The goal of IGCP is to ensure the conservation of the regional afromontane forest habitats of the mountain gorillas in Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Building Partnerships in the Face of Political and Armed Crisis

Annette Lanjouw

ABSTRACT. The crisis in the Great Lakes region has affected Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 1990, but its roots reach back into the colonial and pre-colonial past. Decades of conflict in the region have affected livelihood strategies of local people and caused enormous population displacements, all of which have had impacts on the natural environment and protected area management. Conservationists working to protect and effectively manage natural resources and protected areas have much to learn from the experience of humanitarian and relief organizations working in conflict situations. In addition, relief and development organizations can learn from some of the approaches applied by conservation agencies. In this paper, lessons from the experience of the humanitarian sector are analyzed and their value for conservation organizations working amidst political and armed crisis is examined. This analysis draws upon the experience of the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) in the DRC and Rwanda from 1991 to date. Recommendations are made for greater collaboration and programmatic integration between the conservation, relief, and development sectors.

KEYWORDS. Civil war, protected areas, humanitarian, relief, development, conservation, mountain gorillas, Great Lakes region, Virunga volcano massif.

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INTRODUCTION

The number of wars and civil conflicts, often referred to as complex emergencies, appears to be increasing globally. In 1995, the United Nations (UN) identified 28 complex humanitarian emergencies affecting some 60 million people around the world (Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development 1995). Many of these wars are being fought in border areas. Throughout the world, international borders were commonly drawn along natural divisions, such as mountain ranges, rivers, and lakes. These same features also provided the biological justification for the establishment of many protected areas along national borders. The convergence of these factors has meant that many recent wars and civil conflicts have been fought near, or in, protected areas.

Wars are also increasingly leading to civilian casualties. During World War I, only approximately 5% of casualties were civilians. In World War II, 50% of the casualties were civilians and currently, the percentage of civilian casualties in wars around the world is 80%, a high proportion of which is made up of women and children (Ingram 1994). In many cases, violence against civilians in war or civil conflict is a deliberate strategy in a conflict, not an accidental side effect. Frequently, the purpose is to kill or expel civilians of another group (Cairns 1997). These phenomena have been witnessed in many of the past decade’s conflicts in Africa. This paper considers how recent complex emergencies in the Great Lakes region of Africa have affected civilian populations, natural resources, and the management of protected areas.

THE GREAT LAKES CRISIS WITHIN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

The Great Lakes region considered in this paper includes eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire), Rwanda, Burundi, western Uganda, and northern Tanzania. This area, mountainous and highly fertile, has been inhabited by numerous groups of people for centuries. Before the colonial era, these groups were subdivided into clans, some of which established political control over others. These divisions were not established along ethnic or racial lines, but according to political and economic relationships (Chretien and Triaud 1999). The different ethnic divisions that existed among the different social groups in the area that is now Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, were taken advantage of during the colonial period for political objectives. These divisions deepened after independence, and as a consequence, numerous “ethnic” clashes have occurred throughout the region in the past 50 years (Lanjouw et al. 2001).

Clashes between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups in Rwanda during the late 1950s led many Tutsi to flee to Uganda and other neighboring countries. These refugees were never fully integrated, and remained as a “diaspora” in their new host countries. Repeated clashes and violence against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1963, 1967, and 1973 resulted in the flight of many more people to neighboring countries. Strains and conflicts between other groups in the DRC also contributed to the tension in the region. The Masisi and southern Kivu regions in the DRC have repeatedly seen clashes between Congolese groups and groups of Rwandan origin (“Banyarwanda”), as well as other ethnic groups.
In Uganda, past problems under the Amin and Obote regimes also led to the movement of many refugees into the DRC, and northwards into Sudan. The wars in Sudan, Somalia, and elsewhere in the region have also affected the border areas with Congo and Uganda, increasing the availability of small arms and light weapons (Boutwell and Klare 2000) and the presence of refugees, militias, and rebel groups in all of these countries. Specifically in the region around the Virunga Volcanoes range (Rwanda, Uganda, and DRC), numerous clashes among different groups have led to population displacement across the borders.

