Chapter 7

The Integration of Traditional Religious Beliefs in the Conservation of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, Uganda: Processes, and Lessons Learned*†

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1 Background

National parks in rural Africa are said to face various problems such as encroachment (by human settlement and agriculture) and loss of biodiversity as a result of illegal access and indiscriminate extraction of resources therein by the neighbouring community (Brockington 2002). Attempts by biodiversity conservationists, especially the national park staff, to address the problems have been ineffective and have resulted in poor relations with the local people living in nearby villages. Conflicts regarding overuse of national park resources are common in many national parks in Africa (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2010). To address these poor relationships and conflicts in national parks, a plethora of studies, especially from anthropologists and social scientists, have argued for the integration of local people's interests into the management of national parks (Igoe 2002).

One of the available options to consider local people's interests in the management of national parks is a traditional religious belief system comprising beliefs, knowledge, and practices. However, studies that advocate for this consideration have mainly been theoretical, relying on and drawing from historical accounts of lifestyles of people in traditional societies but lacking practical demonstrations and interventions.

In Uganda, attempts were made beginning in 2008 to integrate local people's traditional religious beliefs, knowledge, and practices in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park under the Culture, Values and Conservation Project (CVCP) implemented jointly by the Uganda Wildlife Authority and Fauna and Flora International. This was a short-term project aimed at demonstrating how the integration of beliefs, knowledge, and practices in park management could achieve better relations between the local people and the park staff. It was assumed that improved relations could translate into reduced incidents of illegal access and resource use. The lifespan of the project ended in 2012 but left several spin-off activities on conservation and the traditional religious beliefs of the local

communities which were taken over by the Universal Institute of Research and Innovations in 2014.

Resulting from the call for expressions of interest as part of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), a case study based on the CVCP and the spin-off activities has been presented in this chapter. The intention of CREID is to provide research evidence and deliver practical programmes which aim to redress the impact of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, tackle poverty and exclusion, and promote people's wellbeing and empowerment. Based on this intention, in this case study, we aim to answer the following questions:

1 What are the traditional religious beliefs, their meaning and manifestation among the local communities in the Rwenzori Mountains?
2 Why were the traditional religious beliefs of the communities in and around the Rwenzori Mountains neglected and not integrated at inception during the creation of the national park?
3 How were the traditional religious beliefs integrated into the conservation and management of the park?
4 What were the successes and failures of the project in the integration of religious beliefs?
5 What are the key lessons of the project worth noting, and what lessons can be utilised for the African rural context or where similar situations prevail?

This case study is exciting in part because it is based on the Rwenzori Mountains which, by their location along the equator, and with the heat of the sun, surprisingly have glaciers. However, glaciers are already being affected by global warming and the local people are affected by the impacts associated with climate change. Based on their traditional religious beliefs, the local people had devised a way of mitigating the impacts. However, the creation of the national park has hindered people's expression of these beliefs, and it has affected the perception of the mountains and its conservation. This case study has a strong appeal in that it addresses the recognition of the importance of religious beliefs in relation to conservation and addressing climate change. This is not only a local and national issue but also a global challenge.

2 Overview of the body of literature underpinning the case study

It has been extensively documented that the conservation of national parks must be supported by local communities neighbouring those parks if such efforts are to succeed (Abrams *et al.* 2009). In cases where local people support parks, there is success and in cases where they do not support parks, there is failure (Muhumuza and Balkwill 2013). Various studies have been conducted in search of what motivates local people to support biodiversity conservation. Most of these studies link local people's support of conservation to benefits that they obtain from parks (Malleson 2000; Kasparek 2008). This means that people who do not benefit from the conservation of biodiversity in national parks are less likely to support the conservation of biodiversity in those parks. Usually, they regard them as anathema to their welfare.

2.1 Extrinsic motivation for local people's conservation practices

Integrated conservation and development projects in and around national parks are planned and implemented based on the assumption that if local people derive economic benefits from parks, they will support the conservation of biodiversity in parks (Kasparek 2008). For instance, 'tourism revenue-sharing' schemes and alternative livelihood projects that are often implemented in communities near national parks aim at ensuring that local people benefit from the establishment of national parks and hence support biodiversity conservation in those parks.

Studies that have evaluated community-based conservation projects implemented in communities near national parks have found that it is not automatic that people will be motivated to conserve biodiversity in national parks even if they are given incentives in compensation for their limited access to the park (Malleson 2000). In some cases, even when benefits that people receive as compensation for limited access to park resources change people's attitude towards the park (Holmern *et al*. 2002), the attitude may not lead to a change of behaviour towards pro-conservation practices. In the Rwenzori Mountains, for instance, despite the implementation of various strategies to motivate people to support the conservation of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, local people still obtained resources in the park and conducted activities that were considered illegal by the park management (Tumusiime, Vedeld and Gombya-Ssembajjwe 2011). This calls for further exploration of the factors underlying illegal access to the national park for resources.

Some of these factors, such as the need for resources for survival and livelihood (including commercial trade) and claiming ownership of the protected area and the resources therein, are more obvious because they emanate from within the external environment of the individual. These are commonly targeted in interventions that attempt to address illegal access to resources and in facilitating sustainable utilisation (Neumann 1998).

2.2 The role of traditional religious beliefs in conservation

Apart from the extrinsic factors that motivate conservation practices, there are, however, other subtle factors emanating from an individual's mindset, intrinsic norms, and values of the community in which the individual lives that may also influence illegal access to resources of protected areas. Resource use among traditional communities in rural Africa is, for instance, influenced by traditional religious beliefs that are subtle in nature and lie in the individual's mindset but which may only be expressed occasionally through religious rituals (Christie 1991).

Analysis of the literature on traditional or indigenous approaches to biodiversity conservation (described in Agrawal 1995) revealed a variety of traditional approaches that may have been used in the sustainable utilisation of natural resources in the past. This study concludes that based on these approaches, the protection of biodiversity and habitats could have been coincidentally achieved through a religious belief system comprising customary rules, traditional beliefs, and traditional practices established through experiential indigenous knowledge.

Traditional cultures of people in rural Africa are said to have developed based on the environmental resources and resource availability which

shape the evolution of traditional religious practices (*ibid.*). Given the limited success of current community-based conservation strategies, case studies on how traditional religious beliefs and practices influence resource use and management is very important. From such case studies, scholars could draw useful lessons to enhance their understanding of the reasons for local people's continued illegal access to park resources which could serve as a basis for proposing sustainable ways of utilising the resources.

2.3 Attempts to integrate traditional religious beliefs in conservation

The view that indigenous people in traditional communities deliberately sustained biodiversity, and therefore the traditional religious beliefs and the associated methods they used should be integrated into current conservation approaches, has been regarded as a contentious issue in the contemporary literature. There is substantial literature about whether or not people in African traditional communities conserved biodiversity based on their traditional religious beliefs (for instance, Cinner 2007; Cohn 1988; Saj, Mather and Sicotte 2006). The available literature provides contrasting points of view about traditional biodiversity conservation, suggesting that people in traditional communities did not have the motive and restraint over resource use to qualify as conservationists (Alvard 1993, 1994; Winterhalder *et al.* 1988).

Publications about 'the ecologically noble savage' (Hames 2007; Posey 1985) provide important debates about the pros and cons of recognising and attempting to integrate traditional religious beliefs in modern conservation strategies. These debates have triggered a need to have more evidence to provide a basis for the recognition and inclusion of these strategies in current biodiversity conservation schemes (Beltrán 2000; Brook and McLachlan 2008; Byarugaba 2010).

