

# RESILIENT AFRICA

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*2024: Volume II*

## DEFINING & DELIVERING COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION



BUILDING A FUTURE WHERE  
PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE THRIVE



## PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE CENTER OF CONSERVATION

At AWF, we believe conservation will only succeed in Africa if it is linked to the aspirations of Africa’s people. That is why we emphasize strategies at the intersection of conservation and development. We focus on creating opportunities for people not at the expense of wildlife and habitats, but because of them. We emphasize coexistence. We promote African agency. And we believe in the rights of local communities to define and lead conservation solutions that are in their long-term best interests as well as the long-term best interests of wildlife.

To create economic opportunities that balance nature and development, we partner with African institutions, civil society, businesses, and rural communities to put people at the center of conservation. Our inclusive, collaborative approach is at the heart of our mission because we know traditional knowledge and local stewardship of natural resources are essential for conservation to succeed in the long run.

This means communities must be at the conservation table as decision-makers and problem-solvers. AWF engages local stakeholders as partners, acknowledging their role as custodians of Africa’s natural

heritage and working to ensure their rights are respected. We also work to empower networks of local leaders to drive an African conservation agenda from the ground up. Connecting the dots between what happens on the ground to what is decided at national and even global policy tables is an important part of our work. Without those linkages, action at the community level can’t scale.

We know conservation is not just about safeguarding wildlife habitat. It is about adapting to and mitigating climate change, preserving healthy and productive ecosystems, and ensuring a sustainable future for both people and wildlife. The urgency of our mission in the face of these rapid changes underscores the importance of everyone’s role in protecting and conserving Africa’s natural heritage and the essential role played by rural communities on the front lines of living with wildlife.

**Kaddu Sebunya**  
AWF Chief Executive Officer



## Balancing the Needs of People and Wildlife

### An Integrated Approach to Conservation and Development in Rwanda

#### *A Conservation Model for Africa*

The rebounding of the gorilla population in Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park (VNP) is one of conservation’s great success stories. But with that success comes a new challenge: limited space that gorillas and people must share.

Rwanda is one of Africa’s most densely populated countries, with farmland directly abutting the park. The needs of gorillas and people are colliding. In response, AWF is partnering with the government of Rwanda to develop a “master plan” for the region. This plan, which supports Rwanda’s green economy and defines land use and investment, is crucial in creating long-term resiliency and opportunity for people living around Volcanoes National Park—while ensuring the park has enough space to support the growing gorilla population.

FALLING TO A LOW OF JUST 254 INDIVIDUALS IN THE EARLY ‘80S, THE VIRUNGA GORILLA POPULATION WAS ON THE BRINK OF CATASTROPHE. THE WORK OF AWF, THE RWANDAN GOVERNMENT, AND MANY OTHERS SAW A TURNING POINT IN THE ‘90S WHEN VALUING THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS AND ECOTOURISM BECAME A PART OF THE NATION’S FUTURE. TODAY THERE ARE MORE THAN 600 GORILLAS IN THE VIRUNGA MOUNTAINS.  
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**Resilient Africa** is a newsletter from the African Wildlife Foundation exploring how Africa is defining and meeting conservation challenges on the continent.

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COORDINATED AND INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE PLANNING AND EXTENSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HAVE MADE WAY FOR A PARTICIPATORY LAND USE PLAN THAT EXPANDS HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED WILDLIFE POPULATIONS AND CREATES CLIMATE-RESILIENT HOUSING. THE SMART GREEN NEIGHBORHOODS, SIMILAR TO THOSE PICTURED, WILL INCLUDE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION, SHOPS, ELECTRICITY, AND SANITATION.



**Patrick Nsabimana, AWF Rwanda Program Manager and Acting Country Director, is leading AWF's work with local communities in the country, advancing a pilot program launched as a proof of concept for an overall master plan for the landscape. We recently spoke with him to better understand how a community-led conservation approach drives the strategy, paying off for both people and wildlife in Volcanoes National Park and the surrounding communities.**

***What is the long-term vision of AWF's partnership with the Rwanda government?***

The collaboration creates a model for how conservation can be the engine for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. By aligning with Rwanda's national priorities, such as Vision 2050 and the Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy, we're contributing to the country's broader development goals while safeguarding its unique natural heritage.