These factors all contributed to an attack, in October 1990, by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), from Uganda into Rwanda. The RPF steadily advanced on the capital, Kigali, and in June 1994, President Habyarimana of Rwanda was killed. This triggered a carefully prepared genocide that killed up to a million people in the space of 100 days. The arrival of the RPF in Kigali in July 1994 caused about two million mainly Hutu people to flee into the DRC, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda (Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda 1996). Also fleeing from Rwanda were the army of the assassinated President Habyarimana and the perpetrators of the genocide – the extremist militia known as the *interahamwe*. The refugees spent more than two years in camps, and during that time the former members of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) and the *interahamwe* regrouped and formed political and military groupings intent on recapturing control of Rwanda (Jongmans 1999). The insurgency that followed greatly disrupted the border regions. It continues today, with incursions by the different militia groups into northwestern Rwanda (African Rights 1998).

At the end of 1996, the dismantling of refugee camps, first in DRC and then in Tanzania, prompted the forced and rapid repatriation of over two million refugees to Rwanda. This was followed by the deterioration of the security situation inside Rwanda. The country had to grapple with the formidable challenges of resettlement, reintegration, and reconciliation in a post-genocide climate, while attacks continued from rebels based in DRC (African Rights 1998). In the DRC, the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL) began a military operation in mid-1996 that took over the country in May 1997. A new rebel force, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), launched an attack on Kinshasa the following year. This war continues, with the RCD subdivided into three groups – RCD, RCD-MLC (Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo), and RCD-ML (Mouvement de la Libération) – and supported by troops from neighboring countries. Throughout this period, Uganda has also been affected by movements of Rwandan refugees, insurgencies from the DRC (as a result of the war in eastern Kivu), and an escalating cross-border conflict with rebel groups based in the DRC and Sudan (Lanjouw et al. 2001).

The conflicts along the borders between the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda have not been resolved (Duly 2000). *Interahamwe* militias still roam in the forests in the DRC and rebel groups based in the DRC still attack Rwanda and Uganda. Clashes within the DRC, between different groups, continue to destabilize the country. The conflict between the Rwandan and Ugandan-backed rebels in the eastern DRC and President Kabila’s forces in the west still ensures that political and military objectives are at the forefront of the government’s agenda. To date, seven African nations and numerous rebel groups are engaged in the conflict in the DRC (International Crisis Group 2000a).
THE HUMAN CONTEXT OF THE GREAT LAKES CRISIS

During civil and armed crises, deliberate strategies to cause famine or disease, or to divert food supplies from certain groups to others, are often implemented. Famine frequently kills more people than violence. The destruction of civil society and the upheaval of populations lead to food shortages. Insecurity can lead to famine by preventing people from working their fields, traveling to markets, or otherwise producing income. Likewise, the restriction of emergency aid and the deviation of humanitarian support by armed groups can exacerbate hunger (Amartya-Sen and Dreze 1989).

The complex emergency in the Great Lakes region, with its numerous conflicts, has taken an enormous toll on the civil population of the region (International Crisis Group 2000b). While much of the assistance to the region has been focused on the refugees and displaced people, the impact of war on the communities that received the refugees may in fact have been far worse. Many of the host communities in the DRC already lived in extreme poverty or at a subsistence level, and the refugee crisis of 1994-96 severely affected the natural resource base upon which they depended. With their normal means of subsistence disrupted or destroyed, both resident and displaced people became more dependent on local natural resources, including those found in protected areas. Displaced people lacked shelter, cooked on open fires, and desperately searched the landscape for food and building materials. Environmental impacts associated with the refugee crisis included heavy deforestation, depletion of fresh water sources, soil erosion, and problems with the disposal of waste and corpses. Consequently, the refugee crisis contributed to food shortages and soaring prices for firewood, as well as the spread of numerous diseases (including cholera, dysentery, and venereal diseases).

The host communities faced additional economic hardships when Rwandan refugees took almost every unskilled job in Goma (DRC) during 1994 (Cairns 1997). With free medical care and food provided to them by humanitarian agencies, refugees were able to accept salaries far below the minimum that was standardly accepted by the local Congolese people. In such situations, differential access to humanitarian assistance can increase the inequities that exist between the people who have, and those who do not have access to resources. The Congolese population is still struggling to recover from the refugee crisis.

