

RESEARCH BRIEF: TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES OF BUGOMA FOREST



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CLEAN ENERGY



TOURISM
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About IGEN-EA

This research brief has been produced by the Inclusive Green Economy Network-East Africa (IGEN-EA) as part of IGEN-EA's efforts to promote green economic alternatives in Uganda.

IGEN-EA is a network of over 26 civil society and private sector players that advocate for the promotion of sustainable and inclusive green economic activities including organic agriculture and sustainable fishing, clean energy, tourism and agro-forestry.

IGEN-EA's membership includes civil society and private sector associations that represent the interests of workers, women and youth in the above economic sectors.

The network is currently hosted by Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO).

For more information on the network, visit: <https://www.igen-ea.org/home>

Abstract

Under the National Development Plan (NDP) III¹, the Ugandan government identifies tourism as one of the priority economic sectors that must be developed for Uganda to reduce poverty levels, increase jobs and accelerate economic growth.

Government, which recognises that the sector attracted over 1.5 million visitors in 2018 and earned the country \$ 1.6 billion² in the same year, set the following targets in the NDP III: Increase the tourism sector's earnings to \$1.862 billion; increase the sector's share to GDP to 8.5%; and maintain the contribution of tourism to total employment at 667,600 people.

The above and other targets are supposed to be attained by 2024/25 through government doing the following: promoting domestic and inbound tourism; increasing the stock and quality of tourism infrastructure; as well as developing, conserving and diversifying tourism products and services.

Despite the above aspirations, forests with tourism potential such as Bugoma are under destruction. For instance, after the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) issued an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) certificate of approval to Hoima Sugar Ltd in 2020³ for its Kyangwali Mixed Use Land project covering Bugoma forest, the company started clearing part of the forest for sugarcane growing⁴.

The company's outgrowers and others have also encroached on the forest, neighbouring wetlands, river banks and others. Furthermore, illegal logging, charcoal burning and other activities are ongoing in the forest⁵.

1 National Planning Authority (2020). National Development Plan III: http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NDPIII-Finale_Compressed.pdf

2 National Planning Authority (2020). National Development Plan III: http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NDPIII-Finale_Compressed.pdf

3 PML Daily (2020). *Conservationists take on NEMA, want Hoima Sugar Ltd certificate on Bugoma forest cancelled*: <https://www.pmldaily.com/news/2020/08/conservationists-take-on-nema-want-hoima-sugar-ltd-certificate-on-bugoma-forest-cancelled.html>

4 Al Jazeera (2021). *Ugandan campaigners vow to keep fighting for Bugoma forest*: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/7/9/ugandan-campaigners-vow-keep-on-fighting-for-bugoma-forest>

5 New Vision (2021). *Hoima Sugar on the spot over NEMA guidelines*: <https://www.newvision.co.ug/articledetails/90957>

Some of the main factors driving the destruction of Bugoma forest are industrial agriculture and poverty⁶. Commercial entities and communities are engaged in destructive economic activities in the forest because they are seeking to earn a living. Yet it is possible to conserve the forest and earn income from it through the promotion of tourism among other green economic alternatives.

To promote the conservation of Bugoma forest through enhanced community livelihoods, IGEN-EA conducted a study to determine the tourism potential of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR). The study was conducted between April and June 2022.

Data for the research was collected through document review, a survey and key informant interviews (KIs) with communities, tour operators, relevant district officials, central government officials, cultural institutions' leaders and others.

This research established that tour operators and other stakeholders feel that Bugoma forest's location and biodiversity can be harnessed to promote tourism. Of the respondents who participated in this research, 94.3%, 91.4%, 71.4% and 60% noted that chimpanzee trekking, bird watching, nature walks and Ugandan mangabey trekking respectively could be developed as tourism products in the forest.