Scientific evidence generated through practical case studies is needed due to the close association of traditional biodiversity conservation strategies to folklore which, according to science, is not empirical but merely based on religious beliefs. Folklore is defined as oral history, jokes, legends, taboos, music, proverbs, customs, and popular beliefs that are the traditions of a given culture and which have been passed from one generation to another through casual imitation or oral transmission (Medin and Atran 1999). Folklore constitutes a lot of information gathered through lived experiences with the natural world (Saikia 2008). Traditional communities hold in folklore, perceptions and ideas regarding plant and animal species (*ibid.*). Folklore could offer important sources of information that are part of a religious belief system that could potentially solve a number of problems associated with the conservation of biodiversity.

Although there are various subtypes of folklore that can be distinguished into traditional religious beliefs, knowledge, and practices (Ceríaco *et al.* 2011), most studies on the role of folklore in biodiversity conservation have mainly investigated traditional ecological knowledge (Berkes 2008; Byarugaba 2010; Cohn 1988; Ramstad *et al.* 2007; Saj *et al.* 2006). Detailed descriptive studies about traditional beliefs, knowledge, and practices and how they are linked to biodiversity conservation are few and their wider application in biodiversity conservation remains elusive. This, therefore, necessitates a need for a reference case study.

Previous and current conservation strategies (Campbell 2000) indicate that conservationists have shown no interest in studies that attempt to demonstrate the relationship between traditional religious beliefs, and biodiversity conservation (Ceríaco *et al.* 2011). In part, this is due to continued inertia in favour of scientific practices that follow the scientific method of inquiry and the need to describe traditional religious beliefs in scientific terms. The epistemology of traditional religious beliefs is constructed on non-scientific grounds and hence conservationists think that this limits their applicability in conservation science (Byarugaba 2010). The non-scientific basis of traditional religious beliefs makes it difficult to assess their role in biodiversity conservation. Also, the difficulty of accessing information about traditional religious beliefs because it is rarely written down (Huntington 2000) has limited its integration into current biodiversity conservation strategies. Also, social and cultural changes in African communities as they adopt modern lifestyles, and conversion to popular religious practices make it difficult to locate traditional religious beliefs linked to biodiversity conservation which could serve as practical examples.

The emphasis of formal scientific studies as a basis of creating, expanding, and developing modern protected areas has resulted in the disregard of traditional aspects of biodiversity conservation. Local people's traditional religious beliefs are not even considered in the process of proposing and implementing various conservation strategies, even when these conservation decisions directly affect their livelihood, survival, and expression of these beliefs (Darkoh 2009). For example, in the International Union for Conservation of Nature best practice guidelines on indigenous and traditional peoples and protected areas, Wild and McLeod (2008) found that in ten out of 11 case studies, local communities had not been consulted before the creation of the protected areas. The low level of consultation with local communities indicates an exclusionary biodiversity conservation strategy whereby local people have been regarded as detrimental to conservation and in many cases (Muhumuza and Balkwill 2013) removed from protected areas at significant economic and social cost.

Despite the difficulty associated with recognising and integrating traditional religious beliefs in biodiversity conservation, they are known to influence resource use and management in rural African communities where they are upheld (Berkes, Colding and Folke 2000). The study of traditional religious beliefs, therefore, becomes of considerable interest to conservation scientists, especially when made from local people's perspective (Davis and Wagner 2003). For instance, local people in Indian communities expressed traditional religious beliefs about ecological aspects of their environment when investigated from a traditional and cultural perspective, rather than from a formal schooling and education perspective (Bhagwat and Rutte 2006).

Such examples have in the last 30 years (beginning in early 1980) influenced the evolution of discourses in biodiversity conservation strategies that hinge on more local people-inclusive strategies such as integrated conservation and development, and community education programmes. However, these strategies have also neither entirely succeeded in interesting local people to support biodiversity conservation in protected areas nor

have they led to a reduction in biodiversity loss in and outside protected areas (Campbell 2000). With these strategies failing, there is a demand for other ways of involving the local people in the conservation of national parks to be sought. There is an urgent need to devise other strategies or improve the existing ones so as to create interest and build support among the local community to support conservation objectives associated with national parks. Therefore, the role of local people's traditional religious beliefs in conservation remains an open area for study and documentation.

2.4 Key considerations in the study and documentation of synergies between traditional knowledge and science

During the last decades, we have seen that more non-indigenous scholars are working with indigenous people and local communities (IPLC), and embracing collaborative and participative research approaches. Scientists from different disciplines are engaged with policymakers and IPLC to face complex environmental issues. However, these processes are not without challenges. Difficulties in reconciling worldviews, goals, methodologies, and rigid funding and research schemes ended up encapsulating fragments of indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) in Western paradigms (Muller 2012). Within this scope, it occurred that scientists and practitioners using their positional superiority, in the name of modernity and development, usurped and co-opted ILK (Smith 2012; Briggs 2013).

A decolonising turn is emerging to counteract the effects of the Western paradigm, not only concerning ILK but also with other knowledge systems. This is a new way of doing science that first recognises the past and present dominant ontologies but is also capable of imagining the future without its dominance. It is a new paradigm of situated knowledge that embraces complexity, uncertainty, conflict, power dynamics, and divergence (Porter 2010) that promotes the revitalisation of ILK, placing different knowledge systems at the same level (Tapia 2016), and building up a pluriverse of knowledge (Grosfoguel 2012). In particular, the pluralistic nature of community-based biodiversity conservation that involves science, politics, cultural beliefs, economics, and behavioural responses requires a multifaceted knowledge source. However, we see that in planning theories and practice, indigenous people and local communities have been voiceless and excluded. Both theory and practice have been failing in the reconciliation of ontological and epistemological differences between indigenous and non-indigenous forms of understanding the land (Barry and Porter 2012). This situation has been true in the Ugandan context of planning national park management since the early 1950s when the first national park was created.

Another essential aspect is the notion of knowledge and its relationship with reality. In contrast to Western paradigms, where abstract knowledge is very important to represent reality, according to the rationale of the Bamba and Bakonjo peoples, the reality lies within the present, it is experiential, and could be (re)created in a symbolic and ceremonial (re)presentation of it. The symbol is a sacred presentation of reality. The best way to understand this reality is not the concept(s) expressed with words, but rather the reality itself, which is alive in constant motion with the whole universe. Knowledge is a collective subconscious transmitted from one generation to another

orally and by actions (know-how), through narratives, stories, rituals, cults, and customs. This know-how is not the result of an intellectual effort but the result of an empirical activity that can manifest in interdisciplinary approaches in pursuit of sustainable development projects, as elaborated in section 2.5.

2.5 Sustainability and transdisciplinarity in development projects

Although many efforts have been made throughout project management in development projects, some constraints still exist: (1) the lack of significant degree of self-reflection on its own impacts; (2) the lack of complementarity of these efforts; (3) the fragmented approach by each individual effort; (4) the lack of effective cooperation among stakeholders and; (5) a lack of cultural and societal contextualisation. In order to ensure the sustainability of these sustainable development efforts in the future, a transdisciplinary approach is needed.

The tackling of these issues themselves, however, also influence specifically the social and cultural characteristics of communities (Abelshausen 2016). These sustainable development efforts are therefore somehow failing their intended goals and need to be better contextualised to the specificities of local communities and their social and cultural organisation and traditions (i.e. transdisciplinarity). Every culture with its own practices has particular capacities and hence faces different conditions; consequently, sustainability is multi-dimensional historically, culturally, and geographically (Bonnett 1999). Not surprisingly, sustainability should be contextualised in order to adapt the concept to the national and regional unique contexts.