THE IMPACT OF WAR ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTED AREAS

The impact of the crisis in Rwanda and the eastern DRC on wildlife, biodiversity, and national parks has been described in numerous reports and articles (Kalpers and Lanjouw 1999; Biswas et al. 1994; Henquin and Blondel 1996). The threats to the environment from the crisis include:

- Destruction or collapse of the economy and loss of opportunity for people to earn a licit livelihood
- Destruction of social structures and institutions, as well as the legal framework, with long-term consequences for the livelihoods of people
• Increased dependence on natural resources for food, building materials, firewood, and charcoal by many different groups of people (local people, displaced people, armies, militias, and rebels)
• Presence of armed combat, landmines, and booby traps in forests and protected areas
• Politicization of all work in and around the conflict zone, including park management activities
• General insecurity due to the movements of armed groups, combat, and banditry, making normal activities unsafe and difficult
• Clearing of forest cover by armed factions for security objectives
• Settlement of displaced persons in natural areas/protected areas
• Temporary settlement of rebels/militias in protected areas
• Conditions of lawlessness that allow the staking of illegal land claims by agricultural populations

These threats to the forests and parks led to a number of direct impacts:

• Loss of natural habitat from agricultural encroachment and deforestation for firewood and construction material (in Virunga National Park [PNVi] 105 km² of park affected by deforestation)
• Illegal harvest of natural resources and poaching of wildlife (this included the killing of 18 mountain gorillas from 1995-98)
• Transmission of human diseases to wildlife from people moving through protected areas and the improper disposal of human and medical waste
• Threat to local people and park staff from armed groups inside the protected areas (this can include researchers and conservationists, as well as tourists)
• Increased casualties of wildlife from mines and encounters with armed groups
• Loss of protected area staff to armed conflict (at least 5 park staff in PNVi have been killed by mines and more than 30 killed as a direct consequence of the war since 1995)
• Disarming of park staff by armed groups; leading to increased vulnerability to armed rebels/militias, as well as ineffective protection of the park from illegal activities
• Increased vulnerability of local people, including resident populations, displaced people, and park staff to attacks and raids by armed groups
• Inability of park staff to work effectively: lack of perceived neutrality, disarmament of park rangers, inability to patrol without accompaniment by soldiers (who patrol for military rather than conservation objectives)
• Loss of tourism revenue for the national economy and park management

Many protected areas have been created without the participation of local communities, and their establishment has often involved eviction and repression of local people. In addition, communities are often prohibited from utilizing the natural resources. As a result, many protected areas have been the focus of historical resentments. These resentments may constitute another significant threat to protected
areas during periods of conflict. When the same protected area harbors armed militias, or functions as a transit corridor for armed groups that raid, ransack, and kill neighboring populations, it can be perceived even more negatively.

The Impact of the Refugee Crisis of 1994-96 on Virunga National Park

Virunga National Park (PNVi), known initially as ‘Albert National Park’ was created in 1925 and is the first national park in Africa. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared PNVi a ‘World Heritage Site’ in 1979, and in December 1994 named it a ‘World Heritage Site in danger’. PNVi comprises a unique range of habitats ranging from high-altitude forests and afro-montane habitats to lowland forests, lava flows of various ages, grassland and savannas, wetlands, and even glaciers (Ruwenzori massif). These ecosystems harbor exceptional biological diversity, including a great number of endemic species of plants and animals. PNVi was initially created to protect the critically endangered mountain gorilla (Gorilla beringei beringei) (Hilton-Taylor, 2000), but it also contains a small population of eastern-lowland gorilla (G. b. graueri). The park comprises a total area of about 7,800 km\(^2\) and is subdivided into a number of sectors. The southern sector covers approximately 1,000 km\(^2\) and was the portion of the park most heavily impacted by the refugee crisis of 1994-96 (Kalpers et al. 1999).

In July 1994, following the war in Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of refugees crossed into the DRC. They settled around the town of Goma, where they found what they were desperately seeking: water, firewood, and food, all provided by Virunga National Park (PNVi) and its immediate surroundings. On one day alone that month, over 500,000 refugees arrived. Within a few days, another 300,000 had joined them. During July, three camps (Kibumba, Mugunga, and Katale) emerged where the refugees had stopped (Kalpers 2001). To accommodate the continued influx of refugees and to decongest some of the initial refugee locations, two additional camps, Lac Vert and Kahindo, were developed in late 1994 and early 1995. In late 1994, the population of the refugees was estimated at around 750,000. All five camps were established to shelter the refugees from Rwanda and were managed by a number of humanitarian agencies under the overall coordination of the UNHCR.

Deforestation – Loss of forest has been the most visible environmental impact of the refugee crisis. During the more than two years that the refugees remained in the Goma area, large tracts of forest were systematically destroyed, especially in the southern sector of PNVi. The deforestation around the camps was driven by the refugee’s need for cooking fuel and construction material, as well as the commercial demand for timber and charcoal in the town of Goma (Languy 1995). This commercial activity was able to flourish due to the state of insecurity in this sector the park.