Bugoma forest is home to 570 or 11.4%⁷ of Uganda's estimated population of 5,000⁸ chimpanzees. The forest is also home to 225 bird species^{9,10} and the endemic Ugandan mangabeys. Despite these attractions, no tourism activities in the forest are ongoing. Habituation of chimpanzees and Ugandan mangabeys is ongoing however. This study established that it is expected that the chimpanzees will be ready for tourism purposes in 2023.

This research also established that the annual income that could be derived from promoting chimpanzee and Ugandan mangabey trekking, bird watching and nature walks in Bugoma forest is \$547,500. Jobs in the form of accommodation, provision of food, tour guides and crafts making for communities among others could also be created.

This research recommends that Bugoma forest be turned into a national park by government and is put under the management of Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to realise the forest's tourism potential.

6 Twongyirwe, R., Bithell, M., Richards, K. (2018). *Revisiting the drivers of deforestation in the tropics: Insights from key informant perceptions in Western Uganda*: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327274223> *Revisiting the drivers of deforestation in the tropics: Insights from local and key informant perceptions in western Uganda*

7 Plumptre A.J., Cox, D. & Mugume, S. (2003). *The Status of Chimpanzees in Uganda. Albertine Rift Technical Report Series No. 2. Wildlife Conservation Society*: https://programs.wcs.org/portals/49/media/file/AR_Tech_Rpt_2_Uganda_Chimps.PDF

8 Wildlife Conservation Society . *Chimpanzee conservation in Uganda*: <https://uganda.wcs.org/wildlife/chimpanzee.aspx#:~:text=Eastern%20chimpanzee%20numbers%20are%20highest,late%201990s%20and%20early%202000s>.

9 Bird specie. <http://www.africa-wilderness-safaris.com/uganda/bugoma-central-forest-reserve/#:~:text=There%20are%20225%20species%20of, and%20118%20species%20of%20moths>.

10 Daily Monitor (2021). *Bugoma forest where illicit logging thrives*: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/arts/culture/Reviews/Bugoma-forest-where-illicit-logging-thrives/-/691232/1998124/-/a29ac5z/-/index.html>

1. Introduction and background

Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR) in Kikuube and Hoima districts in western Uganda was first gazetted by Legal Notice No. 87 of 1932. The forest was gazetted as an undemarcated reserve of 35,840 hectares. Under Legal Notice 251 of 1944¹¹, the forest area was increased to 41,144 hectares.

The forest is one of the most biodiverse in Uganda with Birdlife International observing that of “65 forested Protected Areas that were surveyed for biodiversity in Uganda, Bugoma ranked eleventh in overall biodiversity value and fifteenth in terms of rarity value”¹².

The study, *Biodiversity surveys of Bugoma forest reserve, smaller central forest reserves and forest corridors south of Bugoma*¹³, notes that the reserve is home to primates, elephants and other vertebrate fauna. The forest is home to 570 chimpanzees⁷, 225 bird species⁸, the Ugandan mangabey which can only be seen in Uganda, bush elephants, butterflies and others. With Uganda marketing herself as the ape capital of the world¹⁴ and with tourism stakeholders seeking to create new experiences for tourists, the untapped attractions in Bugoma forest offer great potential. It is notable that despite hosting 11.4% of Uganda's chimpanzees, chimpanzee trekking in Bugoma forest is not developed.

It is also notable that between July and August each year, competition for chimpanzee trekking permits is stiff and Uganda loses income (up to \$200 per permit) due to failure to issue trekking permits to all the tourists that need them. Chimpanzee trekking in Bugoma forest can ensure that the country earns more income.

Further, the forest is part of the North-Western Tourism Development Area (TDA) that includes Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) as well as Bugungu and Karuma Wildlife Reserves. These are identified in the Uganda Tourism Development Masterplan of 2014 to 2024 as having great tourism potential¹⁵.

Notably, the forest lies between MFNP and Kibaale Forest National Park. It can be marketed as a stopover for tourists visiting MFNP. The forest is also accessible as it is a three-hours' drive from Kampala. Further, the forest is located within the Albertine Graben which boasts of accommodation facilities for tourists.

