



# Contribution of Tourism to Rural Community Livelihoods in the Murchison Falls Conservation Area, Uganda

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## Abstract

Tourism is one of the growth sectors recognized for its role in socio-economic transformation and improvement in the livelihoods of rural communities in developing countries including Uganda. This study examined the contribution of tourism to the livelihoods of rural communities living around Murchison Falls Conservation Area (MFCA) from 1996 to 2015. Data were collected using a questionnaire, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied to the data to show the link between tourism development and rural households' livelihoods. The results reveal that tourism generates incomes and contributes to rural households' livelihoods through direct benefits (factor mean = 0.753), indirect benefits (factor mean = 0.826) and multiple forms of economic support given to the local community (factor mean = 0.807). In order to enhance and sustain these benefits, there is need to enhance business skills of the local communities through vocational training in tourism related enterprises, enhancing of markets for local products, the establishment of community-based tourism enterprise groups and savings and cooperative organizations (SACCOs).

**Keywords:** Tourism, Rural Communities, livelihoods, Murchison Falls conservation , Uganda

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the socio-economic activities that benefits from nature conservation (Mowforth and Munt 2016; Cobbinah et al. 2013). It has been recognized and prioritized in national development frameworks of many countries as one of the major drivers of socio-economic transformation (Liu et al. 2012; Ekanyake & Long 2012). Regional, national and local economies benefit from tourism by initiating and boosting new businesses and promoting a positive image of an area (OECD 2010; UNECA 2010; UNWTO 2002). In addition, tourism elicits development in remote rural areas where households have limited economic opportunities. According to Uganda's National Planning Authority (NPA) (2015), tourism sector grew by 20% from 2000 to date (2017). The number of inbound visitors increased by 0.13% from 2011 to 2015 (UBOS 2016). This growth translated into over USD 1,830 million in 2015 thus indicating that tourism can enhance the economy and cause socio-economic transformation. Furthermore, tourism created 191,500 direct employment opportunities, representing 2.8% of the total number of people employed in Uganda. According to UBOS (2011), 14% of the registered businesses in Uganda were related to tourism. Mwaura and Ssekitoleko (2011) reported that tourism-related businesses such as accommodation facilities and transport contributed to 7.3% and 7.9% respectively of the total employment opportunities.

Tourist expenditure forms part of the resources that trickle down to local communities. A major proportion of tourist expenditure in Uganda is generated from conservation areas thus making Murchison Falls Conservation Area one of the epicenters of tourism growth and revenue generation. International visitors constituted a large proportion of tourists who visited conservation



areas in Uganda in 2014 (MTWA 2015; UBOS 2014a). Data from Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS 2016) indicate that the number of tourists that visited Murchison Falls Conservation Area increased by 1.4 percentage points from 27,825 to 65,366 in the period 2002 to 2015. In 2014, 66,844 international tourists visited Murchison Falls Conservation Area. This accounted for 32.9% of the total number of tourists that visited conservation areas in Uganda. As required by the Uganda Wildlife Act Cap 200 of 2000, 20% of gate entry fees have been used to support revenue-sharing projects that directly benefit the local communities. These data signify the importance of tourism and provided the impetus to examine, in this study, the contribution of tourism to improvement of rural households' livelihoods.

Whereas tourism can contribute to improved livelihoods of local communities living in and around protected areas, there is a need to establish the link between tourism and national development strategies in order to direct the benefits of tourism to the intended beneficiaries especially those living in the rural areas (Banskota and Sherma 1996). Tourism development needs to be planned to increase and diversity economic opportunities for rural people and augment their livelihoods through employment and generation of incomes from tourism enterprises (Goodwin 2002; Ashley 2002). Tourism differs from other economic activities because it uses a diverse range of facilities across a number of industrial sectors (Dwyer et al. 2010). Several authors have reported the benefits of tourism to local communities, for instance, Chok et al. (2007), Scheyvens (2007), Zhao and Ritchie (2007) and Mitchell and Ashley (2010). They noted that local communities benefit from tourism through employment, capacity building in business development and management, improved social welfare and sharing of revenue generated by tourism. Through direct capital injection and job creation, tourism has a multiplier effect on the livelihoods of local people (Mitchell and Ashley 2010; Spenceley 2008).