In less than two years after the arrival of refugees, tree cutting affected 105 km\(^2\) of the park, of which 35 km\(^2\) were completely deforested. The area affected by various degrees of cutting is equivalent to a clear-felled area of 63 km\(^2\) (Henquin and Blondel 1997). Table 1 distinguishes the deforestation estimates associated with each of the refugee camps. Table 2 describes the evolution of deforestation over the 2 years it was
evaluated (Henquin et al. 1997). Most of the deforestation took place in the more recent lava plains (1,500-1,800 m in altitude), thus having comparatively little effect on the mature, and more biologically diverse forests on the Virunga Volcanoes (1,800-3,500 m in altitude). However, some mature forest was affected, especially near the Kibumba camp, where there was irreversible damage to the montane Podocarpus milanjianus forests.

The forests closest to the Kibumba camp (which held 190,000 refugees) suffered severe and extensive deforestation during the first year. The prominent ecological value of these forests motivated considerable efforts to protect this sector of the park during the second year. Further damage was practically halted in 1996. In the zone of the Mugunga and Lac Vert camps, where some 200,000 refugees were located, extensive areas were stripped of vegetation. In the other camps, these activities were more effectively controlled, and deforestation gradually decreased.

The provision of fuel wood to refugees depleted the tree plantations in the area, thereby expending the reserves of wood previously available for use by the local population. The region was already experiencing a shortage of fuel wood, and the arrival of the refugees put an unbearable strain on the region’s ability to provide sufficient supplies. Most importantly, this increased pressure on the forests and jeopardized the long-term sustainability of the local population’s energy resources.

Commercial bamboo collection and poaching – Aside from the deforestation associated with fuel wood and timber cutting, a variety of other commercial and subsistence activities caused direct environmental impacts in PNVi. Refugees, primarily from the Kibumba camp, were involved in commercial enterprises that required bamboo collected from inside the park. The commercial demand for bamboo caused extensive damage to the limited bamboo zone inside the park, where it is an important seasonal food source for a number of different species of wildlife. Refugees were also heavily involved in poaching, primarily for food. They used traditional snares as well as the firearms smuggled into the camps. Poaching quickly became a commercial activity and a significant threat to wildlife populations. The movement of tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees through the forest also caused a great deal of damage and disturbance to the forest. The damage was especially intense when the refugees brought along their herds of livestock.

Disease transmission and health threats to wildlife – The regular movement of insurgents through the park and the presence of refugees greatly intensified the risk of disease transmission to wildlife. Much of the wildlife, especially the primates, is very susceptible to human diseases. The diseases that can be transmitted from humans to gorillas include a number of respiratory diseases (e.g. measles, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and ‘flu’), as well as diseases that can be contracted via the fecal-oral route (e.g. shigellosis, hepatitis, herpes, scabies, intestinal worms, and polio) (Homsy 1999).

Another health threat, posed to the wild ungulate populations (Syncerus caffer, Cephalophus spp. and Tragelaphus spp.) in PNVi-south was the periodic presence and passage of thousands of cows, goats, and sheep. In addition, some of the organizations working in the medical sector disposed infectious materials inside the national park. This problem was particularly severe during the first year of refugee
operations. These materials included used syringes, human waste, bloodstained materials, and other medical refuse.

It is impossible to assess the actual impacts of human movements, the presence of livestock, or the disposal of medical waste on the overall health status of mountain gorillas. Total access to the gorilla habitat is not yet guaranteed. Therefore, these impacts can only be measured over time and as “potential” threats.

The Threat of Resettlement in Rwanda’s Volcano National Park, 1996-2000

After the Rwandan Patriotic Front stopped the genocide and gained power in Rwanda in August 1994, it was estimated that approximately 50% of the Rwandan population was displaced or settled in only a temporary fashion. In early 1996, a portion of Rwanda’s Volcano National Park (PNV), was considered as a site for the resettlement of refugees and displaced people. A commission of the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Social Integration (MINIREISO) officially listed PNV as one of several proposed places for the reintegration of refugees and displaced people. The Arusha Accords, signed in 1993, had excluded PNV from the list of potential zones for the resettlement of old caseload refugees and other people without land. However, pressure to open the park to settlement continued. Since 1995, the population living adjacent to the PNV has made numerous attempts to occupy and settle on lands within the park. The authorities maintained a firm position with respect to protecting the park boundaries. The park boundaries have not always been so steadfastly defended, and over the years, much parkland has been lost.

