

Report on

A day on '*Conservation and culture*'

Lake View Mbarara Hotel, May 14, 2009

facilitated by

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda



1. Background

Fauna and Flora International (FFI), in partnership with UWA, is implementing a cultural values project in Lake Mburo and Rwenzori National Parks. One of the priority activities in this project was to undertake a training session among the top management at the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) that have a role in policy development and implementation. The key objective of this training was “to assist the senior management of UWA get a better understanding of what culture is and how it relates to conservation objectives and the attainment of conservation goals.” In discussions with UWA, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) had been identified as partners in this initiative.

This report presents a brief outline of a one-day engagement that was held in Mbarara on May 14th, 2009 for this purpose.

2. Introductions

After a word of welcome from John Makombo (UWA), Emily Drani (CCFU) encouraged participants to introduce themselves in a cultural fashion – by clan, totem, lineage, or any other way in which they identify themselves culturally. This was meant to set the tone of the day, starting with self-reflection in relation to culture and individual identify.

Moses Mapesa (UWA) then welcomed participants, those from the cultural institutions, the senior UWA management and the CCFU team (See list – Appendix A). He emphasised the strong link between culture and conservation. Examples were several, including the regular harvesting of bamboo shoots on Mount Elgon, which is sought by local residents and is favourable to the ecology; yet rules and regulations often undermine this link and take us away from the past balance between nature, conservation and spiritual inspiration, which are all endangered by the modern economy and modern habits.

He put a challenge to the participants: can we rethink conservation models, and reflect on a situation, perhaps 100 years ago, when nature and man co-existed, and can we initiate a dialogue between top UWA management and cultural leaders?

3. Why are we here?

Emily Drani reiterated that communities are, and have been the custodians of natural resources in the past and it is important to recognise and take into account their contribution. She introduced John De Coninck (CCFU), who took participants through the programme (Appendix B) as well as the objectives of the day which included:

- Understanding culture and its linkage with conservation
- Better understanding the UWA / FFI project (on achieving conservation goals through cultural practices, values and understanding) and
- Developing further the ‘Cultural Values and Conservation Project’.

The output of the day was summarised as developing a simplified road map to make cultural values an integral component of conservation, using the Lake Mburo and Rwenzori experiences as pilots. This road map would consist of the outcomes of a cultural base line, proposed mechanisms and principles to develop guidelines, and networking plan.

4. Understanding our cultural context and identity

In small groups, participants reflected on their multiple identities (ethnic group, religion, marital status, profession, etc), their connection with different cultural contexts and how this affects their professional lives. The purpose of this exercise was to recognize our multiple identities, reflect on how this impacts on our work, with a view to address changes as individuals and our work environment. For example, Nelson Abiti explained the conflicts that arose between his religious values and work which sometimes required entering shrines and making offerings to traditional spirits; Vanice from UWA (a Muhima, conservationist and tourism professional) shared the conflict she experienced between her cultural outlook on the Ankole cow and her work which at times entailed arresting cows which were on occasion mistreated. Adonia from UWA (a human resource manager) found himself strongly influenced by his family upbringing which made him empathise with colleagues - reluctant to take stern disciplinary action, even when this was required.

5. Culture and development

CCFU took the participants through an analytical tool to further “unpack” the connection between culture and development. This entailed examining culture as context (working within a socio-politico-cultural environment, *e.g. conflict resolution, governance systems, gender roles*); culture as content (use of local languages, objects, clothing, material items of cultural significance); culture as a method (a medium to convey developmental messages *e.g. through music, dance, drama, photography*) and culture as expression (through tangible, dynamic and creative elements of culture linked to beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings, emotions, and world views). Culture, as one participant suggested, could also be a product. In our current development practice, culture is commonly used as a tool or as a participatory process for community empowerment based on inherent knowledge and skills.

A discussion ensued on the challenges of integrating culture in development and how distinctions were made between religious and cultural beliefs which, after deeper examination, are based on similar principles. Some voices raised scepticism about a wholesale acceptance of culture. It was agreed that culture is dynamic and, in its evolution, perceptions, attitudes, gender roles, etc. will need to change, although accepting and adjusting to these changes may take time.

Participants were shown a 10-minute clip from CCFU’s film on ‘Culture in development in Uganda: experiences and prospects’ that illustrated the use of cultural values in development. In Fort Portal, a traditional female role model was used to encourage women to emulate the value of hard work by engaging in entrepreneurship and, in Nebbi, cultural values and content were used to disseminate HIV/AIDS prevention and management messages.

6. A broader look: experiences in integrating culture and conservation outside Uganda

Arthur Mugisha from FFI made a presentation on the origin of the concept of 'protected areas' (PAs), initially rooted in a value system informed by a relationship between man and nature. With time however the spiritual, emotional and the aesthetic dimensions of the protected area movement took a back seat and were replaced by economic rationalism and, more recently, by a concern about genetic resources.

