

## **Bwindi Ape Conservation Partnership (BACEP) Annual Report 2024**

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This report summarizes the conservation education program conducted in 2024, around the communities surrounding Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP). The program aims to engage the younger generation in conservation efforts through interactive lessons and interschool competitions.

### **Program Implementation**

The program collaborated with four primary schools in the Ruhija sector:

- Ruhija Primary School
- Bitanwa Primary School
- Mburameizi Primary School
- Kanyashogi Primary School

The continuation of activities this was well received from both the schools and community members, facilitating the program implementation (lessons and school competitions). Active participation from headmasters, teachers, and students facilitated the logistics of lessons and competitions, and empowered them in decision-making processes through the activities done during 2024.

We had a change in staff organizing the BACEP activities. Mr. Enos Nyahabwe left the project in June 2024. We hired Ms. Arleta Asingizwe in October 2024. Arleta grew up in Ruhija village and recently completed her Bachelors degree from Makerere University. Other staff members of the Bwindi Gorilla Project assisted with the school competitions as well as the classroom lectures.

We conducted fewer activities in 2024, due to both staff changes as well as scheduling constraints with the schools and local government officials.

### **Activities Conducted**

In 2024, the program delivered four conservation lessons, corresponding to the months of February, March, April, and June. Additionally, three interschool competition sessions were held in March, July, and November. We had scheduled to conduct nine classroom lessons but only did four because to staffing issues with scheduling. Due to scheduling constraints with the schools and local governments, we did not conduct the forest walks or the litter pick up activities with the children in 2024.

**Table 1.** Conservation Lessons and Competition Activities for 2024.

		Month	Lesson
2024	1	FEBRUARY	Conservation Threats and Activities In Bwindi - For Mountain Gorillas
		MARCH	Importance of gorillas and conservation of Bwindi park.
			Competition 1 (Football/Atheletics)
	APRIL	Gorilla tourism	
	2	JUNE	What is an ape and other wildlife in BINP?
		JULY	Competition 2 (Music dance and drama)
		NOVEMBER	Competition 3 (Debate)

### Challenges

The number of lessons conducted in 2024 was reduced compared to 2023 due to several factors:

- Staffing changes within the Bwindi Gorilla Project
- Overlapping community and school events
- Difficulties in coordinating lesson delivery with school schedules

### Partnerships and Support

The project benefited significantly from the support of various stakeholders:

- **Bwindi Gorilla Project members:** Provided logistical support for lessons and competitions.
- **Local government representatives:** Their presence in the villages enhanced community engagement beyond the schools.
- **Religious institutions:** Generously offered the use of their facilities for program activities.
- **Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA):** Had a crucial role as neutral judges in the competitions and provided ongoing support.

### Conservation Lessons

Conservation lessons were provided for the students of primary 5 and 6. A total of four lessons were done during the course of the year (Table 1). Each lesson had a specific subject to be discuss with the children, which started with a theory introduction, different concepts were explained related to conservation and the importance of BINP. This introduction also involved a discussion between the students with an exchange of ideas to assess the students' knowledge. Any misconceptions or misleading information provided by the students was clarified by the instructor. The lessons were supported by Bwindi Gorilla Project members, who were able to deliver firsthand information based on their field experience. Next, the theory is followed by an interactive activity where the students had to apply what was learn during the introduction. Didactic material was

provided to make the activities more visual, hoping to ensure the reception of information by the students (figure 1). It is important to recall the success of the messages given during the lessons, as witnessed during the debate competition where it was evident that the use of the different terms and issues treated during the lessons by the students at the moment of defending their position during the competition.



**Figure 1.** Activity during the Gorilla Social Structure lesson.

### **School Competitions**

A total of three competitions were held. The first one was the sport competition. Despite not being related to a conservation issue, this competition helps with creating the bond between the students of the four different schools. Sports competition was chosen as the first event due the strong engagement by the students, teachers and community. The sport selected for this occasion was football, where each school provided one girls team and one boys team. The competition was held at the Church of Uganda playground. Community and Bwindi Gorilla Project members were selected to act as referees, ensuring neutrality to avoid future difficulties. The winner was Kanyashogi Primary School (figure 2). At the end of the event, each school received a box of exercise books and one box of pens. A total of 120 students participated.