PNV lost approximately 55% of its area between 1958 and 1979, primarily to satisfy the local population’s need for land. The ecological value of the park’s forests has suffered. The park has lost most of the lower levels of forest vegetation, which form a critical resource for a number of wildlife species, including the mountain gorilla. Scientific data show that for the Virunga Volcano range, poaching (primarily in the DRC) and the conversion of a large proportion of the park into agricultural land in Rwanda in the 1960s led to a 60% decrease in the gorilla population (Weber and Vedder 1983). Reductions to PNV have limited the park to those portions that are on steep slopes of more than 15-20%. Any agricultural exploitation of this forest would inexorably lead to serious erosion of the soils.

Resettlement of displaced people has had deleterious effects on other protected lands in the region, including Rwanda’s Akagera National Park (PNA) and its associated Mutara Hunting Reserve, where increased human pressures resulted in the loss of almost two thirds of these protected areas in 1998. The park, with its extensive wetlands and humid zones, has been reduced to a small area. It is still threatened by resettlement and urbanization, despite efforts by the international community (particularly the German Technical Agency for Cooperation - GTZ and the European Union- EU) to prevent its destruction (Gombe 1995).

In early February 2000, the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) learned of a plan to resettle war refugees within Volcano National Park. The Rwandan government had decided to move approximately 500 of the 8,000 families
from a camp of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Forest Reserve of Gishwati to PNV. Approximately 627 ha of PNV (approximately 5% of the park) were to be degazetted and given to the families. After numerous missions by the Minister of Lands, Resettlement, and Environment Protection (MINITERE) and park staff, the problem was brought to the attention of the President and Vice President of Rwanda. The government was presented with concerns regarding the long-term impacts of the planned resettlement on the livelihood of the local population. Having considered the concerns for the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences, the Rwandan government clearly indicated that the park should remain intact, and that resettlement should take place elsewhere. Although the park is not yet out of danger, the government’s desire to protect the park is clear.

PNV has a significant ecological function in Rwanda and the broader region, especially in terms of protecting water catchment and soil stability. It also plays an important role in the economy. For the population of Rwanda, tourism is one of the economic alternatives to agriculture, and the prime tourist attraction is the mountain gorilla. The mountain gorilla also brings a great deal of international attention to the country, and its conservation is therefore a credit to Rwanda in the eyes of the world. In 1989, the gorillas drew more than 7,000 visitors to the country, and thus provided the Rwandan Office for Tourism and National Parks (ORTPN) with more than US$1 million in that year alone. Tourism grew slowly but steadily during the post-genocide period from 1995 to 1997, with associated revenues approaching pre-war levels. Then, in 1997, insecurity forced the park to close. It was reopened in 1999, and gorilla tourism continues to hold considerable potential for the development of both the national and regional economies.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations Working in areas of armed Conflict

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been much analyzed over the past 20 years. They are responsible for delivering increasing amounts of development and humanitarian/relief assistance. Their ability to deliver this assistance and to function in a politically impartial manner has been debated in light of accusations that they have often had a negative impact on some communities. A number of problems have led to a re-evaluation of the role and approach of NGOs in conflict situations. These problems include competition between NGOs over “turf” and resources, a lack of coordination between organizations, and allowing emergency assistance to be deviated by warring factions, thus enabling militias to rearm, regroup, and reinforce themselves, while supported by “humanitarian assistance”.

In just four weeks during August-September 1994, 180 humanitarian and relief NGOs flooded into Rwanda. Over the next two years, 250 NGOs were operating in Goma (DRC). These two cases form perhaps the most celebrated examples of the NGO “circus” and are frequently cited to demonstrate the need for coordination, collaboration, and strategic alliances. These criticisms most directly apply to the experience of humanitarian organizations, including NGOs, as well as the United Nations and other multilateral organizations. However, these lessons could be apt for
environmental and development organizations. They must be examined and utilized to improve operations within the environmental sector.

