

RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (UGANDA)(N684)



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Reviewed by Nelson Guma, Conservation Area Manager QECA

**State of Conservation periodic Report for Rwenzori Mountains National Park World Heritage
Property – Uganda**

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Introduction

Rwenzori mountains National Park Identification Number 684, state Party Uganda, type of property Cultural and Natural, and year of inscription on the world heritage list 1994.

Location of the park

Rwenzori Mountains National Park (RMNP), a World Heritage Site, lies in Western Uganda. It borders the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the West. It is located in the four districts of Kasese, Kabarole, Ntoroko and Bundibugyo.

The mountains lie between altitudes 0° 06' South and 0° 46' North and longitudes 29° 47' West and 30° 11' East. The mountain ranges out of which the park has been gazetted are much larger in size running about 80 Kilometres in the North - South direction and 40 Kilometres in the East - West direction. The park is part of the ranges, which rises from about 1670m to 5,109m above sea level (a.s.l), which includes Africa's third highest peak, Margherita at 5109m asl.

Area of the park

The park covers an area of 995km². Rwenzori Mountains National Park is a constituent protected area in Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area landscape

Purpose of gazettelement

Rwenzori Mountains National Park was gazetted in 1991 to; *protect and conserve the park, a world heritage site, with its water catchments value, unique natural and scenic beauty and its fragile mountain ecosystem which supports threatened, endemic, and rare species of fauna and flora for the benefit of the local and international community now and in the future.*

Conservation Values

Water catchment

The Rwenzori Mountains are one of the largest and most significant water catchment areas in Uganda. It contributes significant waters to the Nile

Scenic beauty

On the ranges are a combination of beautiful peaks, glaciers, Valleys, Rivers, Lakes and various species of flora and fauna making the Rwenzori scenic. The stratified vegetation is one of the main attractions for visitors.

Unique biodiversity

It has Stratified vegetation: grassland, 1000m – 2000m; montane forest, 2,000 – 3,000 m; bamboo/mimulopsis zone, 2500 – 3,000 m; heather/rapanea zone 3,000 – 4,000 m; Afro – Alpine zone 4,000 – 5,000 m. The most striking plants are found above 3000m. These are the giant tree heathers supporting aerial epiphytic gardens of outstanding botanical and aesthetic interest, some of which are unique to the Rwenzoris. The Afro alpine zone is home to the most graceful of giant lobelia (*Lobelia wallastoni*) and groundsels (*Senecio admiralis*). These gigantic species are hallmarks of the Rwenzori.

The mountains are habitat to several endemic, endangered, threatened and rare species of the Albertine Rift and also an Important Bird Area (IBA)

The Rwenzoris are renowned for species of conservation concern. The park has 54 Albertine Rift endemics which include 18 species of mammals, 21 species of birds, 9 species of reptiles and 6 species of amphibians. Five species are endangered, 14 are threatened and 4 have restricted range. The endangered species include the Rwenzori duiker (*Cephalophus rubidus*), montane squirrel (*Heliosciurus ruwenzorii*), chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and Rwenzori range frog (*Africana ruwenzorii*). Four species have restricted range. These are Rwenzori/Kivu climbing mouse (*Dendromus kivu*), the Rwenzori Duiker (*Cephalophus rubidus*), *Bradypodion xenorhium* and the Uganda clawed frog (*Xenopus ruwenzori*).

The Rwenzori supports one of the most important bird communities in Uganda, with a total of 217 species having been recorded. Whilst this represents only a moderate level of species richness, the forest harbours many rare, threatened and endemic species. The amphibians show high altitudinal stratification in terms of diversity and richness. Two species of horned chameleons occur in the forest zone. Two species of snakes have been recorded below altitude of 2440 M.

Resources for communities

Rwenzori mountains National park, a World Heritage Site, is an important source of resources for communities, the Bakonzo, who live on the slopes of the mountain. The resources include smilax and acalph (for basket making), medicinal plants, mushrooms water, honey, fibres from tree bark, bamboo stems and sheath. During the reporting period 4 resource access memorandums of understanding have been signed to enhance sustainable resource access with the local communities along the Park front line Parishes.