The usefulness of transdisciplinarity, which is an approach that includes multiple scientific disciplines focusing on shared problems and the active input of practitioners from outside academia, has long been recognised (Craps 2019). Transdisciplinarity involves producing, integrating, and managing knowledge from across disciplines (Scholz *et al.* 2006; Klein 2001, 2004). Transdisciplinarity indicates a realistic way of building sustainable futures in which reality as ontology is presumed to comprise multiple levels of reality (Nicolescu 2012; McGregor 2012). Transdisciplinarity as a mode of community-based learning involves novice, lay people, and experts jointly addressing issues of shared concern. Learning for sustainability takes on forms such as problem- and project-based learning (Wiek *et al.* 2014) and entails the integration of other (non-academic) forms of knowledge in the learning process (e.g. traditional ecological knowledge (Reid and Sieber 2020)). The variety of knowledge forms and educational practices linked to transdisciplinary learning for sustainability are framed within the scholarship on community-based learning and assets-based learning. Conceptualisation of this learning is, however, most often framed within disciplinary bounds such as educational sciences (Nicolescu and Ertas 2013) or within social capital theory (Putnam 2000).

2.6 Community capitals and community development

Based on the literature (Apgar, Argumedo and Allen 2009; Mumuni, Alhassan and Sulemana 2019; Klein 2010; Lang *et al.* 2012; Bergmann *et al.* 2013), it is hypothesised that the implementation of system-level and assets-based community development can lead to transdisciplinarity.

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (Flora, Flora and Fey 2004) is a system-level, assets-based approach framed within the broader field of community development (Gutiérrez-Montes, Emery and Fernandez-Baca 2009; Kretzmann and McKnight 1996) and social capital theory (*cf.* bridging, bonding, linking (Putnam 2000)). Community development has a tradition of applying needs-driven approaches even though research and practice have provided evidence for the benefits of asset-based community development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996; Burkett 2011). Of these two divergent options, argument has long been made for the latter, i.e. assets-based community development (ABCD) (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). Within the framework of ABCD, Flora *et al.* (2004) developed the CCF. The CCF is an approach that envisions economic security, a healthy ecosystem, and social equity (Gutiérrez-Montes *et al.* 2009; Flora *et al.* 2004). The CCF approach builds upon the strengths, traditions, and societal organisations that are already present in a community rather than focusing on what is missing, i.e. what is needed.

Flora *et al.* (2004) developed the CCF to allow for these assets to be identified within community development projects. This framework contains seven capitals; natural, cultural, human, social, political, built, and financial. CCF for this reason places itself within a community, transcending academia and having the potential for transdisciplinarity in sustainable development projects. The CCF has the potential to embed sustainability efforts within communities, provide ownership to communities, and thereby achieve sustainability. It was hypothesised by Gutiérrez-Montes *et al.* (2009) that by augmenting the system-level ABCD CCF approach with local participation and decision-making, long-term sustainability of development efforts can be ensured.

The framework for analysis is the CCF as designed by Flora *et al.* (2004). The analysis criteria follow the descriptions of the seven community capitals: natural, cultural, human, social, political, built, and financial. Simplified, the community capitals entail:

> Natural Capital – The environment, natural beauty, lakes, rivers and streams, forests, wildlife, soil, the local landscape.
> Cultural Capital – Ethnicity, generations, stories and traditions, spirituality, habits, and heritage.
> Human Capital – All the skills and abilities of people, leadership, knowledge, and the ability to access resources.
> Social Capital – Groups, organisations, networks in the community, the sense of belonging, bonds between people.
> Political Capital – Connections to people in power, access to resources, leverage, and influence to achieve goals.
> Built Capital – Buildings and infrastructure – schools, roads, water and sewer systems, and main streets – in a community.
> Financial Capital – Money, charitable giving, grants, access to funding, and wealth.
> (Jacobs 2011: 1)

The interaction of all seven capitals theoretically brings about a spiralling effect (Emery and Flora 2006). Within this theory, Gutiérrez-Montes *et al.*

(2009) found that an ongoing process of assets building on assets can lead to the effect of an upward spiral. The theory of cumulative causation states that the place that loses assets, for whatever reason, will continue to lose them through system effect. Emery and Flora (2006), however, theorise that the opposite is also true: that an increase in assets will attract other assets. Their research also shows that the capitals that initiate a spiralling period are highly influential on the upwards or downwards trajectory of the spiral (*ibid.*). They indicate that the social capital is the possible predominant capital needed for spiralling up (*ibid.*).

The potential of the CCF for transdisciplinarity could be the subject of further research in order to assess the community capitals in relation to prevalent discourses from environmental sciences (*cf.* environmental management, nature conservation, protected area management (Cooke and Lane 2019; Nkhata and Breen 2010)). The change in assets identified from our focus group discussions and interviews can already be used for the development of guidelines for community-based conservation that harnesses the value of traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Specifically, we can investigate how the CCF can act as a bridge to close/remedy the gap between community development and sustainability. This implies the examination of the CCF within the current sustainability discourse, moving beyond project-driven sustainability (Burns 2015).

Finally, the CCF has the potential to act as a transdisciplinary approach that adheres to the scholarship of transcending academia, while at the same time providing a rigorous methodology that has the potential to transcend disciplines within the academia (Kirby 2019).

3 The Rwenzori Mountains National Park case study

3.1 Description of the study area

The Rwenzori Mountains National Park lies on the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo on the east side of the Western Rift Valley in East Africa (Figure 7.1). It is located between 0°06' and 0°46' North and 29°47' and 30°11' East, between the neighbouring lakes Albert and Edward within the Albertine Rift (Howard 1991). The Rwenzori Mountains include the third, fourth, and fifth highest mountain peaks on the African continent (*ibid.*). The Rwenzori Mountains National Park traverses four districts (Kasese, Bunyangabu, Kabarole, and Bundibugyo) that form part of the nine districts which collectively constitute what is politically known as the Rwenzori region in mid-Western Uganda.

The Rwenzori Mountains National Park is of great conservation importance for three main reasons. Firstly, it has a rich and unique biodiversity as it is home to a variety of plant and animal species, many of which are endemic, rare, or globally threatened. Its uniqueness is attributed to species richness, a number of endemics, and a range of habitats (*ibid.*; Wilson 1995). In the afro-alpine zone, 81 per cent of the 278 woody plant taxa are endemic to the East African region (Hedberg 1961; Lush 1993). The Rwenzori Mountains National Park has at least 177 species of forest birds which constitute 17.6 per cent of the total forest birds in the country, including 19 birds which are found only in the Albertine Rift (Wilson 1995).

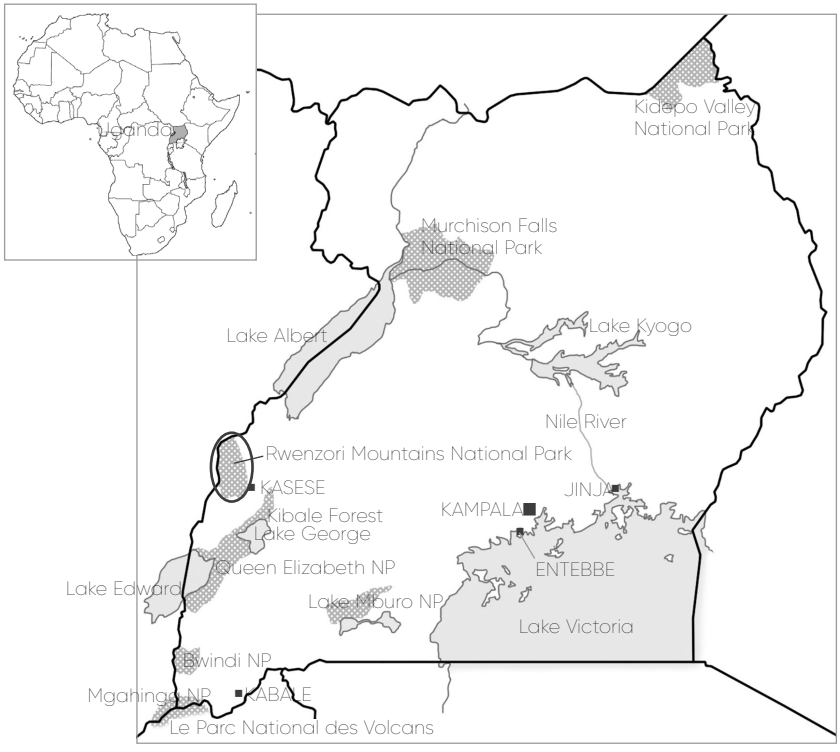
In the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, there are also 15 species of butterfly which constitute 22 per cent of butterflies in the country