Lessons Learned from Humanitarian and Development Organizations Operating in Conflict Zones

A review of literature documenting experiences of NGOs and bilateral and multi-lateral organizations working in complex emergencies and conflict zones has identified a number of important lessons for the conservation, humanitarian, and relief sectors (Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development 1995; Bennett and Kayetisiblewitt 1996; International Crisis Group 1996). These lessons should guide the policies and strategies of conservation organizations operating during times of crisis. Some of the key lessons, which can help strengthen conservation programs in conflict situations, include:

- The distinctions between relief, rehabilitation, and development are not clear and often inappropriate for local conditions and communities
- An integrated approach, forging links between humanitarian, developmental, environmental, political, and military sectors, is necessary. This includes the relationships between local and external actors, such as state agencies, external organizations, and civil society institutions
- A sustainable strategy for assistance should include investments in local people and institutions
- Strategies for building peace should bring together the interests of warring parties
- Organizational and programmatic flexibility allows groups to respond to evolving situations
- External or technical agencies must be perceived as neutral parties
- Organizations (NGOs as well as governmental agencies and state institutions) must coordinate their efforts

For all of these points, the experience of International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) has shown that building partnerships is an approach that strengthens a program’s ability to remain operational and achieve strategic objectives in times of conflict. Since 1991, IGCP, a coalition of the African Wildlife Foundation, Fauna and Flora International and World Wide Fund for Nature, has been working in Rwanda, the DRC, and Uganda (Figure 1). The program works with the protected area authorities of these countries on four different levels:

1. Strengthening the capacity of protected area authorities to manage afro-montane forests
2. Improving collaboration between Rwanda, the DRC, and Uganda on the conservation of their shared ecosystem
3. Increasing support for conservation among various interest groups
4. Promoting improvements to and respect for policy and legislation related to the conservation of the region’s afro-montane forests.

During the Great Lakes Crisis, IGCP provided emergency technical and financial support to the protected area authorities in the region. The objective was to help them face the enormous challenges that suddenly confronted them and to establish
mechanisms for the mitigation of and recovery from impacts of the crises. From 1994 to 1998, IGCP implemented a program for the rehabilitation of the Parc National des Virunga (Virunga National Park) in the DRC and the Parc National des Volcans (Volcano National Park) in Rwanda. Funding support came from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other donors.

The distinctions between relief, rehabilitation, and development are not clear – Many organizations operate during and after times of crisis. They are typically characterized as relief, rehabilitation, or development. However, these services are delivered along a continuum, and the distinctions between the different phases are often very artificial. The distinctions can be unclear and are often not appropriate for communities whose strategies for survival face long-term crises. A concentration on short-term objectives (typically relief and rehabilitation) can exacerbate development problems over the long term. It is necessary to provide emergency support in a manner that enables communities to achieve long-term development objectives. For example, enduring problems like those caused by the provision of food and firewood to the refugees in the camps in the DRC from 1994 to 1996 should be avoided. Hastily conceived solutions for the resettlement of displaced people have led to environmental degradation and the loss of long-term agricultural potential for many communities.

From 1996 to 1998, the IGCP worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to rehabilitate the southern sector of Virunga National Park in the DRC. The rehabilitation program for Virunga National Park had a strong development component. This included the design of an ecotourism strategy for the park, and more importantly, the initiation of a ranger-based monitoring program that is still being used. Here again, there was a continuum, from the provision of emergency assistance to the strategic strengthening of protected area management and its capacity to cope with future crises.

The park required rehabilitation partly due to the failure of relief organizations to evaluate adequately the long-term environmental impact of the refugees, or the importance of the environment to local people. Assistance provided during the refugee crisis was focused exclusively on the provision of relief (Languy 1995). The cost of measures to prevent environmental impacts would have been less than that of the attempted rehabilitation of degraded areas. Moreover, much of the environmental damage was permanent. One result of UNHCR’s experiences in the eastern DRC was its design of environmental guidelines for refugee operations (UNHCR 1996). These guidelines emphasize the value of investing in environmental protection, given that restoration of extensively damaged areas is costly and often impossible.

The importance of an integrated approach – During times of crisis, efforts to provide support must link emergency, development, and environmental objectives. Humanitarian assistance must integrate concerns for sustainable development and environmental protection. Emergency assistance should take into consideration the longer-term needs of people, and the impact that relief efforts will have on host communities and their environment. During times of conflict, conservation organizations must also situate their objectives in the larger context of human needs as well as political and military interests. A holistic approach that addresses a whole range of
issues is necessary. The focus on conservation objectives in conflict situations is frequently criticized for ignoring human needs and “putting wildlife before people”. Although these criticisms are shortsighted, it is important to consider the dependence of local populations on natural resources, and to link human development and environmental objectives.