Tourism has grown in Murchison Falls Conservation Area in terms of number of tourist arrivals and contribution to GDP (Tourism Sector Statistical Abstracts, 2013, 2014, 2015). However, there has been insufficient research on how tourism specifically contributes to livelihoods of rural households living around conservation areas such as Murchison Falls Conservation Area. This study was undertaken as part of the effort to address this gap. The objectives are twofold: to assess the benefits of tourism to the livelihoods of rural households and to examine the growth of community-based tourism enterprises as sources of incomes. The study answered the following questions: what are the categories of tourism benefits received by the rural communities living in Murchison Falls Conservation Area? What are the different ways in which tourism contributes to rural communities' livelihoods? What are the growth trends in community-based tourism enterprises in terms of numbers and scope of activities?

### **An overview of tourism as a growth sector for promotion of rural development around protected and conservation areas**

Tourism development in protected and conservation areas is a common global phenomenon (UNEP 2016). Therefore, protected and conservation areas managers need to be equipped with information in order to meet the demands and expectations of local communities and other stakeholders such as tourists (Eagles and McCool 2002). According to UNWTO (2017), tourism is an important component of local and international trade accounting for 30% of overall global exports of services. World Bank (2011) reported that tourism contributes to improvement of local people's livelihoods while OECD (2016) recognized tourism as a means for promoting economic growth and creating job opportunities. It is, therefore, important to carry out studies that help to increase understanding of the role of tourism in rural development and to suggest strategies for improving rural livelihoods (OECD 2016, UNWTO 2017). In this respect, a question frequently



asked is: how does tourism development contribute to the livelihoods of rural households in protected and conservation areas?

Research in tourism is crucial because it generates data used to guide tourism planning and management. Furthermore, the data help to monitor tourism growth trends, provide feedback on the performance of the tourism sector and highlight its role in local and national economies. Such information, according to Thomas et al. (2002), guides governments in the sharing of tourism revenues with local communities living adjacent to protected and conservation. Furthermore, the revenues support community-based development projects that contribute to improved rural households' livelihoods. It is, therefore, logical to conclude that conservation area-based tourism is an important tool for spurring rural economic development.

Tourism in protected and conservation areas provide a number of positive social, cultural, physical, environmental and economic benefits for the surrounding local communities (Bennett 2009). At the same time, several studies have shown that development of tourism in protected and conservation areas have several negative effects on local communities such as displacement, restricted access, changes in resource tenure, conflicts with wildlife, decline in cultural values and many others (Scherl et al. 2004; West et al. 2006; Coad et al. 2008). Ideally, tourism development in protected and conservation areas should promote a balance between nature conservation and generation of socio-economic benefits for local communities. This is critical because tourism is a tool for promoting nature conservation and a means of achieving local economic development (Bello et al. 2016). There is a strong argument in favour of tourism as a strategy for enhancing local community livelihoods around protected and conservation areas (Bello et al. 2016) because the benefits generated offer alternative economic livelihoods to local communities (Mayer et al. 2010). Local community's participation in tourism in conservation and protected areas helps to maximize the benefits to them (Bello et al. 2016). Improvement of socio-economic wellbeing of rural households is an incentive for attracting and sustaining local support for nature conservation and tourism development. Furthermore, it empowers local people to make informed and decisions before participating in nature conservation and tourism development (Akama, 1996).

## **Study Area and Methods**

### **Study Area**

Murchison Falls Conservation Area (1°42'N -02° 15'N and 31° 24'E-32°14'E) is located in north-western Uganda at the northern end of the Albertine Rift Valley. It comprises Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP), Bugungu Wildlife Reserve, Karuma Wildlife Reserve and Ajai Wildlife Reserve (AWR) (Figure 1). Records indicate that the landscape covered by Murchison Falls Conservation Area was infested with tsetse flies and the local population suffered from sleeping sickness between 1898 and 1915. As a result, the population was evacuated from an area of about 13,000 km<sup>2</sup>. However, by mid 1960s tourism in the area had grown considerably and became the premier tourist destination in East Africa visited by over 60,000 tourists annually (Jordahl 2005).

Murchison Falls Conservation Area was established because of its abundant wildlife and little threat from other forms of land use and human activities (UWA 2014). Buffer zones were created around the Park to protect ecological processes and augment biodiversity conservation. Controlled hunting areas (CHAs) were also established in the southern and western flanks to regulate hunting by local communities and protect wildlife.