(Howard 1991). A survey carried out in 1948 found 60 species of invertebrate and 25 of them had previously not been known (Salt 1987). Secondly, it is a fragile ecosystem prone to biological and physical degradation, induced by both natural and human factors. To prevent such degradation requires putting in place conservation measures. Thirdly and most importantly for this case study, the Rwenzori Mountains National Park is a cultural symbol of the local people. It is inhabited mainly by the Bamba and Bakonzo people whose traditional religious practices are closely associated with the mountains (Stacey 1996). A variety of superstitions, tales, and folklore about the Rwenzori Mountains are embedded within the traditional religious belief system (*ibid*.). The traditional religious beliefs may lead to practices that may affect the harvest of natural resources in the Rwenzori Mountains.

3.2 The problems in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park that motivated the need for conservation

Despite conservation efforts in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, resources continued to be illegally harvested (Loefler 1997) and the park boundary encroached (Muhumuza 2006). The effect of the illegal activities of the people on the park is evidenced by a difference in vegetation in and around the park. There was a noticeable difference in vegetation cover between the community land and the land currently protected as part of the park. There was land degradation and soil erosion in the villages

Figure 7.1 Location of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park



neighbouring the park (National Environment Management Authority 2006). There was a decrease in natural vegetation cover between 1955–99 (in each district traversed by the Rwenzori Mountains National Park) and 2001–05 in the entire Rwenzori region.

Many species formerly abundant in the mountains, such as the wild buffalo, are rare as a result of anthropogenic activities (Loefler 1997). Biodiversity loss and resource degradation attributed to local people's practices has persisted since the early 1990s up to the present.

There was a conflict of interest between the local community for the need to have access to the park resources and the Uganda Wildlife Authority for conservation and tourism activities (Nkonya *et al.* 2002). Their needs could explain why the local communities are said to still carry out illegal activities such as poaching, accessing restricted areas without permits, and the harvesting of resources.

Bids by the park administration to prevent illegal activities from occurring have met with resistance from the local people. The communities bordering the park are said to have developed negative attitudes towards the existence of the park. Such attitudes involved setting some areas of the park ablaze and killing stray animals without any intended benefit. This was also demonstrated when some of the community members were caught in the park being involved in the illegal extraction of resources, or when the park authorities enforced the by-laws (Tamale and Nzirambi 1996). Local people in the villages that neighbour the Rwenzori Mountains National Park say that they are being regarded by Uganda Wildlife Authority staff as less important than the monkeys and baboons in the park (*ibid.*). Other problems involving many natural calamities such as floods, landslides, soil erosion, and erratic seasonal changes are common phenomena in the Rwenzori region (BBC News 2010; Majangu and Basalirwa 1996; Muhumuza, Muzinduki and Hyeroba 2011; Protos-Directorate of Water Resources Management 2012; Lara, Cruz and Anderson 2013).

3.3 Why the problems required the integration of traditional religious beliefs

From the literature on the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, it appears that several causes could have contributed to problems associated with the conservation of the park as relating to traditional religious beliefs. When part of the Rwenzori Mountains was gazetted a forest reserve and then consequently a national park, the local people were not consulted and yet they are an important stakeholder group that traditionally owned the area (McCall 1996). It is not a guarantee that they would have simply accepted transferring ownership and management of the area to the central government. However, it was most likely that they could have expressed alternative views about access and use rights of the area and the resources therein based on their traditional religious beliefs.

Community consultations prior to the establishment of national parks have been found elsewhere to be among the factors that influence successful conservation of biodiversity in protected areas. The establishment of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park must also have thus been considered by the local people as anathema to them because it threatened their welfare, since the majority of them depended on the resources in the area where

the park was established for survival and livelihood (CVCP 2007) as well as religious practices. Additionally, the legislation governing the park was not clear to the people (Muhumuza 2006) as it did not resonate with their traditional religious perspective of the Rwenzori Mountains and the resources therein (Ministry of Natural Resources 1995).

When community involvement in conservation was eventually considered in 1996, it was not well grounded in research. The revenue generated out of tourism is very small and the 20 per cent allocated to the community cannot meet the needs of every community member, let alone be a direct substitute for the resource needs that the local people previously obtained from the park (UNESCO 2002). Local representation on the Park Management Committee (PMC) was implemented, but the representatives seem to have no popular authority among the local people. This was because the traditional leadership structure respected the traditional religious leaders but they were not represented on the committee.

The local people have continued to argue with the park administration for their failure to allow them into the park to express their traditional religious beliefs. This expression involved evoking and appeasing the spirits that the local people believed have protected them for decades (CVCP 2007). From the claims made by the local people, the CVCP deduced that attending to the traditional religious beliefs of the local people and integrating them into the management of the national park would be a step towards addressing the conservation problems facing the Rwenzori Mountains National Park.

In the following sections, we present how the information for this case study was gathered and explore how the traditional religious beliefs of the Bamba and Bakonjo in the Rwenzori Mountains were expressed. We also consider the reasons for not considering those traditional religious beliefs in the establishment of the national park; the steps, approaches, and strategies that were used in the integration of religious beliefs into the management of the park; the successes and failures of the integration of religious beliefs into the management of the park; and the testimonies from the implementing team and communities of the lessons learned.

4 How the information for this case study was gathered

This case study was prepared between February and April 2020. The information for this case study was based on three sources: (1) documents containing the CVCP implementation reports. There were four unpublished annual reports from 2008 to 2012 in the office of the Warden Community Conservation at the Rwenzori Mountains National Park; (2) the key informant interviewees who were the staff of the Uganda Wildlife Authority involved in the implementation of the project and those that foresaw the post-project activities. There were 20 respondents, five from each of the four districts traversed by the Rwenzori Mountains National Park; (3) the local communities in and around the Rwenzori Mountains National Park that were involved in the integration of traditional religious beliefs into the management of the national park. There were 40 respondents, ten from each of the four districts traversed by the Rwenzori Mountains National Park.

The CVCP implementation reports were analysed through the document analysis procedures using a protocol that captured information on the

traditional religious beliefs of the Bamba and Bakonjo in the Rwenzori Mountains, the reasons for not considering those traditional religious beliefs in the establishment of the national park, and the steps, approaches, and strategies that were used in the integration of religious beliefs into the management of the park.

The key informant interviews were conducted using an open-ended interview schedule that was administered by the researcher. An open-ended interview schedule comprises questions that do not include a set of response options (Züll 2016). Open-ended questions require respondents to formulate a response in their own words and to express it verbally or in writing. Respondents are not steered in a particular direction by predefined response categories. Such questions are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences (McNamara 1999). The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. In this case, it was necessary to get deeper information from participants about their experiences regarding the integration of their traditional religious beliefs into the management of the park, in order to understand the processes they went through and the results that were achieved. Information from the local communities was gathered through focus group discussions using an open-ended focus group discussion guide.

This case presents a unique ethnographic encounter whereby the questions posed can only be answered through the primary data that were collected through the project. Without that data/information, the questions would remain unanswered.

The information gathered was analysed following the thematic content analysis procedures. In this process, the information was categorised under each of the case study questions as stipulated in the background to this chapter (see section 1).

