

Conflict Redress Mechanism for Itohya Forest, Kikuube District



1. Background and context

Itohya Forest, covering about 800 acres along the Hoima–Kagadi road in Kikuube District, is a natural forest managed by St. Joseph Vocational Institute, Munteme, under the Hoima Catholic Diocese. It is an important biodiversity habitat, home to chimpanzees, various monkey species, birds, small mammals, and diverse flora. Surrounded by 10 villages, local communities heavily rely on the forest for firewood, charcoal, timber, medicinal plants, rattan, and poles, leading to human-wildlife conflicts (such as crop raiding) and disputes over forest resource use and access.

The forest plays a crucial role in climate change mitigation and conservation, especially for primates.

Management efforts, in collaboration with communities, government, and NGOs, focus on promoting sustainable forest use, conflict resolution, and alternative livelihoods.

Partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding exist with Ecological Trends Alliance (for forestry, fire management, and livelihoods), Chimpanzee Trust (for chimpanzee monitoring), and Friends of TECO (for voluntary forest support).

Against that background, Ecological Trends Alliance commissioned a consultancy to develop a conflict redress mechanism, engaging forest managers, local government, Civil Society Organisations, and community leaders to foster peaceful coexistence and sustainable forest management.

2. Objectives of the consultancy

- i. To reduce and resolve conflicts between wildlife (chimpanzees, baboons, monkeys, small rodents, and small mammals) and humans, particularly crop and property damage.
- ii. To address human conflicts stemming from resource extraction from within Itohya Forest.
- iii. To engage local communities in co-management and sustainable resource use, fostering ownership of conservation efforts.
- iv. To build capacity for long-term conservation while supporting the livelihoods of adjacent communities

3. Methodology

A participatory and inclusive approach, through engagement of stakeholders was used.

Key informant interviews were conducted with church leaders, local leaders, members of the association, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), local government officials, and forest users.

Focus group discussions were held with community leaders and community members to gather broader perspectives.

A transect walk was carried out within the forest to facilitate field observations. The team also undertook a comprehensive review of relevant policies, legal frameworks, and government documents related to conflict and redress mechanisms, as well as UWA reports on the management of human-wildlife conflicts, to deepen understanding of the subject.

4. Key findings

4.1 The actors

Several actors are involved in the management of Itohya Forest, including the Church management (St. Joseph Catholic Church), adjacent communities, local council leaders, and forest users (harvesters, cultivators, and herders). St. Joseph Catholic Church owns and oversees the forest, ensuring its protection, sustainable use, policy implementation, conservation promotion, and

stakeholder coordination. Adjacent communities depend on the forest for firewood, medicinal plants, and other products, and are responsible for using these resources sustainably, reporting illegal activities (like poaching and bush burning), engaging in restoration activities such as tree planting, attending sensitisation sessions, and supporting eco-friendly livelihoods.

Local council leaders provide leadership in enforcing forest bylaws and mediating stakeholder conflicts, while forest users are

expected to comply with forest rules and adopt sustainable practices in harvesting, grazing, and cultivation.

4.2 Sources of Conflict in Itohya Forest

There are three categories of conflicts, grouped as human-wildlife conflicts, human-

related conflicts, and policy-related conflicts and grievances, as detailed hereunder.

4.2.1 Human-wildlife conflicts

Human-wildlife conflicts around Itohya Forest involve chimpanzees, baboons, and monkeys straying into farms and settlements, raiding crops, attacking livestock, damaging homes, and causing fear among locals. These incidents result in financial losses, safety concerns, and occasional attacks, mainly by chimpanzees, on women and children, raising fears of zoonotic diseases like brucellosis and rabies.

Wildlife frequently feeds on crops such as bananas, cocoa, and groundnuts, leading to significant losses and community frustration. Some animals become aggressive when threatened, resulting in injuries and property damage. In retaliation, some locals kill or injure wildlife, despite their protected status, and occasional poaching worsens relations. Shrinking wildlife habitats have also increased predation on small domestic animals, especially poultry, heightening concerns among farmers.

4.2.2 Human-related conflicts

Expansion of farming into forested areas around Itohya Forest has caused deforestation, habitat loss, and increased human-wildlife contact. Although crop cultivation in forest clearings, such as

sugarcane farming, has been halted to allow natural regeneration, attempts to resume farming risk reigniting conflicts. Habitat fragmentation limits wildlife movement, disrupting ecological balance.