Cultural values

The history, culture and beliefs of the Bakonzo are closely woven around the Rwenzori Mountains. These include the Kingdom rituals, management of sacred sites, to mention but a few. The Bakonzo deity Kitasamba with his four wives is believed to have lived in the peaks. During the reporting period, the Katwe-kali sacred site has attracted communities to working more closely with the Park Authority especially in the conservation of the primates / Chimpanzee habitat around the sacred sites.

The increasing integration of cultural approaches in the conservation of the primates and its habitats is widely acceptable by communities surrounding the Heritage site and is reducing threats to chimps. *But the increasing crop raiding by chimps may relapse the conducive community conservation trend.*

Glaciers and wetlands

They are an important attraction for visitors with an aril extent of 1 km ². Numerous rivers flow from the mountain due to high rainfall and melting of snows. Many bogs with associated plant and animal life occur in the mountains

Collaboration with stakeholder in Park management

(State party engaging local communities in the conservation of the property)

RMNP continues to collaborate with different stakeholders to implement the GMP within the framework of UWA’s policy on partnership with stakeholders. These include World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Environmental Conservation Trust of Uganda (ECOTRUST), Fauna and Flora International (FFI), MacArthur Foundation, UNESCO, L’Umana Dimora, Ev – K2 – CNR, District Local Governments, *Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu* (Rwenzururu Kingdom and Communities and community Based Organisations.

Stakeholder	Areas of collaboration
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Capacity building, Community benefit, sensitization and education, In park resource use & monitoring</i>
MacArthur Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Infrastructure development, Climate change research and impact monitoring, Staff social facilities</i>
Fauna and Flora International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conservation of cultural values</i>
L’Umana Dimora & EV – K2 - CNR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Monitoring weather parameters/climate change indicators</i>
Rwenzururu Kingdom (Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Access to cultural sites, Community tourism</i>
Local Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Community benefit, Sensitisation</i>
ECOTRUST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Visitor facility development</i>

Community participation in park programmes

The park promotes community participation in management interventions and benefit sharing schemes. These include increased involvement and participation of communities in General management planning, fire management, and boundary management, collaborative sustainable use for Non Timber Forest Products, resource use monitoring.

Support of community livelihood

The park supports community livelihood through provision of benefits that accrue from conservation such as in park resources, sharing gate entry revenues, ecotourism ventures, training and support of income generating activities initiated by communities

About 56 ex –poachers denounced poaching during the reporting period and handed over the poaching implements to park management. They are participating in management programmes such as boundary maintenance and supported with IGAs such as bee keeping

Community groups numbering 434 were trained in bee keeping techniques to supplement their livelihood, nursery raising and tree Planting, soil and conservation on the hills, organizational group management, sustainable in - park resource use/harvesting, energy saving stoves, community based data collection, proposal generations and writing, PAC interventions of growing and maintaining of Mauritius and Kei apple barriers

Park – Community relations

Human – wildlife conflicts arising from crop raids by wild animals that stray into crop fields and cause damage strain relation between park management and communities. Park management is mitigating human – wildlife conflicts through intervention such as promoting growth of unpalatable buffer crops such as green pepper, onions and garlic by adjacent communities and planting of maurithius thorn to establish a fence as a barrier to stop incursions into community crop fields by wild animals. The green pepper, onion and garic doubles as a cash crop that generates household income

Review of revenue sharing policy

The revenue sharing policy was reviewed and approved by the board of trustess for UWA to focus and equitable benefit the communities in the front line parishes who suffer from the Park effects.

During the year under review 2012-2013, the local community's income generating Projects received funding from the Revenue sharing scheme amounting to UGX.135m=(US \$53,465) from the 20% Rwenzori Mountains National Park gate collection. Currently over 105million (US \$ 41,584) has accumulated for and it's yet to be disbursed to the communities.

The communities continued to sustainable maintain the Park boundary through the community boundary management committees, thus respecting the boundary and strengthening the Park integrity.

The Park Authority continued to promote and involve the local community tourism groups /Association (Rwenzori mountaineering services, Ruboni community and Turaco Tourism community group among others) around the site in participating in Tourism guiding and conservation related activities in and around the mountain.

Sustainable financing strategy and business plan for the property

A Five year general Uganda wildlife Authority Strategy Plan was drafted by staff and approved during the reporting period to cover 2013-2017. The strategy details the approaches for sustainable financing of the organization, which have to be adapted and implemented by all Protected areas Managers for sustainable financing.