5 Findings on the integration of traditional religious beliefs into the conservation of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

5.1 Traditional religious beliefs: their meaning and manifestation among the local communities in the Rwenzori Mountains

5.1.1 The cosmology

Among the Rwenzori Mountain people, there are traditional religious beliefs that have an impact on the conservation of natural resources. The description of the cultural practices of the mountain people (Stacey 2008) shows a close relationship between the belief system, the mountain environment, and the plant and animal species in the mountains. For example, the Bakonzo cosmology begins with the creator (Nyamuhanga) who made the snow (Nzururu). According to oral legend, Nzururu is the father of the spirits Kithasamba and Nyabibuya, who are responsible for human life, its continuity, and its welfare.

Kithasamba, who is believed to live in the glaciated mountain peaks, is a giant force who controls the natural environment and the lives of all of the mountain people (*ibid.*). Local people in the Rwenzori Mountains attribute current erratic seasons and the loss of snow to their failure to practise their traditional religious rituals, which has angered Kithasamba. Therefore, this indicates that the local people in the Rwenzori Mountains still have a strong traditional religious belief system associated with the environment.

Also, the etymologies of many of the words in the language spoken by the inhabitants of the Rwenzori Mountains are based on the natural resources in the mountains. For example, the word 'Rwenzori' comes from a local word 'Rwenjura' meaning that the mountain is the home of rainfall ('*enjura*' in the local language). Each mountain ridge has a local name with a local meaning.

5.1.2 Beliefs in gods and spirits

Local people traditionally believed that gods lived in different peaks and different mountain resources. Traditionally, over 30 gods and goddesses are associated with various resources in the mountains but only 21 (Table 7.1) were mentioned by respondents because the names of other gods and goddesses were supposed to be mentioned only while performing rituals and not casually such as in an interview.

Local people traditionally believed that gods had wives, children, soldiers, and pages. Gods mentioned can be placed in three categorical groups: one group comprised nine 'white gods', the second group constituted an unspecified number of 'black gods', and the third was a miscellaneous group (including mothers to gods, children, soldiers, and pages of gods). Each of the gods had unique names concerning the power and control of that god.

There were several ways in which gods were believed to influence local people's relationships with resources and their utilisation. For instance, bark cloth (locally known as Orubugo and made from the Ficus species) was said to be a cloth for the gods. It was also believed that all mountain ridges and some plant species are the homes of gods. Gods brought resources from an unknown place to humankind and some gods reside inside those resources. Plant species said to be homes of gods include: Euphorbia candelabrum, Euphorbia tirucalli, Dracaena afromontana, and Cymbopogon afronardus. It was believed that the use of resources from those species and other resources in various mountain ridges must conform to the expectations of gods. People traditionally worshipped certain trees and they believed that in some situations, if such trees were cut, they would bleed or cry or speak with an expression of pain.

People with particular names associated with gods were supposed to harvest resources in a particular way. An individual with the name 'Ndahura' was supposed to collect only species of plants that have thorns and rough leaves. Such a person was the only one who could successfully hunt animals with rough and sharp fur. A person with the name 'Mulindwa' was supposed to hunt only carnivores. A Mulindwa-named person was also supposed to collect plant species of medicinal value that protect people from attack by enemies or wild animals. Such people had powers to resist attack from any wild animal (ranging from small animals such as snakes to big animals such as lions and leopards). A person with the name 'Mugenyi' was supposed to hunt herbivores. A Mugenyi-named person was also supposed to collect plant species of medicinal value that protect people from illnesses and plant species rich in amphetamines.

People who worshipped the god Mulindwa were not supposed to worship the god Mugenyi and hence each of the worshippers of one god was not supposed to gather resources that are gathered by another. The restrictions in worshipping gods did not only stop at gathering resources but also extended to social relations among the community.

Table 7.1 Gods and goddesses that local people believed control resource use in the Rwenzori Mountains

God and goddess	Responsibility of god or goddess
1 Nyamuhanga	The creator of everything
2 Nzururu	The god of snow and the father of gods Kithasamba and Nyabibuya
3 Kithasamba	The overall god of humans. Kithasamba is believed to live in the glaciated Rwenzori Mountain peaks. This god is described as a giant force that controls the natural environment and the lives of all the mountain people.
4 Nyabibuya	The goddess of blessings
5 Mugenyi	The god of visitors and domestic animals
6 Ndahura	The god of diseases known to cause and cure diseases
7 Kalisya	The god of hunters
8 Kahigi	The god of wild animals
9 Nyabinji	The god of abundant harvest
10 Irungu	The god and spirit of wilderness and hunters
11 Mulindwa	The god of misfortune. He was believed to make people's plans succeed or fail
12 Nyabahasa	The goddess believed to enable women to bear twins
13 Walyuba	The god of life and its perpetuity
14 Ndahukira	The god of luck and destiny
15 Mulembeki	The god of expectant mothers and children
16 Mbolhu	The god of strong love among women
17 Ndyoka	The god of water and wetlands
18 Kaleghire	The god of rescue
19 Kathulikanzira	The god of travellers, believed to guide the movement of travellers
20 Kayikara	The god of herbalists
21 Muthundi	The god of abundant harvest

Source: Authors' own.

Traditionally, people built houses or huts or shrines for gods, and in those places, they evoked them during cultural practices. Such houses were constructed using particular plant resources which had to be collected in a particular way. Hunting was conducted in close consultation with the gods. Hunters had to consult a god of wild animals ('Kalisya') before they engaged in hunting. People held a belief that the god of wild animals became furious, not only when hunting occurred without consulting him, but even when people did not engage in hunting.

> *Not hunting is disrespect to Kalisya, the god of hunters and the other hunting spirits and this is a bad omen.*
> (CVCP 2007)

Engaging in hunting without first honouring the demands of the gods would be fruitless. Local people had strong beliefs about the control of gods on resource use evidenced by the statement below:

> *If the spirits themselves make their call, not even the rangers will see us going up to the sites, and yet we will go through their protected area, even when they are there. I can even cut down all the trees without the rangers seeing me if the spirits are with me!*
> (CVCP 2007)

Obtaining resources in the mountains without following the proper procedure of appeasing the gods resulted in punishments from those particular gods. Common punishments included deformity of the body by developing hunchbacks, swollen limbs, atrophy in the limbs, insensibility in some parts of the body, abnormality in the number of fingers and toes (especially the development of the sixth finger and toe), the production of twins, and the occurrence of peculiar phenomena such as giving birth to albinos. These punishments occurred either immediately or later to the offender and or his or her close relatives.

Such incidents could occur not only as a result of not appeasing the gods when collecting resources but also through other causes. However, there were traditional ways to know that the cause of the problem was non-conformity to the requirements of a particular god in the harvest of resources.

These influence other traditional beliefs and practices such as beliefs in totems, beliefs in taboos, traditional knowledge, traditional rules and management, and cultural rituals which are critical for the survival of the community in and around the Rwenzori Mountains. For instance, the right of the indigenous people in the Rwenzori Mountains to follow their own religious faith is natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital, built capital, and financial capital based on the categorisation by Jacobs (2011). For instance, traditionally, although they were from different ethnicities, the Bakonzo and Bamba jointly performed the circumcision ritual (RFPJ 2019). That ritual enhanced social, cultural, human, and political capitals necessary for their survival. Also, the traditional rituals and practices of the indigenous people are often exhibited in communities for tourism purposes to enhance the communities' financial capital. The totems and taboos are also known to have positive conservation implications which

enhance natural capital. Enhanced natural capital has the added advantage of reducing vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

5.2 Why traditional religious beliefs of the communities were neglected at inception during the creation of the national park

The first formal attempts to conserve the Rwenzori Mountains were implemented in 1941 when part of the mountain was gazetted into a forest reserve. Rules governing the exploitation of the resources within the forest reserve were as follows (McCall 1996): (a) hunting was totally prohibited; and (b) forest products (such as timber, firewood, bamboo, and honey) inside the reserve could be taken for personal domestic use without a permit or payment of fees. A senior forest officer was empowered to issue permits at his discretion to individuals to allow them to fell trees, take forest produce, reside, cultivate, or graze livestock within the reserve. At this time, the traditional religious beliefs of the local people and their association with resource use had not yet been documented.