Communities heavily depend on forest products like firewood, timber, and medicinal plants, often harvesting them unsustainably and illegally, creating tension with forest managers enforcing conservation laws. Unregulated logging, firewood collection, charcoal burning, and product harvesting threaten forest sustainability and local livelihoods. Unmarked forest boundaries cause land disputes, and communities feel

excluded from forest governance, fuelling resentment. NGOs and community groups are promoting inclusion and dialogue to ease tensions. Conservation efforts by institutions and NGOs often conflict with community needs for land and resources. Unauthorized commercial exploitation of forest resources increases conflict with forest authorities.

Despite legal restrictions, hunting and trapping persist, threatening wildlife. Fires—often started during hunting or honey collection—

Dependence on forest resources is growing as other areas are depleted, heightening tensions. Weak forest management structures

Increasing competition and safety risks, particularly at shared water sources. Infrastructure like roads fragments habitats, escalating biodiversity loss and disease

4.2.3 Policy-related conflicts

Conservation policies in Itohya Forest are poorly communicated and not linked to local benefits, making restrictions feel punitive rather than protective, thus weakening community support. Communities feel excluded from forest management decisions, leading to resentment and a lack of ownership over conservation initiatives.

Policies are often perceived as top-down and disconnected from local needs and knowledge. Forest management is based on unclear rules, especially concerning resource access like firewood, causing confusion and mistrust. Inconsistent enforcement and frequent

damage ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and increase restoration costs.

and limited enforcement funding allow unregulated activities. Farming, settlements, and deforestation further reduce forest cover, pushing wildlife into human spaces.

transmission risks. Cultural misunderstandings and negative experiences also fuel hostility toward primates and wildlife, despite their ecological importance.

policy changes further frustrate forest-dependent communities.

There are no clear channels for reporting complaints, and unresolved issues like wildlife crop damage strain relations with forest managers. Although forest boundaries are generally known, they have not been physically reopened recently, causing disputes when communities are penalised for activities they believe occur on their land. Crop damage by wildlife, such as chimpanzees, baboons, monkeys, and rodents, goes uncompensated, worsening community hardship and dissatisfaction with forest authorities.

4 Drivers of conflict

The drivers of human-wildlife conflict are critical factors affecting conservation efforts and the relationship between people and wildlife. Prominent among them are rapid population growth that increases demand for the influx of external workers unfamiliar with local conservation practices further intensifies

land for agriculture, settlement, and infrastructure; expansion of the oil and gas industry that contributes to deforestation, habitat fragmentation, and disruption of wildlife corridors; pressure on land and resources; the inadequate personnel to patrol protected

areas that leads to unchecked illegal activities like logging, poaching, and encroachment, causing habitat loss and worsening human-wildlife conflict; unclear forest boundaries and lack of proper documentation that causes land disputes and encroachment, disrupting wildlife habitats and increasing human-wildlife encounters.

When land ownership is disputed, communities often exploit forest resources for agriculture and settlement, undermining conservation laws and further threatening wildlife. Poor boundary demarcation also hampers rule enforcement, allowing illegal activities to persist.

5 Proposed conflict redress mechanism

The conflict redress mechanism for Itohya Forest addresses internal community tensions and Human-Wildlife Conflicts through a two-pronged, inclusive, and sustainable approach. It emphasises the inclusion of all groups, especially women, youth, and children, in discussions. The proposed conflict redress mechanism:

- i. Establishes patrols and reporting channels (e.g., hotlines or local monitoring offices) to track and respond quickly to wildlife movement, especially crop-raiding species like baboons and chimpanzees.
- ii. Creates buffer zones using non-palatable crops and physical deterrents such as Mauritius thorn fences or beehive fences, which provide honey as an income source.
- iii. Sets up a fund managed by a Community Resource Committee to compensate for wildlife-related losses. Funds can come from the government, NGOs, or ecotourism revenue.
- iv. Uses scarecrows, noise devices, flashing lights, and habitat enrichment (e.g., planting fruit trees) to keep wildlife within forest boundaries. In extreme cases, regulated reduction of problematic species can be considered with authority involvement.
- v. Educates communities on coexistence, wildlife behaviour, and conflict prevention. This includes school programs and workshops to foster conservation-minded communities.
- vi. Promotes less wildlife-attractive crops (e.g., chilli, lemongrass) and alternative livelihoods like beekeeping and ecotourism to reduce dependence on forest resources.
- vii. Forms community-based conflict committees with trained mediators, including elders and local leaders, to manage and resolve disputes peacefully and fairly.
- viii. Engages agencies like UWA, NFA, NEMA, and local government to support conflict resolution efforts, provide technical help, and push for supportive policies. It also seeks to partner with NGOs for expertise and funding.
- ix. Uses ecotourism revenue to fund conflict mitigation, build infrastructure, and educate both locals and tourists on conservation and coexistence.