WWF is yet to commission a 3 year (2014-2017) Project aimed at addressing the gaps for ensuring sustainable financing of Rwenzori Mountains National Park. The project worth 1.3 million Euros will be funded by the European Union. The gaps to be addressed for enhancing sustainable financing in Rwenzori include: supporting the Park and communities surrounding it in developing and promoting Eco-Tourism activities, diversifying Tourism activities, marketing of the Rwenzori Tourism activities to increase visitor numbers, community activities to minimise resource use especially fuel wood.- Energy saving stoves(Gold standard) will be implemented, payment for watershed management shall be initiated and explore possibility of REDD.

All the above activities and others are aimed at enhancing sustainable financing of Rwenzori mountains National Park.

During implementation of the WWF Sustainable Financing Project for Rwenzori Mountains National Park, a Business plan will be developed in line with the Strategic plan 2013-2017 of Uganda Wildlife Authority.

Other strategies

There is considerable effort to market the park locally and internationally through print and electronic media, exhibitions. UWA participates in international expositions such as World Travel Market, ITB Berlin trade show and domestic exhibitions where the park is represented. In 2006, the park celebrated the centenary anniversary of the scientific exploration of the mountains in 1906 led by the Duke of Abruzzi, where names were bestowed to peaks, altitudes of the peaks measured and scientific study of the mountain vegetation conducted. It involved retracing of the foot prints of the Duke and a scientific expedition to generate a proposal for scientific studies in the Rwenzoris. The exposure put RMNP under the regional and international spot light leading to its recognition as one of the best 15 hiking spots in the World. There is need to collaborate with Italian environmental organizations to undertake these scientific studies that will contribute to conservation of the Rwenzoris

Working with Eco-trust Uganda, a Ugandan conservation NGO, Geo-lodges company established a high end accommodation facilities at the gate way to the park. This has been marketed together with the Park tourism activities.

Trend of revenue generation

Activity	2012	2013
VAT	41,130,135	54,435,768
Revenue Share	43,167,938	58,636,023
Visitors Entry	172,671,758	234,544,097
Camping	717,200	4,128,950
Nature Walk	4,662,754	8,976,042
Resale - Maps	2,542	197,033
Researcher	-	67,797
Franchise fees	7,995,763	29,253,850
Ground Rent	-	13,500,000
TOTAL	270,348,090	403,739,560

(Equivalent to US 103,980 and US \$ 155,285 respectively. An increase of about 49% in internal revenue generation during the period under review). However, the operating budget of the park is US \$ 431,205 representing a financial gap of 36%

Regional cooperation Transboundary DRC and Uganda

RMNP fully participates in the Trans - boundary collaboration initiative supported by Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). RMNP jointly planned and conducted six coordinated patrol (one quarterly) with *Parc National des Virunga* (PNVi), Nord during the reporting period along the contiguous boundary of 50 Km though confined to the southern sector of RMNP. The main challenge encountered in the current trans - boundary collaboration initiative is communication barrier, movement restrictions at the borders, failure to interpret the respective wildlife laws.

RMNP participated in two Wardens trans - boundary committee meetings to share field reports, experiences and plan for quarterly coordinated patrols. This needs to be strengthened with formalization of the coordinated patrols and to initiate cross border Tourism.

Monitoring impact of climate change, initiate mitigation and adaption measures

On climate change, management of the site continues to carry out activities that are aimed at monitoring climate change impacts. These include:-

a) Weather monitoring (Data collection on weather parameters is continuing).

Weather data is continuously collected on quarterly basis from Automatic weather stations installed at different altitudes to monitor impacts of climate change in the park. This provides information on different parameters like temperature, relative humidity, rainfall, wind speed to mention but a few. This establishment is providing useful data on possible causes of snow recession and related melting of glaciers. There is a central database where all weather data are safely stored for future use. This data however is not analysed for management use.

During the reporting period, UWA RMNP with technical and financial support from stake holders WWF RMCEPII, Flora and Fauna International and *L'Umana Dimora*, Ev – K2 – CNR Jun Uetake National Institute of polar have managed to initiated baseline activities as in the Ecological Monitoring Plan.

b) Snow recession (*Monitoring of snow recession and glacial melting is in progress*).