In 1991, 996km^2 of the mountain was gazetted a national park, under the management of the Uganda National Parks. More stringent regulations on its use were put in place (*ibid*.). Resource harvesting and many activities were totally forbidden in the park. By this time, the traditional religious beliefs of the local people had been documented by some anthropologists. Only selected traditional rituals were permitted, provided all other regulations were adhered to (*ibid*.). However, the Uganda National Parks experienced severe problems because local people continued to engage in prohibited activities (Mutebi 2005). Attempts by the park managers to prevent these activities from taking place in the park were futile. Park staff experienced harassment and death threats from the local people. At this time, the entire scope of the local people's traditional religious beliefs and its significance in natural resources management was not known to the Uganda National Parks staff.

> *The management of the park thought that the slightest involvement of the people would deplete resources in the park as the intention was to have the park off the hands of the local community*.
> (Community interview 4)

In 1994, due to the ecological significance of the Rwenzori Mountains and the problems encountered in conserving biodiversity in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, the park was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This elevated the conservation importance of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park to an international level. However, this elevation only considered the natural resources but neglected the cultural resources and the belief system of the local people, as their association with the natural resources in the mountains was not known.

> *The government conservation policies at the time were solely focused on biodiversity and not on the conservation of local people's beliefs*.
> (Key informant interview 7)

In 1996, the management of national parks and other protected areas in Uganda was shifted from the Uganda National Parks to the Uganda Wildlife Authority, a newly created body (Fumihiko 2007). Resulting from the conservation challenges encountered by the Uganda National Parks, the Uganda Wildlife Authority recommended that community-based conservation of not only the Rwenzori Mountains National Park but all national parks in Uganda should be a priority if more effective conservation was to be realised (*ibid.*).

Cognisant of the need for community-based conservation in all national parks in Uganda, the mission statement of the Uganda Wildlife Authority was, and currently is, 'to conserve and sustainably manage the wildlife and protected areas of Uganda in partnership with neighbouring communities and other stakeholders for the benefit of the people of Uganda and the global community' (Mutebi 2005: 5).

Under the community-based conservation strategy, agreements would be reached between local people and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (*ibid.*). In line with the mission of the Uganda Wildlife Authority, the Rwenzori Mountains National Park administration proposed the following (Oryema 1996):

1 Revenue sharing: 20 per cent of all gate collections from tourists should go to the communities neighbouring the park;
2 Representation of the local people on the PMC: the local community would select some of its members to represent them on the Park Management Advisory Committee;
3 Employment opportunities for local community members: local people would be given priority whenever there were any job vacancies;
4 Regulated access to the park: some members of the community, after obtaining a permit, could access restricted resources in specific areas of the park.

All these proposals have been implemented in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park since 1996 (Mutebi 2005). These proposals were made in anticipation that the local people would be motivated to support conservation and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources in the park, under the control of the Uganda Wildlife Authority. However, these provisions did not bring to the fore local people's traditional belief system and their potential role in conservation.

The reason why the traditional religious beliefs of the communities were neglected during the creation of the national park was a lack of knowledge about these traditional beliefs. The traditional way of life of the local people was considered to be largely myth which could not offer any practical solutions to the conservation of biodiversity in the park.

Also because of other religious beliefs from mainstream faiths such as Christianity and Islam, traditional religious beliefs and practices were considered demonic and evil. The attitudes from mainstream religions affected the voice and recognition of the indigenous faith in several ways. For instance, the communities in one of the Rwenzori Mountain ridges (called the Kinyampanika Ridge) that are currently predominantly Seventh-Day Adventists pointed out that their parents and grandparents

were compelled by the Christian missionaries to denounce their traditional beliefs and practices and to adopt Christian beliefs so that they can eventually benefit from the amenities offered by the missionaries such as prayer books and formal education. Threats of suffering and burning in hell were also used to scare away indigenous people from their traditional beliefs and practices. The adherents of the Christian faith also destroyed traditional shrines where indigenous people used to perform their traditional religious practices. The community shrines were replaced with mainstream religious places of worship that looked superior, hence affecting the indigenous faith.

The traditional leadership structure through which traditional religious beliefs were expressed had been largely replaced by a national political system which included local council leaders but who were not necessarily traditional leaders. The management of the national parks was based on the Yellowstone National Park model that was embedded in conservation biology, a science that was seen to be parallel to traditional religious beliefs.

The process of protecting the Rwenzori Mountains since 1941 as elaborated above suggests that the attitudes and actions of the park managers and authorities encroached on indigenous people's right to exercise their faith. For instance, among the permitted activities when the park was created and eventually when community-based conservation interventions were considered, there was not a single community activity that allowed local people to conduct traditional religious practices. Limiting access to places in the park where local people performed their religious rituals is indicative of infringement on indigenous people's rights. Their traditional faith necessitates that religious rituals are conducted in specific places and not anywhere else. Even if they were to find alternative places to perform the rituals, prohibiting access to wild animals which are used during ritual performance would mean that such religious rituals could not be conducted, hence limiting their right to religious expression.

5.3 How traditional religious beliefs were integrated into the conservation and management of the park

Due to a growing body of literature claiming that in most African traditional communities there were traditional biodiversity conservation strategies (Holdgate 1999), the CVCP project attempted to investigate, plan, and implement conservation approaches that integrated local people's traditional religious beliefs.

5.3.1 The steps, approaches, and strategies that were used in the integration of traditional religious beliefs into the management of the park

In pursuit of a more effective biodiversity conservation strategy in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, a cultural-based conservation strategy was proposed. In 2008, the CVCP began to be implemented by the Uganda Wildlife Authority and Fauna and Flora International. The project was intended to test the application of traditional religious beliefs and practices to the conservation of biodiversity in some national parks

in Uganda (starting with the Rwenzori Mountains National Park) and to design practical interventions to integrate local people's culture into park management. The aim was 'to strengthen the linkage between the park and their neighbouring communities by representing them through traditional religious values that are meaningful and relevant to them' (CVCP 2012: 2). The long-term goal of the project was to provide a practical demonstration of how improved relations with local communities can be achieved by incorporating locally meaningful traditional religious beliefs and practices into protected area management.

A description of the efforts undertaken in conducting consultative meetings and investigations and arriving at adaptable management proposals, experiences, and lessons learned in the process are presented in section 5.3.2.

5.3.2 A consultative process with the local community and other stakeholders

The consultative processes were based on an increasing appreciation that for long-term sustainable management of protected areas, the cooperation and support of local people is needed (Rodney 2000). It has been realised that biodiversity cannot be protected or sustainably used without all the stakeholders coming together and planning for the resources.

In the national parks of Uganda, local community support is often ingrained in community-based conservation strategies (Mutebi 2005). However, the actual level of local people participating in the management of national parks remains in question (Rodney 2000). The authors used six levels on the scale of participation, ranging as a continuum from greatest dependence on external agents, to greatest self-reliance.