The vegetation in Murchison Falls Conservation Area, which is also a tourist attraction, has changed in the last 50 years due to human and animal activities (UWA 2008). The southern part is dominated by Budongo tropical rainforest while woodlands and thickets cover the southern part. There are 80 species of mammals (Wilson 1995) which attract tourists including elephant, hippopotamus, buffalo, giraffe, Uganda kob, water buck and many others. The area is home to 450 bird species including the rare and elusive Shoebill stork. Major ethnic groups include the Banyoro, Alur, Jonam and Acholi. This multi ethnicity provides a mixture of cultural values that attract tourists. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European explorers traversed parts of north-western Uganda in search of source of the Nile and later settled as conquerors of Equatorial Province that included Murchison Falls Conservation Area. The presence of different ethnic groups with their rich traditions and cultures plus the European explorers' footprints provides a unique combination of culture and history that attract tourists to Murchison Falls Conservation Area (UWA, 2001).

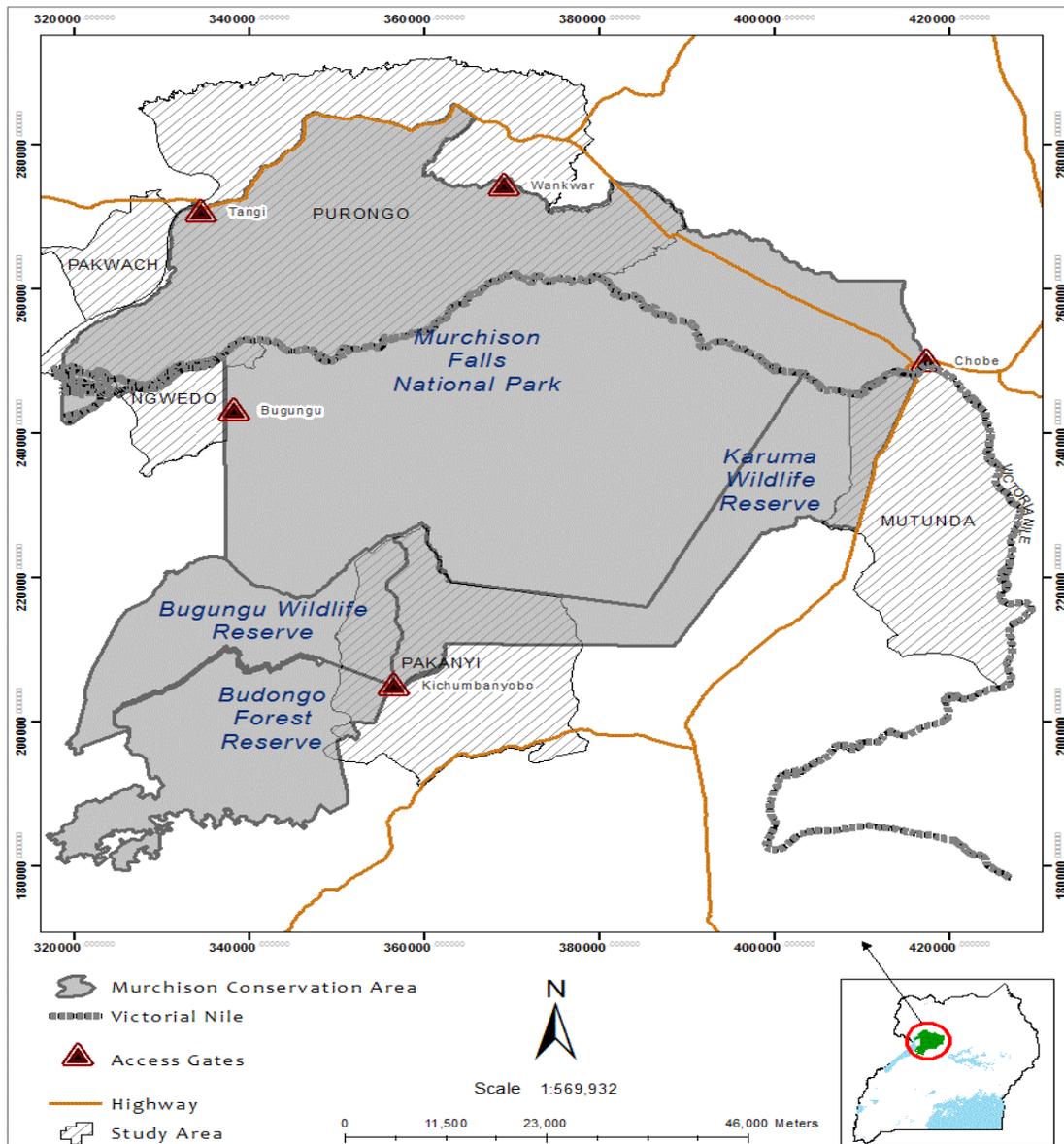


Figure 1. Location of the study area



## Data Collection

A case study design approach based on Creswell (2013) and Yin (2014) was applied and sample size determined using Kish Grid formula expressed as  $Z^2 * P * Q / d^2$  where Z is the standard deviation of the mean at 95 % confidence level, P is the probability of selecting an element of interest (in this study households were selected), Q is the probability of selecting an element (household) without characteristic of interest (1-p) and d is the degree of marginal error corresponding with the confidence level (95%). Using the formula, a total of 335 households were interviewed in five sub counties in five districts bordering Murchison Falls Conservation Area where tourism developments and activities were concentrated particularly at the entry gates established in the sub-counties. The number of respondents was proportionately determined taking into account the total number of households in each sub county. Households were randomly selected and the household head interviewed. In the absence of the household head, an adult household member above 18 years was interviewed because she/he was expected to be knowledgeable about tourism activities in and around MFCA.

The data collected were limited to the period 1996 to 2015. Primary data were collected from respondents using a structured questionnaire containing closed and open-ended questions that helped to generate information that was later subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis. The structured questionnaire also helped to minimize misrepresentation of responses, ensured that all questions were answered and responses probed where necessary. Secondary data were obtained from the National Housing and Population Census Report (UBOS 2014b), reports of Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) on tourism and community conservation and various district reports. Key informant interviews were