Throughout this evolution, however, the local people and their culture was a missing element. New initiatives are however charting fresh ground in this respect: Arthur's presentation included examples of culture and conservation efforts in small forests in the East African region, examples from the Anapurana in Nepal, as well as examples from Scotland, Australia and Serbia. He concluded by outlining the opportunity costs of ignoring cultural values in conservation, including a notion of protected areas still considered alien and irrelevant; conservation costs borne by society, continued conflicts, rising costs and continued threats to the continued existence of PAs.

Moses Mapesa added that although man is part of the ecosystem, there is a tendency to consider world cultural sites, such as natural resources and landscapes, as distinct from exploring the cultural (human) dimension. However increasingly outside Africa, mixed sites (of natural and cultural value) are being identified, thus underlining the cultural dimension of conservation.

From the above presentations and discussions several salient issues emerged. These included the importance of the nature of the partnership and consultation process (between UWA and local communities); the issue of co-ownership and co-management of natural resources; and the existence of a legal regime that can allow cultural aspects of conservation to be recognised.

7. The Cultural Values and Conservation Project in Lake Mbuho and the Rwenzori

a. Cultural research work. Mark Infield outlined his research to understand why, amongst all the challenges raised in conservation efforts at Lake Mbuho National Park, restricting grazing of the Ankole cow caused most conflict (in spite of other efforts, benefits sharing, conflict resolution, etc). The research revealed the cultural significance attached to the Ankole cow for its aesthetic (colour, height, size, shape of horns) rather than economic value, its potential extinction and the value of Ankole ancestral land being at the root of conflict between different sets of values and perceptions on conservation. The subsequent FFI/UWA project was premised on the finding that integrating the Ankole cow in LMNP could be a possibility, without adverse impact on the environment. Workshop participants however raised concerns about the validity of the findings (10 years after the research) and fears in respect to large herds invading the park, and future claims to land ownership.

b. Conservation: a traditional leader's perception. Enock Muhindo (Rwenzuru Kingdom) gave participants a snapshot into traditional conservation practices on the Rwenzori Mountain. In addition to zoning the mountain for worship, settlement and livelihood, restricted access to parts of the mountain (e.g. snow peaks which are considered sacred and forested areas which were specifically for hunting), other practices such as sustainable bark harvesting; honey collection, selective killing during hunting (not killing pregnant animals) were also employed and translated

into conservation practices. The mountain is valued as a source of livelihood (settlement, spirituality, medicine, food, water, building materials, etc) as well as for its aesthetic quality. Folklore, songs, and drama were composed to sustain its significance and protection – thus illustrating the local people’s motivation as keen conservers and collaborators.

c. The Cultural Values Conservation Project: Successes and challenges. Eunice Mahoro (UWA) made a presentation on the successes and challenges of the CVCP. Participants reacted by expressing their fears that reversing current conservation measures might de-motivate some field staff. A “fear of the unknown” also emerged, related to the practicality of a “cultural approach”. The need for clear guidelines was therefore highlighted, which would reflect the need for a careful balance between incorporating cultural values and a possible negative impact on the environment.

8. Culture and Conservation: the challenges in other protected areas

John Makombo shared UWA’s experiences of the interface of culture and conservation in other PAs, highlighting traditional practices that promote or hinder conservation. He gave an example of the pastoral Karimajong who live harmoniously with nature and wildlife, although traditional initiation rites involved killing a lion, thus contributing to its endangered status. Other traditional practices mentioned included harvesting bamboo shoots (amongst the Bagisu) which, if sustainably done, contributes to fast regeneration of the plant. Amongst the Batwa, some honey harvesting methods allow for continued production and are environmentally sustainable. In northern Ugandan, hunters burn bushes to draw animals out from the wild (which are killed for meat and skins for traditional attire), a practice that destroys the natural ecosystem. On the other hand, cultural institutions, such as in Tooro, have been at the forefront of creating PAs in the guise of royal hunting grounds. The presenter ended by pointing out the need to revitalise certain beneficial cultural practices,

Due to these and other traditional practices and anticipated resistance by the communities to change, some scepticism was again expressed by some participants about the viability of integrating culture in conservation. Moses Mapesa urged UWA staff to be open minded, willing to experiment and engage in dialogue in order to understand the rationale behind cultural practices, to recognise the available options, identify potential allies and achieve collective responsibility for conservation.

9. Developing a road map to ingrate culture in conservation efforts

Through group work discussions, participants worked on a “cultural baseline”, discussed mechanisms and principles for incorporating culture in conservation and identified key stakeholders to network with.

a. Cultural baseline: Key cultural resources in our operating environment. Key resources in and around PAs were identified to include: cultural foundations and institutions, cultural leaders, ridge leaders and elders, opinion leaders, traditional healers, and clan leaders. Other resources included cultural practices, values, beliefs, knowledge, skills and relationships.