Collection of data on snow recession and glacial melting is done bi-annually on Speke and Elena glaciers. Use of Ablation stakes (markers) initially used was abandoned due to challenges of maintaining them fixed in the original points. The approach of marking the level of snow on the rock out crops was initiated and two permanent plots were established for progressive monitoring on quarterly basis for the first year and progressively to biannual. The variance in the levels of marking will inform management and stake holder the approximate rate of snow recession and receding.

Such scientific trend on the rate of glacial recession over a period of time, will enable management to be prudent on facts about climate change and demonstration of local adaptation options to surrounding communities.



Weather monitoring
plates.docx

A research result of Glaciological biology on Stanley Plateau in 2012 by Dr.Jun Uetake, monitors the biotic activities to indentify, whether biological activity on the glacier accelerate glacier melting by reducing albedo and effects of glacier retreat observed in many glaciers in recently year. The preliminary findings are attached

c) Water monitoring (*Bio-monitoring of water quality is on-going*).

RMNP's noble conservation value is its role of water catchment. Thus RAMSAR site since 2009. Over twenty glacier lakes exists on the alpine zone, and over 50 rivers originate from the mountain to feed important life supporting activities (agriculture irrigation , domestic use, mini hydro power generation extra) in plains occupied by millions of people and national parks (Semilki's, Kibale, Queen and *Parc des Virunga* in DRC). It contributes to the river Nile through the Semlike river. Because of this the water quality that comes out of the Rwenzori is monitored using bio-monitoring approach:-

Bio-monitoring activities are conducted on the four main rivers Mubuku, Nyamwamba, Rwimi and Lamya, the programme is providing better understanding of changes in water quality within rivers being monitored. The rivers being monitored are buffered by melt snow water which also provides a broader understanding of impacts of climate change in and around RMNP.

Conducting bio monitoring of water quality by staff aims at assessing the quality of water on the seven main rivers that drain water from the protected area under this the following are done.

- Collect samples of benthic macro invertebrates using sabambular ,Taking limnology tests of conductivity , dissolved oxygen, temperature and velocity using conductivity meter and Dissolved oxygenated meter.

- Habitat assessment of riparian vegetation for analysis for potential impacts of human activities that may affect water quality using observation of vegetation canopy cover and ground cover.
- Measure depth and width of river streams using ordinary tape measures.



Impact of climate changes in vegetation belts Vegetation PSP

Gloria plots were established in the alpine zone to monitor the vegetation trends above 3500m asl.

Impacts of climate change on species of restricted range(wild game).

A mammal survey was conducted with financial support from WWF RWCEMP to establish the baseline for flagship and key species in Rwenzori mountains National Park. Results are yet to be published

Issues of the high altitude wildfires / recommendation

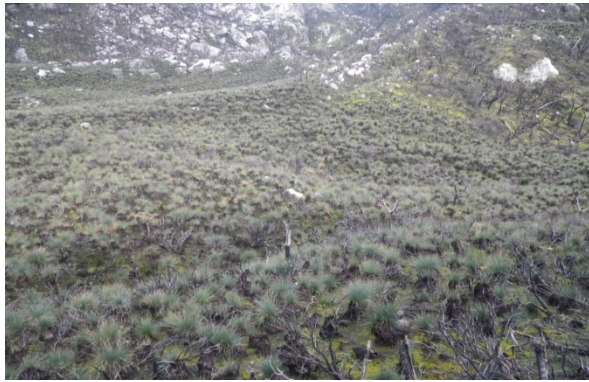
The areas affected by fires in 2011 are gradually naturally regenerating

The fire plan was drafted and is being implemented with participation of local communities. Awareness raising, pre - suppression and suppression measures are among the key approaches used by stakeholders and local communities especially those operating near (Farmers on the Park boundary) and inside the Property (Tourism Porters and guides)

The frontline mobilized community (boundary management committees and Resources use committee) and the Rwenzururu cultural Institution has been instrumental in fire campaigns to dissuade local communities in use of fire near the Heritage site.

This has been effective during the period under review; negligible boundary fires were reported and voluntarily extinguished by the frontline communities, prior to causing damage to the Property. This self community conservation policing are being emphasized by staff in all awareness meetings.

No specialized high altitude fire fighting tools have yet been procured for the Property. Management still rely on the basic traditional fire tools like pangas, hoes, rakes, fire beaters and jerry cans for carrying water among others.