held with 60 staff from Murchison Falls Conservation Area, local districts administration, managers of accommodation facilities and local community opinion leaders. Information was collected on community-based tourism projects, local products sold by households to tourism enterprises, functional community-based tourism enterprises and tourism related projects implemented in and around MFCA. Guided by Jennings (2010), five focus group discussions involving 7-13 participants were held to collect information on how tourism development in the Murchison Falls Conservation Area had contributed to rural households and local communities' livelihoods. In order to check the validity of the responses, similar questions were put to different respondents.

## Data Analysis

Questionnaire responses were edited, coded and entered in SPSS to create data file. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the application of the varimax rotation facility was performed on the data collected to determine the dimension of scales (Zhaoming 2016; Jollite 2014). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.876 which was above the required value of 0.5 thus permitting more elaborate data analysis to be carried out (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Bartlett's test of sphericity was applied and a determinant value of 0.000299 obtained which was above the required value of 0.00001 thus indicating the suitability of multi-collinearity in the factors analyzed. Three underlying factors (variables) with eigen values above 1.0 based on Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion were extracted from the Principle Component Analysis and explained by 75.6% of variance. Exploratory factor analysis was performed to establish the correlation between variables (factors) that explained the contribution of tourism to improved rural households' livelihoods in consonance with work by Vajčnerova et al. (2016) and Jollite (2014).



## Results

The study revealed that tourism contributed to rural households' livelihoods through direct and indirect benefits as well as different community level support (Table 1).

**Table 1. Non-collinear principle components generated from variables (factors) indicating direct and indirect benefits of tourism to the rural households' livelihoods**

Variables/Factors	Rotated component matrix		
	Indirect benefit	Community level benefit	Direct benefit
Appreciation of land value	0.772	-	-
Environmental conservation	0.868	-	-
Increased tourist expenditure in the community	0.830	-	-
Support to health services	0.835	-	-
Improvement in the transport infrastructure	0.829	-	-
Generation of alternative income	-	0.827	-
Support to education	-	0.867	-
Increased tourism revenue from UWA	-	0.728	-
Provision of jobs	-	-	0.830
Growth of market for local goods and demand for services	-	-	0.676

### Community level benefits

As shown in Table 1, tourism revenue from Uganda Wildlife Authority (coefficient of 0.728) was shared with the local community and used to support education and training (coefficient of 0.867) and establishment of alternative income generation enterprises (coefficient of 0.827).