Furthermore, some communities around the forest have been trained to act as tour guides. For instance, stakeholders such as Association for Conservation of Bugoma Forest (ACBF) and Bugoma Jungle Lodge contracted experts to train communities to act as tour guides. Communities have also been trained to supply products such as honey to tourist accommodation facilities.

11 Nyangoma, J. (2010). *The impact of crop raiding by wild animals from Bugoma forest reserve on farmers' livelihoods*: https://www.mak.ac.ug/documents/Makfiles/theses/Nyangoma_Joseline.pdf

12 Birdlife International (2008). *Factsheet about Bugoma forest*: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/bugoma-central-forest-reserve-iba-uganda/text>

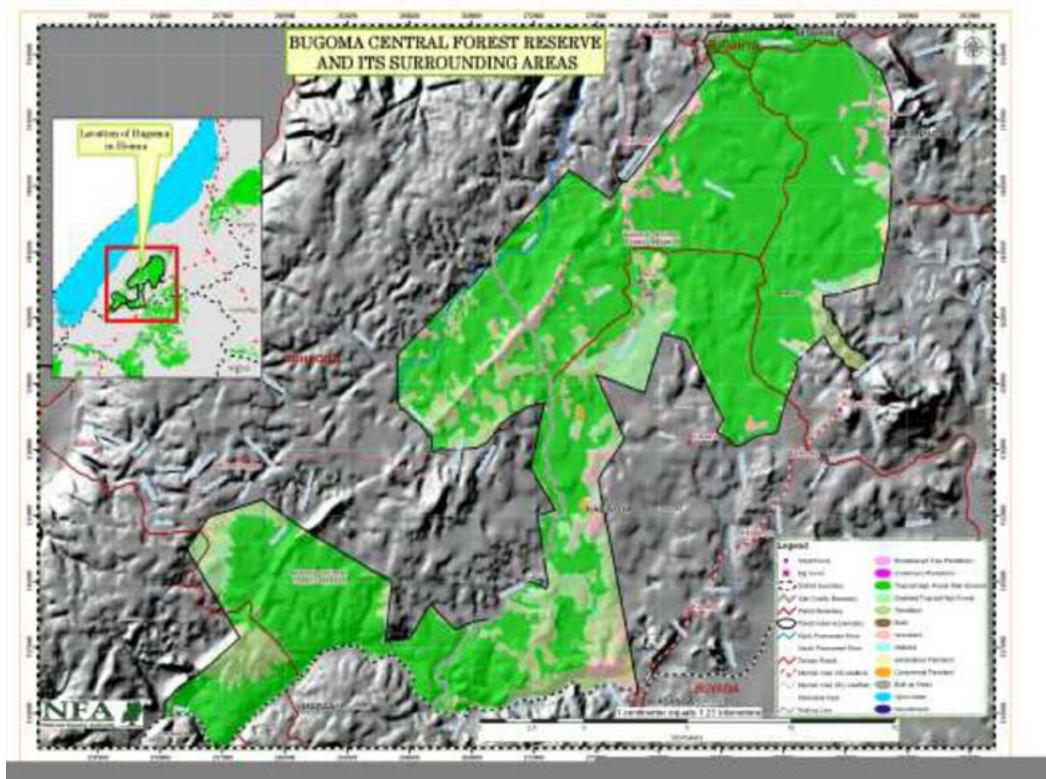
13 Plumptre, A. J., Akwetaireho, S. & Miguel, E.L. (2010). *Biodiversity surveys of Bugoma forest reserve, smaller central forest reserves, and corridor forests south of Bugoma*: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280706205_Biodiversity_surveys_of_Bugoma_forest_reserve_smaller_central_forest_reserves_and_corridor_forests_south_of_Bugoma

14 Deutsche Welle (2019). *Uganda, the primate capital of the world*: <https://www.dw.com/en/uganda-the-primate-capital-of-the-world/av-47946391>

15 Uganda Government, UNDP, UNWTO (2014). *Uganda Tourism Development Masterplan*: <file:///C:/Users/Diana/Downloads/uganda-tourism-development-master-plan-2014-2024.pdf>

Overall, the forest, of which 80% (32,100 hectares) is covered by Tropical High Forest, offers tourism opportunities such as chimpanzee trekking, bird watching, nature walks, Ugandan mangabey trekking and others.