The current methods and levels of engagement varies from PA to PA, but often include informal consultative meetings with cultural and other leaders (to understand cultural issues), the identification of cultural sites; participation and attending cultural functions; and enlisting leaders' help to "mobilise" local communities. Participants suggested that this engagement could be improved by

- More deliberately addressing the cultural values that are highlighted in the General Management Plans (GMPs);
- Develop and implement Memoranda of Understanding with cultural resource persons;
- Make systematic inquiries into different issues of cultural significance in all PAs (cultural analysis)
- Identify mechanisms through which a cultural approach can be better institutionalised within UWA (e.g. representation in UWA board? Employing a cultural anthropologist? Decentralised boards? Build capacity of UWA staff?).

b. Principles. The following seven principles were suggested to inform the development of guidelines for integrating culture in conservation:

1. Principle of "trade offs" that lead to net positive conservation impact
2. Precautionary principle – zonation and setting limits
3. Practical cultural values that support wild life conservation and promote PA management goals
4. Authenticity and integrity – widely acceptable practices
5. Value addition
6. Relevance and meaning to the people
7. Cultural integration that contributes to the existing framework (national and internationally)

The implication of this for UWA planning processes would include:

- The listing of features and stakeholders should be inclusive to determine the composition of the planning team
- Incorporating a sociologist on the planning team to take care of the cultural values issues
- Critically analysing cultural values to ensure ownership and value addition
- Broadening our GMP focus to include values, in addition to tourism and biodiversity conservation

C. Networking plan

The following allies and potential allies were identified for UWA to network with:

- Cultural leaders – because these are respected, listened to, have a continuous presence in communities: once they accept and support an idea may sustain community support (however they also have a tendency to be conservative and this may hinder progress)
- International organisations (UNESCO, FFI, others) who share similar objectives to promote conservation and culture
- Political leaders – because ultimately political will is important to cause change (however politicians are not always reliable and may have a tendency to follow popular opinion which may cause conflict. In addition, their terms of service are often short lived)
- The press is important to engage to promote culture in conservation and a positive image of the relevant institutions

- Religious leaders (however caution needs to be taken to ensure that the cultural values being promoted do not cause conflict in such a partnership)
- Education institutions (this is an avenue through which the youth can acquire knowledge about the value of culture through formal education)
- Local governments – to be engaged to recognise cultural values as an asset in conservation and incorporate this aspect in the district development plans
- NGOs (CARE, Nature Uganda) –these have similar objectives in respect to conservation and development approaches that could incorporate the cultural dimension, and could provide alternative funding sources.
- “Others” included tour operators (to promote cultural tourism); opinion leaders and security organs

Participants also identified non allies who could be considered potential allies if partnerships were developed: associations of indigenous communities; some members of the community (poachers, encroachers, charcoal burners etc), commercial herbalists, and cult adherents.

With regard to the implications for UWA planning processes, involving these stakeholders would require identifying, nominating and including their participation at different levels of the UWA planning process, specifically at Step 4 (Initiation meeting - nomination and introduction to the programme); Step 5 (Field Reconnaissance - involvement in the plan implementation); Step 6: (stakeholder consultations) and Step 7: Proposal generation (as members of the planning team)

10. Conclusions

In response to the presentations made, the following suggestions were advanced:

- Working with cultural institutions While the different NPs may interact with stakeholders relevant to their specific contexts, it is important, as a general rule, to work with traditional institutions on issue of culture and deliberately engage them in conservation efforts. Cultural institutions could therefore rank amongst the most important actors to network with.
- Institutionalising the approach There is a need to explore ways to institutionalise a “cultural approach” (for instance through capacity building of staff, reviewing the planning process, enhancing competency in anthropology among the existing staff; updating all GMPs to ensure that the cultural dimension is taken into account, developing MoUs with (cultural) resource users; redefining resource users in the existing MoUs to include cultural practitioners; systematically analysing cultural issues and the implications on conservation). It is also important to ensure that the “CVCP approach” does not remain isolated, within the pilot areas and its directly concerned staff.
- Participation The quality of participation and consultations needs to be revisited and to the extent possible involve cultural stakeholders in co-management and implementation.
- UWA’s organisational culture may need to be revisited to appreciate how this new approach may be better adopted across the board; to examine new trends and reposition UWA to be responsive to its operating environment and enlist staff support.

10. Way forward

Arthur concluded with a wrap-up on the way forward. The following proposals were made:

	Proposed activities	When	Who
1.	Streamline the principles and draft guidelines		
2.	UWA to undertake the “hippo” test (organisational culture diagnostic test)		
3.	Re-visit the planning unit and CCU to ensure cultural values are integrated		
4.	Network with partners to include mapping and cultural analysis in the planning process		
5.	Cultural analysis and stakeholder assessment to be done at the PA level, focusing on cultural institutions		
6.	Increase support to CVCP in the two pilot PAs		
7.	PA field staff to take the lead in the planning process		
8.	AOPs to reflect what is included in the GMPs		
9.	Increase cultural awareness programme for UWA staff		
10.	Respective CAMs to take responsibility for implementing the CVCP		

Arthur and John (Makombo) volunteered to complete the above action plan and to share this with participants.

CCFU, May 2009

Appendix A List of participants (*See Registration list with UWA*)