The arguments made against the previously mentioned plan to resettle refugees in PNV highlighted the human development aspects of protected area conservation. These include the ecological benefits derived by local farmers and the fundamental role of mountain gorilla tourism in the local, regional, and national economies. These arguments are based on scientific data, experience working with local people around the PNV, and strong institutional relationships with the Rwandan protected area authorities and ministries responsible for the environment and tourism. As discussed earlier, it was because of these arguments that the government revoked its earlier decision to settle people in the park and reconfirmed its commitment to maintaining the integrity of the protected area.

**A sustainable strategy for assistance should include investments in local people and institutions** – For many people, economic and environmental crises are far too common. The humanitarian assistance they received from relief organizations may become another finite and perhaps ephemeral resource in an ongoing struggle for survival. In the DRC, the challenges faced by Congolese people during the Mobutu era vary only in degree to the difficulties faced in the conflict today. The emergency support provided to populations during recent periods of crisis has not improved people’s livelihood strategies or the likelihood that these populations will emerge from the crisis more capable of surviving future crises. Assistance should support local institutions, ensure local participation, and strengthen their ability to cope with emergencies.

Certainly one of the most critical impacts of war and insecurity observed in the Great Lakes region was the institutional collapse of the protected area authorities. On the whole, they were unable to cope with repeated crisis situations. This was partly due to the weakness of institutions before the crisis. Indeed, protected area authorities will be more likely to face emergencies if they are strong at the onset of the crisis. An authority’s ability to cope becomes even more critical when its external partners must leave the area for security reasons, and it is left to fend for itself.

It has been shown that programs that invest in the development of organizational capacity and the training generally have greater long-term impact during times of conflict (Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development 1995). Conservation programs should therefore focus on capacity building, both during conflict and in peacetime. Far too often, conservation projects are designed in such a way that they substitute themselves for the official institutions in charge of protected areas. This is typical of short-term projects that concentrate on the immediate achievements rather than on the longer-term capacity.

**Building peace by finding and emphasizing the common interests of warring parties** – Organizations working on conflict resolution and reconciliation have recognized the importance of identifying common interests between warring parties (Bennett et al. 1996). Conservation can provide an important focus for collaborative processes that
build trust and engender peace. However, the potential of conservation to contribute to peace has rarely been thoroughly explored. In conflictive areas where environmental protection is so closely linked with human livelihoods and poverty alleviation, it is critical that this potential be developed.

The Virunga region, where there have been repeated conflicts during the past decade, provides a promising case. There, three countries (DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda) share the habitat of the mountain gorilla. Implementing a regional approach to conservation is therefore critical (Lanjouw et al. 2001). The governments and park authorities of these countries now recognize the need to work together to ensure the mountain gorillas are protected in the wild (Kalpers and Lanjouw 1997). The park authorities of the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda are working towards building a framework for regional collaboration and advancing plans for transfrontier protected area, or ‘peace park’. In the context of the regional crisis, the process of pursuing this goal is as important as its ultimate achievement. By building a framework and process for regional collaboration, conservationists and the development and relief sectors are contributing to the fragile peace process. These efforts reemphasize the observation that peace and reconciliation are not goals, but rather processes (ECCP, IFOR, and CISWT 1999).

The need for organizational and programmatic flexibility – During times of conflict and insecurity, when many planned activities become impossible to implement, programmatic flexibility is extremely important. It can enable organizations to address new challenges where they arise and as they become priorities. To gain greater programmatic flexibility, organizations must step away from the application of a rigid blueprint strategy for their operations. They must instead develop adaptive programs that respond to priority needs and expectations of partners, stakeholders, and beneficiaries as well as their own interests. Narrowly focused programs often cannot effectively respond to crisis.

During the periods of greatest insecurity, IGCP has worked with the ICCN (in the DRC) and the ORTPN (in Rwanda) to improve training and institutional capacity. The goal has been to strengthen the resilience of projects and programs so that conservation capacity can be maintained during conflict. These priorities emerged as the crisis inflicted heavy losses on protected area personnel and exposed a lack of institutional capacity in the region’s protect area authorities. It is also worthwhile to remember that investment in infrastructure or equipment can be destroyed or plundered in a very short time.

In conflict-affected areas, programs can become irrelevant or even inappropriate from one moment to the next. By emphasizing self-reliance and joint planning with the beneficiary and partner organizations, conservation programs can quickly adapt to the changing needs and respond to new priority areas. Again, conservation organizations can learn from the experience of the relief sector. The classic approach of most conservation programs is to develop strategies that do not include significant contingency plans or consider alternative scenarios. Such programmatic approaches are based on the assumption that the situation observed at the design stage of the project will remain stable for the duration of the project. The conservation sector lacks
the “relief approach” that relies more on operating guidelines, contingency analysis, and constant changes in tactics.