Map of Bugoma forest



Source of the map: National Forestry Authority

2. Problem statement

Despite the tourism potential of Bugoma forest, the reserve is being destroyed due to sugarcane growing, illegal logging, charcoal burning and other activities⁵. While the forest has traditionally faced challenges such as expansion of small-scale agriculture¹⁶, population growth and others, the deforestation and forest degradation challenges of Bugoma forest escalated when Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom claimed over 8,000 hectares, or 20%, of the forest.

In 2016, Uganda's Ministry of Lands issued Bunyoro Kingdom with a freehold land title for the part of the forest that the kingdom claims. Thereafter, the kingdom leased the land it claims to Hoima Sugar Ltd¹⁷. The company started destroying the forest in 2020. Satellite images from Maxar Worldview show that by March 3, 2022, approximately 2,800 hectares of the forest had been destroyed by the company.

The forest, which was grabbed following the oil-induced land grabbing bonanza in

¹⁶ Plumptre A.J., Cox, D. & Mugume, S. (2003) *The Status of Chimpanzees in Uganda*. Albertine Rift Technical Report Series No. 2. Wildlife Conservation Society

¹⁷ The Independent (2022). *Bunyoro Kitara prince petitions lands minister to halt Bugoma forest boundary reopening*. <https://www.independent.co.ug/bunyoro-kitara-prince-petitions-lands-minister-to-halt-bugoma-forest-boundary-reopening/>

the Albertine Graben¹⁸, is being destroyed amidst lack of sufficient information on the green economic alternatives that can be harnessed while protecting the forest. If these alternatives are not developed, more sections of the forest could be destroyed due to competing land use interests such as oil developments, agriculture and others in the Albertine Graben.

This study was therefore undertaken to identify the tourism potential of Bugoma forest to promote conservation of the forest and community livelihoods.

3. Objectives

The main objective of this study was to identify the tourism potential of Bugoma forest. The study's specific objectives included:

- i. To identify and document the tourism opportunities in Bugoma forest;
- ii. To provide a best case scenario of the economic viability of the identified tourism opportunities;
- iii. To make projections of the anticipated income from these opportunities when developed as well as expected benefits to the surrounding communities and other stakeholders in the value chain; and
- iv. To make recommendations for development of the tourism opportunities of Bugoma forest.

4. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional design and a mixed methods research approach. Data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) with Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, National Forestry Authority (NFA), district leaders, tour operators, conservationists, civil society groups, Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom officials and communities that live around Bugoma forest.

Data was also collected through document review and an online survey in which tour operators participated. Thereafter, the data was analysed. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, discourse analysis and content analysis techniques. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS.

5. Study findings and analysis

5.1. Tourism potential of Bugoma forest

The study sought to understand what the tourism opportunities or attractions of Bugoma forest are. An online survey to assess tour operators' awareness of the existence of Bugoma forest, the tourist attractions in Bugoma, whether the tour operators would market Bugoma as a tourism destination and others was undertaken. Below are the findings of this assessment.