The human-related conflict redress mechanism addresses disputes over forest resource access and use (e.g., firewood, timber, charcoal, medicinal plants) between communities and forest managers. It aims to maintain harmony, promote equitable access, and ensure sustainable forest management through structured processes and inclusive participation. It covers the following key elements:

- i. It proposes an inclusive committee, comprising local leaders, elders, women, youth, and forest managers. This is the first line for conflict resolution, regular meetings, and shared decision-making to foster ownership and reduce tension.
- ii. The redress mechanism should include accessible reporting channels (e.g., community meetings, mobile phones, local offices), which should be established. Grievances must be

documented transparently, noting the complaint, involved parties, and proposed solutions.

- iii. A Conflict Redress Committee that handles disputes, including community-based or traditional mediation methods, with timely responses to prevent escalation.
- iv. Clear, regulated guidelines for forest resource use should be established and communicated. Designated areas and sustainable use protocols will help ensure fair and environmentally sound access.
- v. Other approaches include capacity building and livelihood alternatives (in sustainable forest use, alternative income-generating activities (e.g., beekeeping, ecotourism, agroforestry), monitoring, enforcement (preventing illegal activities), and improved communication (between forest managers and the communities).

The conflict redress mechanism for policy conflicts in Itohya Forest provides a structured process to address disagreements between the local community and forest managers, particularly concerning forest management policies, access rights, and decision-making processes. The proposals are:

- i. A neutral conflict redress committee should be formed, comprising local representatives (elders, women's groups), forest managers (St. Joseph Institute, district, and wildlife officials), legal experts, and civil society organisations. The CRC will oversee

and fairly address policy-related grievances.

- ii. Community members must have easy, accessible ways to file complaints (written, verbal, or online) at St. Joseph Institute. Every grievance should be officially recorded, including its nature, involved parties, and requested resolution, to ensure transparency and accountability.
- iii. Grievances must be reviewed within a specific timeframe (e.g., 2–4 weeks). The CRC investigates claims through interviews and evidence, facilitates mediation when needed, and holds

- open forums for dialogue between the community and forest managers to promote mutual understanding.
- iv. When grievances stem from unfavourable or unclear policies, the CRC should recommend adjustments, like allowing limited access to resources. Community consultations are required before introducing new policies to ensure they align with both local needs and conservation goals.
 - v. Both forest managers and community leaders should be trained in conflict resolution and mediation. Workshops should also educate the community on forest policies, restrictions, and the importance of sustainable management.
 - vi. The CRC should regularly review both resolved and pending cases and gather feedback from affected parties to measure satisfaction and identify improvements in the redress process.

6. Recommendations

The consultancy study on Itohya Forest conflict redress proposes inclusive, actionable recommendations centered on multi-stakeholder collaboration among the Church, local communities, government, and conservation groups. It emphasises the need for community awareness campaigns on sustainable forest management, ecological importance, and conflict resolution skills.

The report recommends creating local conflict resolution committees involving government, wildlife authorities, church leaders, and community representatives. It also promotes livelihood diversification through eco-tourism, beekeeping, and agroforestry, and suggests introducing buffer zones, wildlife scouts, and compensation schemes to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

Further recommendations include equipping forest managers with GPS/GIS tools, expanding patrols, improving ecotourism infrastructure, and strengthening community involvement. The study calls for proper conflict documentation, regular forest and community satisfaction assessments, and institutionalised feedback systems to ensure an adaptive, resilient conflict redress framework.

7. Conclusion

Successfully resolving human-wildlife conflicts, human disputes, and policy grievances in Itohya Forest requires a coordinated, inclusive, and multi-stakeholder approach. The proposed conflict redress mechanism provides a framework for fostering peaceful coexistence between conservation efforts and community needs. It emphasises structured dialogue, equitable participation, and the establishment of community-based committees to handle emerging conflicts.



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