The partnership is also important because it represents a holistic approach to addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time—biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development. We hope to achieve nothing less than a transformation in how we think about and practice conservation, one that puts communities at the center and demonstrates the intrinsic link between healthy ecosystems and human prosperity.

***What are the goals for the program?***

We are working to integrate conservation and development outcomes through coordinated landscape-level planning and investment. This includes developing and implementing a participatory land use plan for the Volcanoes National Park (VNP) landscape by 2026, expanding the habitat for endangered wildlife populations in VNP, and ensuring that relocated communities

in the landscape have sustainable diversified income sources and increased economic opportunities. But most importantly, we hope to create a replicable national model that demonstrates how conservation and development can be mutually reinforcing. This could have far-reaching implications not just for Rwanda but for other countries facing similar challenges.

***How does the program partner with and include communities living near Volcanoes National Park?***

Extensive community meetings and engagement have taken place across affected communities, involving over 500 community members, allowing us to gather local perspectives, address concerns, and incorporate community input into our planning. This process has been crucial in securing Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in identifying and restoring land for gorilla habitat.

We have also established community representation in decision-making. For instance, project-involved people have elected 24 community-level representatives to liaise on issues relating to securing land for restoration to the park and helping the community move to the new neighborhoods, which are being designed to meet people's needs for climate-resilient housing, electricity

and sanitation, access to health care and education, and the like. We've also set up community committees to advise us on concerns directly related to the overall pilot project.

***What does Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) mean in the context of this program and what are your biggest challenges?***

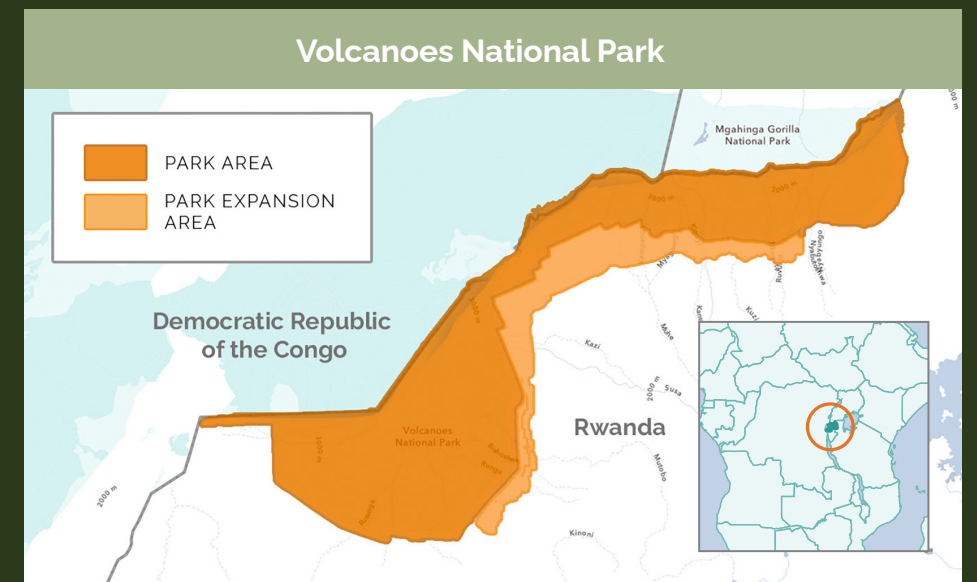
FPIC, in our context, means that local communities have the right to get comprehensive information covering the nature, size, pace, reversibility, and scope of the proposed project, its duration, and the affected communities. This involves consultations and participation in good faith, allowing communities to approve or reject the project based on a collective decision-making process.