Revoking of any existing licence for mining within the Property and no further mining licenses are issued within the Property.

a) Mining/ Kaolin quarry by Kilembe Mines Limited.

Although the intention to re-open the Kaolin quarry in Kasitoha area by Kilembe mines Limited was halted July 2006 and since then, no attempts have been made towards mining and no mining is taking place in the entire Protected area, during the reporting period 2013, Uganda government signed a 25year concession deal with Chinese Tibet Hima Limited to extract approximately/over 4.5 million tonnes of confirmed copper deposit still underground within Kilembe geographical area. The concession area is adjacent to the Rwenzori mountains National Park and revamping its activities directly affects the water streams flowing to Queen Elizabeth National Park. Management is yet to obtain a copy of the concession agreement for the renewed mining operations to internalise the extent of the mining areas. Kilembe Mines Limited that is winding up is to provide the status of the decommissioned mines as a baseline for conducting Environmental audit of mines before TIBET Hima company starts mining operations

Further engagements will be undertaken to ensure that there is no renewed interest in kaolin mining in the park by TIBET Hima company until the lease held in the park expires

b) Ecological monitoring plan

Detailed ecological monitoring plan was developed for Rwenzori through a consultative and Participatory approach with UWA staff and key stakeholders. A copy is attached for reference

c) Information on the extent of location of the 14new resource her vesting zone.



RMNP Resource use
parishes.docx

Although there are 14 running MoUs for resource access, regular monitoring of off-takes is undertaken to ensure that thresholds are not exceeded. These resource use areas lie within the integrated Use Zone and do not have significant impacts on the OUVs of the property

Other Current Conservation Issues Identified by The State Party.

Recent developments.

Staff strength capacity

Uganda Wildlife recruited, trained and deployed ten more staff to boost Rwenzori staffing levels. The park has 72 staff; 6 wardens, 4 clerks, 3 drivers and 59 rangers (including 10 SWIFT rangers), this has increased the patrol intensity and efficiency. The current staffs need further capacity building to enhance professionalism in management of the fragile mountain ecosystem and the World Heritage and RAMSAR Site in face of climate change effects that threaten the conservation values of the park.

Training staff

UWA trained (60 personnel) rangers, guides of RMS, RTS and community members in customer care and emergency handling/fast aid procedures to respond to changing circumstances in a bid to improve services offered to clients. Other trainings have been conducted on GPS use, GIS, bio-monitoring techniques, monitoring weather parameters to equip them with skills to monitor impacts of climate change

Equipments

During the reporting period, rescue equipments, tents, sleeping bags, water sampling equipments among other have been procured to equip staff with necessary facilities to implement park programmes and increase productivity.

Gateway:

The gate way to the park comprises tourist facilities and some administrative units of the park that include the proposed Visitor Information Centre (VIC) for the park by Environmental Conservation Trust of Uganda (ECOTRUST) which is yet to be handed over to UWA by the ECOTRUST management, a modern eco-lodge, snow mountain lodge constructed by Geo-lodges to provide accommodation for clients visiting the Park, community lodge, camp ground and ranger outpost. Although some infrastructure has been developed, the main gate way still requires the following interpretative infrastructure: A visitor centre commensurate with the status of the property at the central tourism circuit trail head at Nyakalengijo (Mihunga), Education Centre and a Museum, Nature walk trail and a picnic site

During the period under review, the park constructed an entrance gate to create a welcoming impression and highlight starting point of scaling the park



A Gate constructed at Mihunga Park entry to monitor clients movements into the Property;

Access Bridges

During the period under review, the property experience a flash flood in March 2013 that destroyed infrastructure inside and outside the property, among those destroyed included, access foot bridges and public roads, thus cutting access to the Property. Therefore it was necessary to reinstate the bridges to ease access by tourists and staff to the property outstanding values.



Destroyed bridge along R.Nyamwamba Kilembe trail and mubuku central circuit.



Buraro wooden bridge crossing R.Mubuku.



Kyoho bridge



Mahoma bridge

These were wooden bridges upgraded into metallic to increase safety of clients.