**Figure 2.** Football Competition Winners: Kanyashogi Primary School; holding the prize Reverend John Niwagaba.

The second of the competitions was Dance, Drama and Poem. For this, the schools were asked to suggested the theme, with climate change being the one chosen. For this event , the competition was held in the Ruhija Church of Uganda. Each school had to prepare a play, dance and poem illustrating and explaining with clarity the theme. The judges were UWA rangers to avoid possible bias in choosing the winner. The dance (figure 3) and play were made in the local language, making it easier for the students to deliver the message and at the same time to reach more people from the community. The winner was Kanyashogi Primary School, for second time in row. A total of 140 students participated.

Finally, the last competition was the debate. The motion this time was: “Is the forest conservation the responsibility for the government or individuals?”. The competition was held at Mburameizi Primary School. The participation by the students was very high. As mentioned before, the students used what they learned during the conservation lessons to defend their arguments, with the exception of Ruhija Primary Schools, where their arguments were off the subject and they weren’t able to defend their argument properly. The main subjects mentioned regarding government responsibilities during the discussions were: governments have the authority, resources, and expertise to implement policies, enforce laws, and manage forests sustainably; governments can provide incentives and regulations that encourage individuals and businesses to adopt sustainable practices. On the other hand, regarding individuals responsibilities, the arguments were that individuals must acknowledge their role in contributing to deforestation and habitat destruction through their consumption choices and work towards minimizing their impact, local communities and individuals can work together to protect and manage forests, activities like bush burning, forest encroachment, dumping of rubbish with plastic and polythene bags that are non-degradable and have a great impact should be minimized. Kanyashogi Primary Schools took the trophy this time, for the third time in a row, make them the absolute winner of the year, meaning they keep the trophy for good. The debate worked perfectly as closure for the year, since was possible to see how much of the knowledge delivered during the year activities was actually absorbed by the students. A total of 80 students participated.



**Figure 3.** Traditional dance during the Dance, Drama and Poem competition.

### **Future**

For the upcoming year 2025, the project aims to continue with BACEP activities and to engage the students and motivate them. Since students, teachers, community and other institutions showed great interest and they are willing to collaborate with BACEP activities, the plan is to create more participatory environments for the community, parents and students to reach more people and spread the conservation message widely. Continuing with the school competitions is also important, as this helps in building the sense of community between the schools and create a wider social network between teachers, students and community. Continuing to raise the awareness for gender equity which, during this year a bigger participation by the girls was evident.

### **Recommendations for 2025**

- **Enhanced coordination:** Develop a more robust coordination mechanism with schools to mitigate scheduling conflicts and ensure consistent lesson delivery.
- **Diversification of activities:** Explore incorporating new activities, such as art contests or community clean-ups, to further engage students and broaden the program's reach.
- **Strengthening partnerships:** Continue nurturing existing partnerships and seek new collaborations to enhance program effectiveness and sustainability.

### **Additional Elements:**

- **Visual Aids:** Include photographs of the lessons, competitions, and participating students to enhance the report's visual appeal and showcase the program's impact.
- **Impact Assessment:** Consider incorporating a section on the program's impact, highlighting any observed changes in students' knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors towards conservation.

### **Conclusions**

The conservation education program in 2024 successfully engaged young people in the Ruhija sector with conservation issues. Despite facing some challenges, the program adapted and continued to deliver impactful activities. The strong support from partner organizations and the local community remains crucial to the program's success.

Overall, the conservation education program remains a vital component of conservation efforts in the BINP region. By fostering environmental awareness and responsibility among future generations, the program contributes to the long-term preservation of this invaluable ecosystem.

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