The importance of neutrality or impartiality – In areas of conflict, the perceived neutrality or impartiality of the NGOs working on the ground and the government institutions managing protected areas can never be taken for granted. The collaboration of conservation organizations with certain communities near protected areas or government institutions (national ministries and park authorities) can be perceived as evidence of impartiality. This can prove dangerous for conservationists in the field. Moreover, NGOs and foreigners are often used as pawns to further the interests of one side or another. To operate effectively in the DRC, it is important for all the relevant authorities to understand conservation organizations and work collaboratively with them.

For the ICCN staff on the ground, the situation is even more difficult. The DRC is effectively divided into sections, each under the control of a different government or rebel authority. The staff of parks located inside rebel-held parts of the country is still answerable to its headquarters in government-controlled areas. Yet any verbal or written report given either to the rebel-government or the centralized government can be perceived as a demonstration of support to that side. Park staff that travel between the headquarters in government controlled territory to field sites under rebel control may be considered to be untrustworthy and risk imprisonment. To operate under a purely technical mandate in these circumstances is extremely difficult, and the personal risk taken in order to continue operating is enormous. Efforts are being made to contact the Environmental Law Commission in Bonn and other legal agencies to investigate the potential of defining a purely neutral mandate, and legally defining and applying “neutral status” to people working for protected area authorities. However, the usefulness of this status for people on the ground would still rely on the willingness of warring parties to recognize it.

The need for coordinated approaches and collaboration between organizations – NGOs working in the conservation, development, and humanitarian/relief sectors have many complementary activities, but a lack strategic alliances and coordination between sectors frequently limits their potential effectiveness. This is due in part to competition between groups for funding, geographic “turf”, and programmatic niches. Although these concerns are legitimate, the perceived threats posed by cross-sector coordination are not necessarily real.

However, examples of effective coordination and collaboration between organizations do exist. In 1999, the ICCN and eight international conservation and development organizations worked together to develop a program for delivering emergency assistance to “World Heritage Sites in Danger in Eastern DRC”. The program involves joint planning, harmonized management approaches, and the implementation of joint activities between all five sites. UNESCO will manage the program, with funds provided by United Nations Fund (UNF) as well as financial

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contributions from each of the eight international organizations involved in the implementation of the program.

Links between conservation organizations and relief organizations, such as the collaboration between IGCP and the UNHCR in the rehabilitation of PNVi, are necessary in order to ensure that both long and short-term objectives are accomplished. This collaboration has continued over the years, and in 1997, IGCP was invited by the UNHCR to assist in the development of the UNHCR Environmental Guidelines discussed earlier (UNHCR 1996, 1998). In 1999, IGCP also provided training for UNHCR technical staff in Africa on environmental management during refugee operations. This training emphasized the importance of associating local communities with relief activities. These examples demonstrate the potential for bridging the divide between humanitarian/relief objectives and conservation objectives.

It is important to emphasize, however, that coordination is only effective when each party is willing to adapt their programs to a common approach. Accordingly, coordination between the eight organizations working under the UNESCO/UNF project in the DRC has required considerable adaptations to the operations on the ground. On the other hand, the six environmental coordinators that were based in Goma during the refugee crisis of 1994-96 had few, if any, operations on the ground and showed little willingness to fall under the control of any one organization. This did not bring about the intended results of more effective environmental programming.

Continued effective coordination between different organizations working towards conservation objectives can only strengthen the impact of the programs. Coordinated efforts must be focused on practical objectives and results. They should identify the needs on the ground, and implement specific cooperative activities to meet those needs. It is important that the overall approach is holistic and responsive to the variety of challenges faced by natural areas and local communities.

Funding for international development is declining worldwide, while funding for emergency and humanitarian assistance is increasing. At the same time, there is a general decline in public donations to northern NGOs. Given these trends, it is critical for conservation organizations to coordinate their efforts and avoid territoriality and competition for funds. In addition, the politicization of conservation issues has had an enormously negative impact on the credibility of conservation organizations and their message. Organizations must work together and avoid manipulating information to further personal or individual objectives. The focus must remain on achieving conservation objectives for the benefit of wildlife, culture, and people over the long term.
REFERENCES

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