### Alternative income generation

Tourism in the Murchison Falls Conservation Area created income generation opportunities for the local community that were involved in enterprises such as passenger transport by motorcycles, taxi hire services, linen laundry for accommodation facilities and supply of construction materials (Table 1).

### Direct Benefits

Tourism activities created jobs, led to growth of market for local products such as crafts, fresh food, fuel wood, building materials & cultural entertainment and the demand for local services such as guiding, security, housekeeping, waiting and pottery represented by coefficients 0.830 and 0.676 respectively (Table 1).

### Indirect benefits of tourism to the rural households' livelihoods

The indirect benefits of tourism to the rural households' livelihoods were based on five items with the factor loading score lying within the acceptable level of 0.772 to 0.868. The eigen values showed that rural households' appreciation of the importance of environment in their livelihoods was loaded highly with a coefficient of 0.868. The indirect benefits included appreciation of land value, environmental conservation, increased tourist expenditure in the local community and improvement of health facilities (Table 1).



### **Appreciation of land value**

Tourism activities led to the appreciation of land value from USD 943.4 to USD 5480 within a period of 15 years. As a result, land became a crucial factor of production especially for cultivation of food crops that were sold to tourists and accommodation facilities (Table 1).

### **Increased tourist expenditure in the community**

Tourism activities attracted growth of several tourism related enterprises in the community such as accommodation facilities, restaurants, hand craft and retail shops. Local oral accounts revealed that tourist expenditures on local goods and services were sources of incomes to the rural households (Table 1).

### **Environmental conservation**

Environmental conservation was regarded as a major indirect contribution of tourism to rural households' livelihoods. For instance, farming households were supported to establish tree nurseries and plant tree seedlings. A total of USD 4896 was invested aimed at reducing local community pressure on protected area resources for livelihoods (Table 2). The investment was expected to provide alternative sources of incomes for the youth, ex-poachers and charcoal burners as a strategy for reducing illegal exploitation of the protected resources. In addition, rural households were allowed to collect wild mushrooms, honey, fruits, firewood, thatch grass, water, papyrus, raffia and palm leaves from Murchison Falls Conservation Area.

**Table 2. Type and amount of support to the local communities**

Type of support	Amount (USD)
Environmental conservation	4,896
Maintenance of roads and ferry	7,123
Provision of health centres facilities	15,614
Construction of classrooms and staff houses	210,872
Goat rearing	21,604
Bee keeping and honey production	90,629

### **Health facilities**

Uganda Wildlife Authority through the managers of Murchison Falls Conservation Area supported the construction of health facilities in the adjacent rural communities. The support helped to improve health services delivery as staff was accommodated on site thereby reducing complains of late-coming and absenteeism hither to very common. Records from Murchison Falls Conservation Area's Community Conservation Department indicated that between 2002 and 2015, a total of USD 15,614 was released to support health facilities (Table 2).

### **Infrastructure**

Tourism as a business requires infrastructure which are used by tourists and the local community. Tourism indirectly contributed to improvement of transport infrastructure in Murchison Falls Conservation Area. For instance, funds were provided for maintenance of roads and ferry services on Victoria Nile. In 2005 USD 5,480 was provided to buy road culverts and fuel for grading feeder roads while USD 43,562 was allocated annually for maintenance of the ferry on Victoria Nile (Table 2).



### **Support to construction of primary schools classrooms and staff houses**

Uganda Wildlife Authority through Murchison Falls Conservation Area supported construction of primary schools class rooms and teachers' houses as a strategy for improvement of local community-level literacy and to empower the youth as agents of nature conservation. In this regard, the 39 classroom blocks were constructed in the adjacent parishes at a total cost of USD 210,872 (Table 2).

### **Increased tourism revenue from Murchison Falls Conservation Area**

Tourism revenue from Murchison Falls Conservation Area was the second most important factor that contributed to the rural households' livelihoods (coefficient of 0.728). It was found that Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) implemented a tourism revenue sharing scheme in accordance with the Uganda Wildlife Act of 2000. Twenty percent of the gate entrance fees collected was shared with the adjacent local communities. The money was used to support local community-based projects identified and prioritized by the local aimed at reducing pressure on the protected resources. The funds were invested in alternative incomes generation enterprises such as goat rearing and bee keeping. USD 90,629 was invested in goat rearing project while USD 21,604 was invested in bee keeping and honey production (Table 2). As a result of the investment, honey production for instance increased from 375 kg in 2010 to 2129 kg in 2015.