18 Muriisa, K. R. & Twinamatsiko S. (2020). *Land grabbing in the Albertine Graben: Implications for women's land rights and the oil industry in Uganda*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvt9k690.17?seq=1>

5.1.1. Awareness of and willingness to sell Bugoma forest as a tour destination

Through an online survey that was participated in by tour operators, this study established that Uganda tour operators are aware of the existence of Bugoma forest. 94.3% of the tour operators that participated in the study observed that they were aware of the existence of Bugoma forest as can be seen under Figure 1. Further, 94.1% said that they would sell Bugoma forest as a tourism destination as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Tour operators' awareness of Bugoma forest

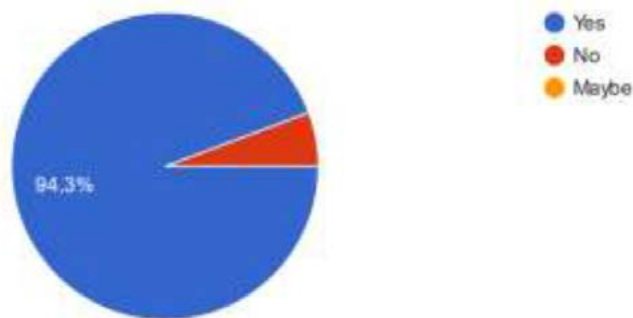
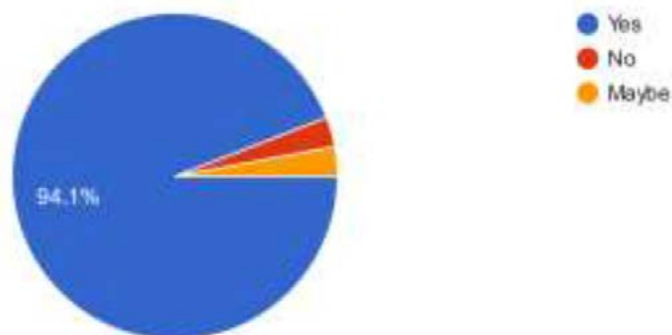


Figure 2: Tour operators' willingness to sell Bugoma as a tourism destination

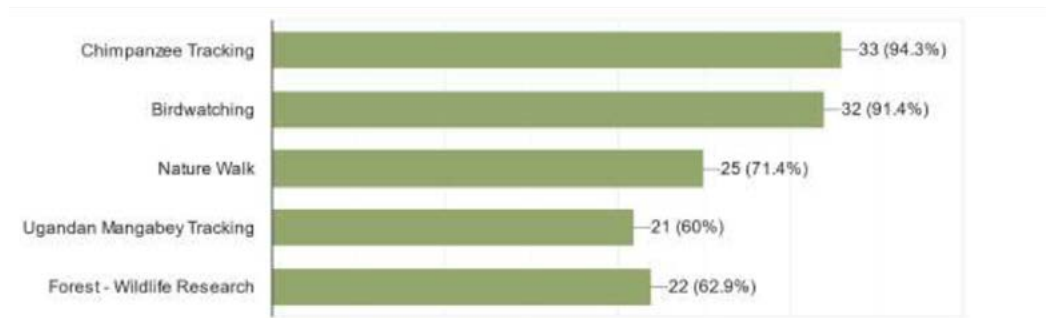


5.1.2. Tourism products/attractions in Bugoma forest

This study also assessed the tourist attractions that are found in Bugoma forest. Through key informant interviews and an online survey, the following tourist attractions were identified: chimpanzee trekking, bird watching, nature walks and Ugandan mangabey trekking.

Of the respondents that participated in this study through the survey, 94.3% identified chimpanzee trekking as a viable tourist attraction in Bugoma forest. 91.4%, 71.4% and 60% identified bird watching, nature walks and Ugandan mangabey trekking respectively as the other tourist attractions in the forest as can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Tourist attractions/products in Bugoma forest



Other tourism activities that can be developed in the forest include tree climbing, canopy walks and post harvest apiary related tours among others.

5.1.3. Chimpanzee and Ugandan mangabey habituation

For successful chimpanzee and Ugandan mangabey trekking, the two attractions must be habituated. Habituation is “the process of training primates to get used to having human beings around them and preparing them to be tracked”¹⁹.