Stakeholders in the conservation of protected areas are seen as:

> Persons or groups that are aware of their interests in the protected area, who possess specific capacities such as skills, knowledge and comparative advantage for management due to their proximity or resource use mandate, and who are willing to invest time, money and political authority in becoming involved in protected areas management.
> (Borrini-Feyerabend 1999: 25)

From the onset, stakeholder participation in the process of integrating traditional religious beliefs and practices in the Rwenzori Mountains was considered important. Given that the CVCP was initiated from outside the community where it was implemented, the participation of the community through self-mobilisation did not happen. However, based on prior work on local community perspectives and resource needs, the project was introduced to the community and an interactive participation process occurred. The local community was closely involved in planning, information-gathering, and decision-making on how their religious beliefs and practices could be integrated into the management plan of the park.

Within the limits of time available (a common characteristic of donor-driven projects which often have a short timespan), rapid ethnographic

assessment procedures (Davis and Wagner 2003) were used to conduct consultations with the local community. These were adopted because they enable investigations into a sociocultural context in a short time (usually in less than a month or even a week) (*ibid.*). A rapid assessment was used to analyse how religious beliefs and practices interrelate and how they could enhance biodiversity conservation in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park. Given that stakeholders were of different categories, they were approached variously using distinct methods (individual, expert, and impromptu group interviews and focus group discussions) as a characteristic element of a triangulated methodology inherent in rapid ethnographic assessment procedures.

Ten individual interviews were conducted with environmental officers, Uganda Wildlife Authority staff, and chairpersons of local organisations engaged in either cultural activities or conservation practices or both. These individuals were asked to give their opinions about the integration of traditional religious beliefs, knowledge, and practices into the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park. Individual interviews lasted for 20 to 40 minutes.

Fifteen expert interviews were conducted with traditional leaders (such as ridge leaders and chieftains) and Uganda Wildlife Authority wardens. These individuals were deemed to have expert knowledge of both traditional religious practices and current conservation strategies, and could offer practical suggestions as to how biodiversity conservation in the park could be improved through the integration of traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Twelve impromptu group interviews were conducted in situations where people were gathered for a meeting. This enabled collection of data in a group context and mitigation of biased responses associated with pre-arranged meetings where the objectives for the meeting are communicated to participants prior to the meeting.

Three focus group discussions were conducted with members of a local organisation (RweMCCA) aimed at integrating culture into the conservation of biodiversity in the Rwenzori Mountains and administrators of the Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu, a cultural institution of the Rwenzori Mountain people. These discussions were important to enable a deeper understanding of traditional religious beliefs and practices in the management of the park, in determining the extent of beliefs in the community, and in identifying areas of conflict and disagreement within the community. The groups consisted of six to ten members and the discussion was conducted in the local language with the help of an interpreter.

Based on the consultative process undertaken through these methods, sacred sites were identified as a possible way of integrating traditional religious beliefs and practices in the management of the park. This was perceived by the CVCP as an opportunity for engaging the community further to propose a community-based conservation strategy based on sacred sites.

5.3.3 Designing the integration of traditional religious beliefs based on sacred sites

There is an expanding body of research demonstrating that many sacred sites support high levels of biodiversity. It is increasingly recognised by social scientists that this is not coincidental but is due to the protection afforded to these sacred areas by the custodian traditional communities (Byers, Cunliffe and Hudak 2001).

A sacred site is an area of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities (Harmon 2002). Many sacred sites are associated with indigenous communities that use a wide variety of natural resources for their survival, economy, medicines, religious rituals, and other purposes (*ibid*.). Historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the ecology of indigenous communities are grounded in biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes in sacred sites (Hadley 2002). For example, the Shona people who live in the Zambezi Valley of northern Zimbabwe consider trees, rivers, pools, mountains, and even whole mountain ranges to be sacred (Murombedzi 2003). Their concept of sacred connotes something that is life-sustaining and linked to rain and the fertility of the land (Harmon 2002).

Sacred sites have been highlighted in some situations as a basis for biodiversity conservation (Beltrán 2000). Sacred sites may either intentionally or coincidentally promote the conservation of biodiversity (Anderson and Berglund 2003). It could be that they are associated with certain taboos linked to religious beliefs and rules of access that restrict some practices from taking place there. The management of sacred sites by indigenous people is said to be one of the ways that can complement national parks and other protected areas established by governments to conserve biodiversity (*ibid*.). For instance, in the Zambezi Valley, deforestation was found to be least 50 per cent lower in sacred forests than in their secular counterparts. It was discovered that 133 species of native plants can be found in these sacred forests whereas they are threatened, endangered, or extirpated elsewhere in Zimbabwe (Murombedzi 2003). Based on such examples, the integration of traditional religious beliefs and practices associated with sacred sites presented a better opportunity for enhancing biodiversity conservation in national parks than strategies imposed by governments and international agencies.

In the Rwenzori region, based on the information gathered from the community, 14 sacred sites associated with local people's religious beliefs and practices were identified, mapped, and described.

It was realised that most of the sacred sites identified were located near the park boundary. Principle 2 of the Sacred Natural Sites Guidelines for Protected Area Managers (Wild and McLeod 2008) requires the use of zoning as a standard tool of land use planning and management of areas with natural sacred sites. Relative to the park zones, most of the identified sacred sites were in or near the buffer zone. This meant that access to these sites would conform to the provisions in the park management plan that restricts human activities in the strict nature zone but allows negotiated access to the buffer zone.

Sacred sites varied in nature and form: six were plants (trees and shrubs), six were hills, and two were stones. The distance of sacred sites from the park boundary also varied. The furthest was 10km from the

boundary into the park. Sacred sites were said to be important areas to the local community for (a) religious worship, (b) tourism, (c) the expression of the traditional culture, (d) ridge cleansing, (e) sacrificing to the gods, (f) healing various diseases, and (g) securing livelihood and welfare. This further revealed that sacred sites were associated with the performance of traditional practices influenced by traditional religious beliefs.

It was also revealed that specific sacred sites were used for particular rituals that served specific purposes. This meant that in the process of planning community-based conservation, it was unlikely that alternatives for sacred sites could be found. Therefore, an exploration of how to integrate traditional religious beliefs and practices through sacred sites encompasses the possibility of provision of alternatives, as is often the case with resource use agreements where it is agreed that a certain amount of resources can be extracted.

5.3.4 Local people's interests in the integration of their beliefs into the management of the park

Effecting community-based conservation through traditional structures influences the successful conservation of biodiversity in national parks (Muhumuza and Balkwill 2013). This happens when the local people and especially those managing the traditional structures have an interest. Respondents expressed a need to revert ownership not only of sacred sites but also of the land on which they 'sit' to the traditional owners. Exploration of views expressed by the local people revealed various interests. These were distinguished into two categories: cultural interests and economic interests.

Regarding cultural interests, local people indicated a positive attitude towards the integration of traditional religious beliefs associated with sacred sites into the management of the park. This was evident from the responses given:

> *We are happy that our culture is now being recognised by Uganda Wildlife Authority and we shall now work together to ensure that our mountain is protected.*
> (CVCP 2007)

Some local community members indicated that access to sacred sites is an important factor for defining their cultural identity.

> *Sacred sites in the mountain define our culture and for long they have been abandoned due to the creation of the park, and the rangers have been restricting the people from going there and yet it is important for our survival.*
> (CVCP 2007)

The interests were not only among the old people; some respondents stated that the young were also interested.

> *The interests in sacred sites is not only for the old people like me but also the young ones are keen at learning what used to take place in our cultural traditions and allowing us to start practising our*

> *rituals in these sacred sites will also help to mitigate some of the problems we are currently facing. The young people will also find a way of being interested in their culture and promote it to tourists instead of engaging in lousy activities in trading centres.*
> (CVCP 2007)

Two factors seemed to drive the cultural interest of the respondents to have access and to manage sacred sites. Firstly, they perceived access to sacred sites as a way of recovering their culture and performing traditional religious practices for the sake of their cultural identity. Secondly, they regarded the access and use of sacred sites as a way of re-possessing what traditionally belonged to them and their forefathers.