### **Employment opportunities**

Local people were employed in accommodation facilities and restaurants while others produced local crafts and managed tourism related businesses. Accommodation and food enterprises employed 513 people of which 353 (68.8%) were from the local communities. The enterprises owned by local entrepreneurs employed more local residents than migrant workers thus affirming the direct contribution of tourism. A total of 863 people were employed as waiters, waitresses, cashiers, housekeepers/gardeners, security, game rangers, guides, receptionists, drivers, ferry operators, messengers, porters and trail maintenance workers. The monthly salaries ranged from USD 19 – USD 123 with a median monthly salary of about USD 96 depending on the level of education and skills. In a year the incomes from employment was about USD 447,616 in 2015.

### **Growth of market for local goods and demand for services**

The growth of market for local products was regarded as an indirect contribution of tourism to rural households' livelihoods. The households supplied local products to accommodation establishments and intermediaries such as craft sellers and tour companies or sold the products directly to tourists. The products included fresh foods such as vegetables, beans, fresh fish, milk, fresh meat (especially goats' meat), beans, fruits, tomatoes, onions and potatoes. They also sold maize flour, fuel wood (fire wood and charcoal), building materials (thatching grass, poles and sand) and crafts. The income earned from products sold in 2015 was USD 192,528 (Table 3).

**Table 3. Direct benefits through employment and market for local products in 2015**

Benefit	Amount (USD)
Employment	
a. Hotel and restaurants	406,656
b. National Park (Uganda Wildlife Authority)	41,472
Sale of local products	192,528



### **Growth of community-based tourism enterprises**

Growth in the number of community-based tourism enterprises and the scope of activities was regarded as key indicator of the contribution of tourism to rural households' livelihoods around Murchison Falls Conservation Area. This study has found that the majority of the tourism enterprises were formed between 2008 and 2012 initially beginning as single enterprises such as tour guiding but later expanded to include income generating activities such as beekeeping and honey production, poultry keeping, provision of boat rides on Victoria Nile and others. The number of enterprises increased from one in 1999 to seven in 2015 together with the number of members and scope of activities (Table 4). According to the chairpersons' of the enterprises, the growing number of tourists in Murchison Falls Conservation Area motivated the local people to start tourism related income generating businesses as a measure to reduce poverty and malnutrition among the adjacent local communities.



**Table 4. Rural community-based tourism enterprises, activities and years of introduction in Murchison Falls Conservation Area**

Names of CBTs	Membership numbers	Activities (1999 - 2003)	Activities (2005 - 2009)	Activities (2010 - 2015)
Acholi Energetic Dances Association	30			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural entertainment of visitors</li> </ul>
Albertine Tourism and Conservation Association (ATCA)	97	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of Konge, Anyongara and Aligo dance groups to entertain and diversify their livelihood activities</li> <li>• Community sensitization on conservation and livelihood diversification through tourism</li> <li>• Organizing</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guiding (including birding)</li> <li>• Training in craft making</li> <li>• Community-based afforestation and tree planting initiatives</li> <li>• Tourism product development at Pakwach (historic site of Gipir and Labongo separation)</li> <li>• Poultry keeping</li> <li>• Operation of traditional boating service for visitors on the Albert Nile</li> </ul>
Boomu Group	Women 35			Establishment and management of nursery and primary schools
Purongo Cultural Tourism Centre	*open			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural tourism center development</li> <li>• Community craft and souvenir marketing centre</li> <li>• Community training centre</li> <li>• Cultural entertainment of visitors</li> </ul>
Mubako Cultural and Craft Association	27		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Craft making and sale</li> <li>• Entertaining tourists</li> </ul>	
Kaniyo Pabidi Ecotourism and Guides Association (KAPEGA)	34		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing guiding services</li> <li>• Guide training</li> <li>• Village walks and home stays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Providing laundry services to Budongo Eco-Lodge</li> <li>• Beekeeping</li> </ul>
Watwero Dance Group	Cultural 32			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural entertainment of visitors</li> </ul>



## Discussion

Protected and conservation areas-based tourism offers opportunity for improving the livelihoods of the surrounding rural households. Tourism can widen and diversify alternative sources of incomes through introduction of enterprises such as accommodation facilities, restaurants, crafts production and cultural entertainment. The incomes generated help to strengthen the local economies and increase the spending power of the households. According to Richardson (2010) and Mitchell and Ashley (2010), tourism contributes to local economic growth and poverty alleviation. Like other economic sectors, tourism should benefit rural communities in terms of employment, market for local products and engagement in tourism related businesses. Results of this study have shown that tourism in Murchison Falls Conservation Area has contributed to rural households' livelihoods in the surrounding areas.