Currently, two groups of chimpanzees in Bugoma forest are under habituation, as was confirmed by the Jane Goodall Institute's research team. One of the groups of chimpanzees that are being habituated is close to the edge of the forest while the other is deeper in the forest. The habituation process is ongoing in the Kaseeta section of Bugoma forest. On the ongoing habituation process, one of the research respondents said:

“Chimpanzee habituation is an incredibly slow process. It takes approximately 10 years to habituate a chimp. The process is ongoing in Bugoma forest and if no impediments occur, the first chimpanzee group that can be visited by tourists shall be ready some time in 2023.”

Two groups of Ugandan mangabeys are also being habituated and the researchers consider them near ready for trekking. One respondent said:

“Ugandan mangabeys are almost fully arboreal even when habituated. They are observed high in the canopy and are regularly on the move. They can be seen and heard nicely in Bugoma. This is a unique experience to the forest as no-other sanctuary has mangabeys that have been specifically habituated for tourism purposes”.

5.1.4. Cultural tourism

The forest can also be harnessed for cultural tourism purposes. One of the research respondents observed as follows:

19 Uganda Wildlife Authority. <https://www.kibalenationalparks.com/chimpanzee-habituation/#:~:text=Chimpanzee%20habituation%20is%20the%20process,to%20be%20opened%20for%20tracking>

“A section of Bugoma forest was once the capital of Bunyoro Kingdom. Two Bunyoro kings had palaces in that section. In 1830, the Omukama (King) Nyamutukura Kyebambe III moved his palace from Buyaga to Kyangwali, where Bugoma forest is partly located. It is unfortunate that a small section of the kingdom selfishly let this part be destroyed. If conserved, the forest can form part of the cultural heritage of Bunyoro, which could be harnessed for tourism.”

The respondent also added:

“The forest is also taken in very high regard as a traditional pharmacy with all sorts of herbs extracted from leaves, tree bark, vines and roots. There are other spiritual and/or traditional rituals that indigenous communities perform under the canopy of the forest. This part has the potential of being elevated to a Bunyoro cultural site.”

5.2. Best case scenario of economic viability of identified tourism opportunities

This study also sought to assess the best case scenario of the economic viability of the identified tourism opportunities as well as the anticipated income from the activities. As previously discussed, the most preferred tourist attractions as identified by tour operators who participated in this study include: chimpanzee and Ugandan mangabey trekking, birding watching, tree climbing and nature walks.

The anticipated income from the activities is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Anticipated income from Bugoma forest’s tourist activities

ACTIVITY	NO. OF TOURISTS PER DAY	AMOUNT CHARGED	TOTAL PER DAY
Chimpanzee	Four tourists per session-Two sessions	US\$50.00 per Person	US\$400.00
Mangaby	Four tourists per session-Two sessions	US\$50.00 per Person	US\$400.00
Birding	Average 5 people per group	US\$80.00 per Person	US\$400.00
Forest Walk	Five tourists per session 2 Two Sessions	US\$30.00 per Person	US\$300.00
TOTAL per day			US\$1500.00
TOTAL PER YEAR			US\$47,500.00

The above projected income was derived from current trekking practices. At the moment, in forests such as Kibaale National Park where chimpanzee trekking takes place, two groups of tourists are allowed to trek a group/family of chimpanzees per day. The trekking takes place in the mornings and evenings when the chimpanzees are most active and are likely to be seen.

Chimpanzee trekking permits cost up to \$200 per tourist in popular spots such as Kibaale National Park. In less visited spots such as the Kyambura and Kalinzu gorges, UWA charges \$50 per trekking permit for foreigners²⁰.

20 UWA (2022). *Uganda chimpanzee trekking permit in 2022*: <https://www.queenelizabethparkuganda.com/information/uganda-chimpanzee-trekking-permit-in-2022/>

This study assumed that being a new destination that wouldn't be as popular as the older trekking sites, chimpanzee trekking permits in Bugoma forest would be charged at \$50. This study also assumed that two trekking sessions with four tourists each would be organised per day.