Implementing these standards comes with significant challenges such as addressing diverse stakeholder interests, managing community expectations, adapting to changing community needs over time, and ensuring that consent (or lack thereof) is properly documented and verifiable. Despite these challenges, this approach is a fundamental principle of the program, and AWF is ensuring genuine community consent and participation in the process.

*Free, Prior, and Informed Consent refers to the rights of local communities to give or withhold their consent for any actions or activities that would affect their lands, territories, or rights.*

***What are the community's greatest needs and how are you helping meet them?***

One of the greatest needs is for diversified, sustainable income sources. Many households rely on subsistence agriculture, which can lead to pressure on park resources. We sat down with community members with the intention to build economic opportunities. The result is a comprehensive Livelihood Improvement



Plan that introduces 17 new livelihood options designed to grow the economy around climate-resilient and conservation-compatible activities. Community members will be supported with training, start-up capital, and market linkages that are projected to increase household income by up to 30%.

We've also recognized the need for targeted support for women and youth. Our enterprise development initiatives aim for 30% women-owned and 20% youth-owned businesses.

Other needs include improved access to health care, education, water, and sanitation. Our modern green neighborhood concept addresses this by incorporating health centers, early childhood facilities, and improved water and sanitation systems. While still in the planning stage, this initiative aims to significantly improve people's quality of life.

Due to land scarcity, crop raiding by wildlife is a significant concern. We're working on strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflict, including buffer zone management, and exploring alternative livelihoods that are less vulnerable to wildlife damage. As we restore parts of the park and develop the green neighborhoods, we are working for fair compensation and livelihood restoration for affected households living in areas identified as best suited to wildlife habitat.

And we are ensuring they can relocate to modern neighborhoods that improve living conditions and economic opportunities.

***What recent strides have you made through the livelihood enhancement programs?***

Through a partnership with Inkomoko, an NGO that provides business expertise and access to financing for entrepreneurs, we launched an innovative business incubation program to empower local entrepreneurs to develop sustainable business enterprises. In July, our first cohort of 100 entrepreneurs attended a workshop focused on developing business plans and equipping participants with essential skills for success. This program offers comprehensive support in training and mentoring, start-up funding, and infrastructure access. By fostering local ownership and building resilience, we're creating a win-win scenario for both wildlife and communities.

***What makes you hopeful?***

The high level of community participation is incredibly encouraging. Over 500 community members actively engaged in our meetings, showing a genuine interest in shaping the future of their landscape. In addition, the strong support and collaboration we've received from the Rwandan government gives me confidence that our efforts align with national priorities and will have long-term support.

## BRINGING COMMUNITY CONSERVANCIES TO UGANDA



In partnership with Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), AWF supported the establishment of the first community conservancies in Uganda, including Rurambira Community Conservancy and Murchison Community Conservancy. Now, we are laying the groundwork for conservancies within the Karenga Community Wildlife Area (KCWA), an area designated by the Uganda government and now co-managed by communities and the wildlife authority. To expand upon that work, AWF supported local community members in forming KKAKKA, a community wildlife association representing six districts that surround Kidepo Valley National Park, including Karenga, Kotido, Abim, Kitgum, Kaabong, and Agago.

Today, with support from John and Rita Canning, AWF is bolstering the effectiveness and reach of KKAKKA. Through education and dialogues, training in conflict mitigation, and community-led projects for natural resource management, we are working with local communities in Lobalangit and Lokori sub-counties in Karenga District to enhance co-existence between communities and wildlife. Rose Ssebatindira, AWF Country Director for Uganda, explains, “By putting the stewardship of the natural resources in the hands of the community, we aim to create a sustainable balance where both wildlife and people can flourish. This is about creating a future where conservation is woven into the fabric of everyday life.”

## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PRACTICES KEY TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY SUCCESS



Campo Ma'an National Park (CMNP) lies 75 kilometers from Kribi, an up-and-coming industrial center and home to the Kribi Deepwater Port, the principal seaport for the region. Recent developments in the last 20 years also include the Chad-Cameroon Petroleum Pipeline, which exports up to 225,000 barrels daily, and the nearby Memve'ele hydroelectric dam, which provides 20% of Cameroon's electricity. Adjacent to the seaport, a 15,000-hectare (a bit smaller than Washington, DC) industrial park and a modern city designed

to house up to 300,000 people are in the works. Rapidly expanding development is taking a toll on natural resources. Both wildlife and humans feel the squeeze, particularly traditional communities living around the park, which are often left out of development opportunities.

AWF is leading a sustainable community farming initiative near the park, taking a rights-based approach to foster better relations between community members and park authorities. We are implementing community-led projects such as cooperative nurseries, seed distribution to farmers, and training in sustainable practices to boost crop yields and reduce wildlife damage. In 2023, 120 households from five Indigenous Bagyeli communities in the northern sector adjacent to the park participated in the program. They cultivated 92 hectares of corn, groundnuts, egusi (pistachio), cassava, and yams, leading to a 50% increase in the overall harvest for the community. This initiative has significantly reduced food insecurity and empowered families to meet their basic material needs and invest in their children's education, marking a positive change in these communities.



**APPLYING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES HAS ALLOWED THE JEAN MBENGA FAMILY TO INCREASE THEIR ANNUAL INCOME FROM US\$250 TO US\$850 FROM THE SALE OF EGUSI AND PEANUTS, DECREASING THEIR DEPENDENCY ON FOREST PRODUCTS AND POACHING.**

## A NEW ERA FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AT MANYARA RANCH IN TANZANIA



*“AWF has been our guardian for many years... Now we are Layoni (a term for grown men in the Maasai language), and we have multiple resources. It's time to walk alone and continue to conserve this Ranch with AWF watching our backs... We are determined to make a success out of it.”*

**ONYAKO OLONYOKIE  
MAASAI RANCHER**

In July 2024, after two decades of transformative conservation and community development efforts, AWF officially transitioned management of Manyara Ranch to the community-led Manyara Ranch Management Trust (MRMT). Since 2013, AWF has worked with local stakeholders to restore the property, part of a critical wildlife corridor between Tarangire and Lake Manyara National Parks, transforming it from a degraded cattle ranch into a thriving habitat for giraffes, lions, elephants, and numerous other species—as well as more than a thousand cattle.

Manyara Ranch now serves as a vital link for migrating wildlife, helping to maintain the ecological balance of the Maasai Steppe, an important part of Tanzania's safari tourism economy. In addition to conservation efforts, AWF made significant investments in community development, including the relocation and renovation of the Manyara Ranch Primary School, which was handed over to the local district



**ONYAKO OLONYOKIE**

council in 2023, and improvement in access to water for local communities. A testament to AWF's commitment to education and community engagement, the school has provided a safe and improved learning environment for over 1,000 students, incorporating environmental stewardship into its curriculum. Now under local management, the Ranch will support the sustainable coexistence of people and wildlife in northern Tanzania through cattle operations and ecotourism.

## THE POWER OF NETWORKS: SCALING THE WISDOM OF LOCAL COMMUNITY-LED EFFORTS

In 2020, AWF brought together civil society organizations from throughout the continent to form the African Civil Society Biodiversity Alliance (ACBA). Today, this network of more than 150 organizations is a powerful force, collectively advocating for policies integrating biodiversity conservation and sustainable development across Africa.

One of the founding members of ACBA is Tommy Garnett, Founder and Executive Director of the Environmental Foundation for Africa (EFA), a Sierra Leone-based NGO founded in 1992 during the country's civil war. One powerful example of their work is Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary, a community-initiated and managed

conservation initiative. The 1,200-hectare property in southeastern Sierra Leone was once a war-ravaged landscape. Today, due to community leadership, it is part of a thriving tropical rainforest home to pygmy hippopotami, 11 species of primates, and over 135 different species of birds.