The indirect benefits of tourism were realized in the form of local communities' appreciation of the importance of environment to their livelihoods, support to health service delivery, increased expenditure in the community, improvement in transport infrastructure and appreciation of land value. These indirect benefits support income generation for households and local community groups and empower them to improve their livelihoods. As an industry and business, the sustainability of protected and conservation areas-based tourism depends to a great extent on good environmental health as well as wildlife, history of the local area, the natural landscape, amenities and the warmth of the local people.

Environment is natural capital that offers visitors opportunity to experience and observe nature, thus it is vital in the growth of tourism destinations. Local communities that live adjacent to conserved environments such as national parks indirectly depend on them as an alternative source of livelihoods. Results of this study show that local community's appreciation of environment had a coefficient of 0.869 implying that they value the existence of Murchison Falls Conservation Area and its contribution to their livelihoods. Although not specifically examined in this study, Murchison Falls Conservation Area, like other conservation areas in developing countries, experiences anthropogenic challenges such as cultivation and grazing in protected areas, charcoal burning and wildlife poaching by the neighboring local communities. Such activities undermine the existence of conservation and protected areas that promotes tourism and which in turn contribute to the livelihoods of the local people.

These findings are in consonance with the results of a study by UNWTO (2015) on the economic value of wildlife-based tourism which indicated that Africa has experienced considerable increase in poaching and illicit trade of wildlife products due to lack of alternative livelihood opportunities. In such a case, the local communities exploit protected and conservation areas' resources for livelihoods. Equally important is the need to sustain nature conservation and tourism even where land for production is limited and market for local products inadequate. Where local communities are supported to produce and supply tree seedlings as a source of income and for environment conservation, it is important for Murchison Falls Conservation Area managers to supervise the activities especially to ascertain the type of tree species being planted and their suitability for the local areas.

Increased expenditure in the local communities was mentioned as one of the indirect benefits from tourism activities in Murchison Falls Conservation Area. Increase in expenditure in the local communities was attributed to the existence of tourism enterprises that created avenues for consumption of local goods and services. Generally, tourism enterprises create economic opportunities that can be exploited by the local community to enhance their livelihoods. Bailey



and Richardson (2010) and Sharpley (2002) noted that tourism enterprises provide opportunities for backward and forward linkages in local economies because of tourist requirements for products and services. The need to meet the demands of tourists sparks economic linkages through local ownership of tourism businesses, sale of food and beverages, provision of transport, tour guiding and sale of crafts and other souvenirs. Increased expenditures in the local community surrounding Murchison Falls Conservation Area was associated with increase in tourism activities as well as increased demand for land for establishment of tourism related enterprises.

Support to health services was regarded as one of the key contributions of tourism in Murchison Falls Conservation Area to improvement of social services to the surrounding local communities. In addition, it was seen as an avenue for attracting private sector investments to the area. Akama and Kieti (2007), Muganda et al. (2010) and Ray et al. (2012) noted that tourism can maximize socio-economic benefits for the local communities in terms of improved infrastructure, capacity building, better health care and education. These are the benefits that managers of Murchison Falls Conservation Area and Uganda Wildlife Authority should focus on in the foreseeable future for improvement of local communities' livelihoods.

Since 2002 the tourism revenue sharing scheme in Murchison Falls Conservation Area has been promoted as a strategy for improvement of the livelihoods of the surrounding local communities by supporting community-based enterprises as alternative sources of income generation. Results indicate that education received the highest support with a special focus on improving infrastructure for primary and secondary schools. Although low scale, the support to education in the local communities surrounding MFCA was in line with Uganda government's pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education for promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Support to education should also include skills development to empower local community members to effectively participate in tourism related activities and support their livelihoods. Inadequate education and lack of skills probably explains why only 39% of the respondents participated in tourism related activities. Goat-rearing, bee-keeping and honey production were reported as some of the economic income-generating activities linked to tourism which contributed to improved livelihoods of the households. During the focused group discussions and key informant interviews, respondents acknowledged continued increase in the amounts of funds released to the local communities through the tourism revenue sharing scheme that has made it possible for beneficiary households to engage in rearing of improved breeds of goats and bee keeping and honey production. The managers of Murchison Falls Conservation Area need to monitor the impact of the contribution of tourism to local communities' livelihoods through a feedback mechanism that allows systematic collection and analysis of information.