While two groups consisting of eight tourists each are ordinarily permitted to trek chimpanzees in national parks such as Kibaale per day, scientists advise that for newly habituated chimpanzees such as those in Bugoma, only four people per group trek chimpanzees per day. A bigger number could scare the chimpanzees.

Further, this study set the bird watching activities to one session per day with five tourists paying \$80. Bird watching in forests requires patience and is usually a whole day experience. This means only one session a day can be arranged. The bird watching rate per tourist in Uganda is currently \$100. With bird watching in Bugoma forest being new, if the activity is allowed in the forest as recommended by this study, it would be prudent to offer a cheaper price of \$80 to attract tourists.

In addition, for the forest walks, it was assumed that two sessions in the mornings and evenings would be organised at the current rates of up to \$30. This study assumed that the number of people going for bird watching and forest walks would be limited to five and ten respectively because few tourists should be engaged in the activities to maintain quiet in the forest. This would enable the tourists to listen to the rhythm of the forest. They also would not scare animals in the forest with loud voices.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

As this research brief has shown, tourist attractions such as chimpanzees, Ugandan mangabeys and birds exist in Bugoma forest. The tour operators that participated in this are willing to sell Bugoma forest as a tourism destination. Further, efforts to habituate chimpanzees to support tourism are ongoing and are expected to be concluded in 2023. To support tourism in Bugoma and protect the forest from oil, land grabbing and sugarcane threats, we recommend the following:

- a. Government should **upgrade Bugoma forest to a national park** to protect the forest, its biodiversity and promote tourism. UWA, which manages national parks in Uganda, has the expertise and human resources needed to protect the biodiversity in the forest and to promote tourism. The forest should therefore be put under UWA's management after being turned into a national park.
- b. The Ministry of Tourism, UWA and Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) should in consultation with all other tourism stakeholders **develop a tourism development strategy for Bugoma forest**. This will guide tourism development while ensuring ecosystem and business sustainability.
- c. In addition, while developing the strategy and tourism activities in Bugoma forest, the Ministry of Tourism, UTB, UWA and other stakeholders should **maintain effective community outreach services around the forest**. Communities should be trained in tour guiding, crafts-making, bee-keeping, catering and other services to enable them to participate in tourism activities in Bugoma forest.
- d. Government and development partners should support institutions such as the Jane Goodall Institute **to habituate more groups of chimpanzees**

for tourism purposes in Bugoma forest. This will create more tourism opportunities.

- e. Furthermore, government and civil society groups should train **communities in interpretive tour guiding, crafts making, catering** and others to enable them to participate in the tourism value chain.
- f. Finally, government should **promote public-private-partnerships** to attract more sustainable investment options in accommodation and others to promote tourism. Government should also support communities to establish community-private venture partnerships such as that of the Clouds Mountain Gorilla Lodge model in Kisoro to support community participation in tourism.

7. References as they appear in this report

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Bugoma forest reserve, smaller central forest reserves, and corridor forests south of Bugoma: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280706205 Biodiversity surveys of Bugoma forest reserve smaller central forest reserves and corridor forests south of Bugoma](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280706205_Biodiversity_surveys_of_Bugoma_forest_reserve_smaller_central_forest_reserves_and_corridor_forests_south_of_Bugoma)

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8. Annexes

Pictorial

1. Some of the research participants



2. One of the researchers (R) after an interview with a research participant (L)



3. Beekeeping training for communities in Kikuube district. Bugoma forest supports bee-keeping.



4. Tour operators visiting Bugoma forest to explore its tourism potential



5. Tour operators discussing how to package Bugoma forest into sell-able tours



6. There are investment opportunities around Bugoma forest such as those in accommodation.



Photo credits: Association for Conservation of Bugoma Forest, Exclusive Sustainable Tour Operators and Jane Goodall Institute