As a member of ACBA, Garnett has found support to further EFA's work through shared knowledge, access to resources, and a vision for Africa that influences governments to embrace conservation and sustainable development. “It takes sustained investment, political will, commitment, and love to reverse biodiversity degradation and champion conservation. Our evolving relationship with ACBA members and AWF promises to bolster ongoing efforts to conserve biodiversity in the Guinean forests of West Africa and contribute significantly to our continued progress,” explains Garnett.



**THE ENVIRONMENTAL FOUNDATION FOR AFRICA IS A LOCAL NGO WORKING IN SIERRA LEONE AND A FOUNDING ORGANIZATION OF ACBA. EFA'S COMMUNITY-LED EFFORTS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTED TO PEACEBUILDING IN SIERRA LEONE AND NEIGHBORING LIBERIA THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND LAND RESTORATION.**



**BOB AND EMMY KING, PICTURED HERE ON ONE OF THEIR FIRST TRIPS TO AFRICA, ARE ARDENT SUPPORTERS OF EDUCATION BOTH IN THEIR NATIVE CHICAGO (US) AND AFRICA.**

## Bob and Emmy King

AWF, in partnership with the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK), recently launched a transformative, four-year conservation education project. This initiative, supported by Bob and Emmy King through their organization Salt Creek Ventures, a technology-based USA company specializing in education, health care, and conservation, is a testament to the Kings' dedication and long-time support of AWF's conservation education efforts across Africa. The project, 'Building a Movement of Young Conservation Change Agents,' provides conservation education to about 83,000 learners in 137 schools in the Tsavo landscape, Kenya's largest conservation area.

With 40% of Kenya's population being 15 years or younger, the Kings realize that Africa's children and youth are conservation's greatest

assets. Their belief in the transformative power of education has been a driving force since the first large project they supported, 'Classroom Africa,' in 2013. That program built six schools in five countries, providing access to quality primary school education in rural, biodiversity-rich landscapes, reaching over 20,000 children. Bob and Emmy have been involved with AWF since 2005, when Bob joined the Board of Trustees. He became a Trustee Emeritus in 2018.

"We believe education makes the world go 'round. Our hope, and our legacy, is that participating youth will become champions and leaders of the growing conservation efforts in their communities and throughout the continent of Africa," explain Bob and Emmy King.



**"OPEN DIALOGUE AND ALIGNMENT OF INTERESTS ARE AT THE HEART OF SUCCESS IN BUILDING SHARED LANDSCAPES WHERE PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE COEXIST PEACEFULLY AND WHERE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GO HAND IN HAND," EMPHASIZES KfW PORTFOLIO MANAGER BIANCA SCHLEGEL AT A MEETING WITH A LOCAL COMMUNITY IN CAMEROON.**

## Equitable and Sustainable Communities Drive KfW Partnership

KfW Development Bank, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), finances programs and projects in developing countries and emerging economies to fight poverty, maintain peace, protect the environment and the climate, and appropriately shape globalization. Currently, KfW supports several programs with AWF, such as the Simien Mountains landscape in Ethiopia and biodiversity protection and development in Cameroon.

The Cameroon program aims to support the management and implementation of the development plan and monitoring of ecotourism in the Campo Ma'an National Park (CMNP) and its surrounding areas. AWF's activities focus on reducing poaching, wildlife

monitoring, income-generating activities with Indigenous Peoples, and developing ecotourism products. As part of the community engagement work here, we partnered with the Indigenous Bagyeli communities to increase crop production and sell their produce on an open market—a significant step towards reducing food insecurity and decreasing the pressure on wildlife habitat bordering the national park.

"Our hope is that through this continued partnership we will see a more equitable and sustainable development model where humans and wildlife peacefully coexist, where natural resources are sustainably managed, and community members benefit," shared Bianca Schlegel, Portfolio Manager, KfW.

## LEADING FOR WILDLIFE LIVING WITH WILDLIFE CARING FOR WILDLIFE

*We believe in a vision of Africa where sustainable development includes thriving wildlife and wild lands as a cultural and economic asset for Africa's future generations. Your generous gift today can help us build a resilient future for Africa where people and wildlife both thrive.*

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