This study has revealed that employment of local people in tourism related enterprises directly contributed to the households' livelihoods. However, the number of people from the local communities employed in the high, mid-range and low end accommodation establishments varied in the following order of magnitude: 79%, 89% and 100%. This clearly shows that the low end establishments have a high potential of providing employment opportunities compared to mid-range and high ends.

Analysis of wages paid to workers employed in accommodation establishment and other related tourism enterprises indicated that the median monthly income was UGX 350,000 (USD 96). This is relatively low wage that is also paid to unskilled workers employed in other sectors of the Ugandan economy. These findings compare well with those of Meyer (2011) who reported that in Mozambique many tourism destinations employ and pay low wages of about USD 100 per month to the relatively unskilled workers engaged mainly in menial jobs. In spite of the low-skilled jobs



and wages, Snyman (2012), Mason (2003), Slocum and Backman (2011) and Mitchell and Ashley (2010) indicated that tourism creates a multiplier effect in the rural communities that is beyond direct payment of wages and salaries and involves indirect employment opportunities that are key to improved livelihoods. Therefore, the nature of employment in tourism is important since it determines the earnings that can translate into better living conditions.

Availability of markets for local products that contribute to households' livelihoods is fundamental especially to local communities living adjacent to protected and conservation areas. According to UNWTO (2002), supplies and sales of locally produced items and services are important for improvement of household livelihoods. The local communities look at the existence of a protected and conservation area with tourism activities as a source of market for their products and services and thus link it to improvement of their livelihoods. This study has revealed that there were markets for local products such as fresh foods, fuel wood, crafts and building materials. In addition, local people provided services such as entertainment and laundry to the accommodation establishments. The incomes from sale of these products helped households to meet basic livelihood needs such as food, clothing, medical care and paying for children's education. The incomes from sale of local products and services rendered to accommodation establishments was USD 192,528 in 2015 which is a clear indication of the monetary benefits obtained from tourism related activities.

This study has also revealed that tourism in Murchison Falls Conservation Area led to growth in community-based tourism enterprises. In several conservation areas, community-based tourism enterprises have been established for social mobilization and community empowerment. In Murchison Falls Conservation Area, the growth from one community-based tourism enterprises community-based tourism enterprise in 1999 to seven in 2015 with the corresponding increase in membership from 35 to 255 is a good indicator of the contribution of tourism to rural households' livelihoods. Similar conservation areas in developing countries have experienced a surge in growth of tourism enterprises and their associated tourism activities. For example, Pasape et al. (2014), UNDP (2011) and Mitchell et al. (2009) observed that community-based tourism enterprises associated with village walks, cultural entertainment, craft making and provision of accommodation indicated tourism growth and its contribution to local communities' livelihoods. Thus, providing an enabling environment for the growth of community-based tourism enterprises will influence the flow of tourists to Murchison Falls Conservation Area and increase the contribution of tourism to rural households' livelihoods.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This results of this study have revealed that tourism contributes to rural communities' livelihoods in many ways such as appreciation of land value, appreciation of the importance environment in the households' livelihoods, increased expenditure in the local community, support to schools and health centres, increased tourism revenue, employment opportunities and growth in the number of community-based tourism enterprises. Based on these results, it is recommended that Murchison Falls Conservation Area managers should invest in vocational training and business skills enhancement for managing community-based tourism enterprises. The surrounding local communities should strive to form solid partnerships with both the public and private sectors so as to engage in businesses that would meet the growing demands of local and foreign tourists. The managers should also support formation of local community-based tourism Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations in the surrounding parishes or sub counties to provide financial resources that can be invested by local people in tourism enterprises to generate incomes and improve their livelihoods. Furthermore, local communities need to be strategic and sustainably produce goods that are demanded by the tourism enterprises in and around Murchison Falls



Conservation Area. The advantage is that farmers will access the market easily while the buyers obtain the goods more cost effectively.

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