Board Walk in the Upper Bigo Bogy



- *Rwenzori Trekking Services Constructed Tourist Bandas*



Waste management

- A waste management plan was developed to enhance the pristine park environment, protect the fragile ecosystem and scenic value of the park. Additionally an Incinerator was constructed at Mihunga- in order to manage the final disposal of tourism waste from the Park,(waste in waste out) a simple incinerator was constructed about 1 km away from the Park boundary for burning off all the Tourism waste that is collected from the Park.

Replacement of Signage for Rwenzori Including Margherita Peak



Transport facilities

Currently the park has 2 vehicles and 5 ageing motorcycles. The transport facilities are generally inadequate to support effective park operations. Some of the transport facilities are being replaced through equipment replenishment programme. During the reporting period the Park received one new land cruiser from the UWA headquarters to expedite Park operations.

Development of Kakaka Mini Hydro Power Project along river Rwimi

- *Greenewus Energy Africa Ltd (www.greenewus.com) proposed development of Kakaka Mini Hydro Power Project along river Rwimi at Kakaka falls inside the Park (about 500m long by 50m wide). This area is likely to be degraded during the implementation of the Project. The site identified has potential to generate hydro power close to 8MW (32GWh per annum)*
- *The feasibility study report conducted by VS Hydro (a Sri Lankan firm) recommended that the intake Weir (mini flow diversion dam) and part of the Headrace Channel/Canal (which direct the redirected water to the Power House downstream) be located inside the forest 300 - 500m inside Rwenzori Mountains National Park.*
- *A detailed EIA was conducted to address / mitigate the potential environmental and social residual impacts that come with such development. UWA is working closely with the developer to ensure that the OuVs are not greatly affected.*

THREATS TO RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK



THREATS TO RWENZORI 2013.doc

Key Challenges

- Wild Fires – destroys the water catchment and undermines the water retention capacity of the bogs. Fires remain a threat in the alpine zones and bogs due to extreme dry conditions associated with climate change
- Floods & Landslides – triggered by torrential rains and compounded by melting of snows destroys tourism infrastructure and adversely affecting ecosystems.
- Prospecting for minerals with negative environmental impacts.
- Receding snow, melting of glaciers and exposure of crevasses affect tourism operations on the peaks
- Insecurity in DRC creates perception of insecurity in the whole region affect park visitation
- Poor safety facilities makes hiking challenging and affect ascent to the peaks
- Substandard visitor infrastructure affects visitor experience and satisfaction
- Poor mountaineering techniques ruins visitor experience and affects repeat visits
- Shifts in vegetation belts and shrinking home ranges of local endemics will drive these species to extinction
- Increasing demand for pharmaceuticals raw materials (*Prunus africana* bark) threatens the tree species as local communities start to trade in the bark of the tree without adequate sources within the community areas.

Areas of collaboration

- Climate change is easily detected in fragile ecosystems such as mountains. Management oriented research is required in the areas of climate change to fully understand its impacts on the natural resources and communities and implications for the long term conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems of RMNP. The information would be used to build resilience of the park to climate change impacts
- The park monitored impacts of climate change for three years. There is need to leverage on information generated to demonstrate local adaptation options to cope with climate change impacts on tourism facilities and park operations. One of the interventions would be to upgrade the historic route of the Duke, the central tourism circuit to international standards to boost tourism and generate the needed tourism revenues to finance conservation of the Rwenzori ecosystem and provide benefits to support the livelihood of the adjacent communities
- The establishment of a profile of weather stations is already providing concrete data on temperature increases that is causing the snow retreat and melting of glaciers. Though the current trends are based on global climate change simulations, there is need to localize these trends for the local nationals to further appreciate the impact of climate change at a local scale and adapt management of the park to climate change scenarios. An Ecological monitoring plan for the park is in place and support for its implementation will generate data and information for adaptive management of the park
- The park is the largest water catchment in the country supporting irrigation agriculture, Hydro - electric power generation (30 MW) and gravity water schemes (46) as an ecosystem service. A

financing mechanism hinged on ecosystem services would provide an option to raise additional funds for conservation and support to community livelihood

Conclusion

The long term maintenance of the integrity of the Rwenzori mountains National park and its conservation will be achieved through ecological monitoring, sustainable financing and enhancement of benefits to the surrounding communities, continued collaboration with key stakeholders for its management and regional cooperation to promote trans - frontier conservation initiatives.