It was also revealed that as a result of religious practices in sacred sites, these sites had a diversity of plants and animals compared to other neighbouring areas. Respondents stated that this could have happened not because these areas were intentionally conserved but as a result of the taboos associated with them. A follow-up probe on this issue revealed that such taboos were to ensure that the sacredness of the site was maintained.

> *It is just like the churches these days, one is expected not to play around at the altar, or collect money from the altar which Christians have offered to God, and this is for purposes of giving respect to a place that is considered holy. Similarly, sanctions on sacred sites were put in place to keep the area holy.*
> (CVCP 2007)

This was another strong point which indicated that sacred sites could offer a way of restricting resource extraction from some areas in the mountains. However, as a way of exploring the potential risks associated with traditional practices in sacred sites, it was further necessary to investigate the materials that were used in performing religious rituals within them. According to the regulations of the Uganda Wildlife Authority, people are restricted from taking certain materials inside the park for fear of posing potential risks to the plants and animals therein. Respondents explained about the various materials necessary for performing religious rituals. Some of the materials were to be obtained from outside the park and others from inside the park (Table 7.2).

The Uganda Wildlife Authority regulations do not permit taking the identified materials, especially domestic animals, to the park, and yet these were required for the performance of religious practices in sacred sites. The community members pointed out that religious practices cannot be conducted without these materials. This was an issue for negotiation between the park staff and the local people about how religious rituals would be performed without these materials. For instance, it was revealed that the goat is not killed in ritual performance but left to wander in the mountains. After negotiations between the local community and the Uganda Wildlife Authority staff, it was agreed that after the ritual, such a goat could be captured by people who are not associated with the ritual such as rangers. This would fulfil the expectations of the park staff as well as the local community. This was an example of the adaptive integration

Table 7.2 **Basic materials required for performing religious rituals in sacred sites**

Materials obtained from outside the park	Number	Materials obtained from inside the park	Number
Hen or cock	2–4	A bunch of spear grass	1
Eggs	2–8	Pieces of flexible branches of a plant locally called 'Mulyangote'	50
Bunches of green bananas	2	Pieces of dry wood	Many
Stems of sugar canes	20	Strands of 'Emikole' as tying material during the construction of shrines	Many
Clusters of purple bananas	4		
Goats	2		

Source: Authors' own.

of traditional religious beliefs and practices into the management of national parks. Traditional religious beliefs need not be integrated into the management of the park in exactly the same way as they operated in the traditional context.

Regarding economic interests, local people's views indicated that the community perceived sacred sites as areas that would easily generate income, especially when developed for cultural tourism. This was revealed when they were asked about the activities that they would conduct in those sacred sites.

Associating sacred sites and traditional religious rituals with economic benefit was not a traditional practice. This was an indication that community-based conservation interventions also need to be linked to economic benefits to the community. This demands that attempts to integrate traditional religious beliefs and practices into the management of national parks need to take into account the economic needs of the people or how they can be supported by other economic interventions.

The ownership of sacred sites was also an issue for consideration regarding the integration of religious beliefs associated with the sacred site into the management of the park. Traditionally, sacred sites were owned by various categories of individuals and organised groups. In the traditional cultural context, 'ownership' meant that power was vested upon ridge leaders, chieftains, and clan leaders to oversee the activities that took place in sacred sites, at some unknown time in the social–cultural history of the Rwenzori Mountain people. This power was passed on from father to son, through many generations. When community members wished to access sacred sites, they would seek permission from those with vested power to manage the sites.

5.4 Proposals on the way forward by the Uganda Wildlife Authority staff and by the local community

Two proposals, one by the Uganda Wildlife Authority and another by the local community were suggested on how local people's beliefs, knowledge,

and practices could be integrated into the management of the park through sacred sites.

5.4.1 Proposal 1 by the Uganda Wildlife Authority staff

This proposal was based on the mandate that the Uganda Wildlife Authority has for the management of national parks in Uganda. Other than the Uganda Wildlife Authority, there was no individual, group, or organisation authorised to manage national parks and the resources therein. According to Uganda Wildlife Authority staff, they were cognisant of other stakeholders and appreciated their efforts and concerns regarding the conservation of biodiversity and were willing to work with them.

In this proposal, the Uganda Wildlife Authority would sign an agreement with individuals wishing to access sacred sites, provided that those individuals offered information about the location of sacred sites and a detailed description of what they would do when they got to the sacred site. Among other roles, Uganda Wildlife Authority staff would be involved in monitoring activities taking place at these sites. An identified local organisation or a resource user group and Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu would serve as left and right 'arms' of the Uganda Wildlife Authority to support regulated access and use of sacred sites in the park.

5.4.2 Proposal 2 by the local community

The local community proposed that collaborative management of sacred sites be done through the traditional leadership structure based on what was in place before the park was created. According to this proposal, an agreement on the use and management of sacred sites would be signed between the Uganda Wildlife Authority and Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu.

However, the Uganda Wildlife Authority would monitor Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu activities and Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu would, in turn, monitor the use of sacred sites by the community. To do this, Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu would, where necessary, have to work with community-based organisations. These organisations would be delegated by Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu to conduct some of the activities it is mandated to do in agreement with the Uganda Wildlife Authority. If it was deemed crucial, however, the Uganda Wildlife Authority would monitor the activities of sacred site users directly.

6 Discussion on the successes and failures of the project regarding the integration of religious beliefs in conservation

The Rwenzori Mountains National Park is already a protected area under the management of the Uganda Wildlife Authority and for many years the local people have been prohibited from accessing and performing religious beliefs in the sacred sites therein. The proposal that sacred site users sign agreements with the Uganda Wildlife Authority directly served the Uganda Wildlife Authority well because the sacred sites are in the protected areas and should be managed by the Uganda Wildlife Authority. Also, the Uganda Wildlife Authority has experience in planning and can bring technical capacity and tools to the process. The consideration of access to sacred sites as part of resource use agreements in the park management plan, as well as the creation of job roles focused on cultural values, conservation

rangers, and conservation wardens, are examples of positive efforts in the integration of local people's traditional religious beliefs into the management of the park.

However, given the past history of resentment and conflict between the Uganda Wildlife Authority and the community members (Muhumuza 2006), engaging the Uganda Wildlife Authority and the local people to sign an agreement directly could not lead to attaining the objectives of encouraging the local people to support the conservation of the park. From the interviews with local community members, it was evident that they do not have trust in the Uganda Wildlife Authority staff at all. Therefore, signing an agreement with them might be perceived to be similar to the prevailing arrangements for local people to access the park that are not as effective as described previously. Even now, local communities are not happy that the two sacred sites that were identified and developed through the CVCP (Buremba and Katwekali) are not functional and the local communities use this as an example of Uganda Wildlife Authority's lack of commitment to fulfil its promises.

Additionally, although the Uganda Wildlife Authority recognised existing structures of collaborating with the local people, there were weaknesses in the proposal of signing agreements with individual resource users. There are over 100 sacred sites in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park and this meant signing over 100 agreements. Even if it is possible to sign all those agreements, it is complicated on a practical level, given that each agreement may have its unique terms. It would have been preferable for the Uganda Wildlife Authority to sign an agreement with an 'umbrella' organisation that would be mandated to licence, provide access to sacred sites, and monitor the performance of traditional religious beliefs in those sites. According to the local community, such an umbrella organisation would extend beyond sacred sites but would also include other components of the traditional religious belief system. The community was concerned that the CVCP only considered a narrow perception of their traditional religious beliefs, as one respondent pointed out:

> *The integration of religious beliefs was based on a few sacred sites but even if they had considered all the sacred sites, it would still be only a narrow integration of our religious belief system as other aspects such as taboos, totems, rules and regulations would be left out. A whole system integration is needed.*
> (Community interview 1)

A decentralised co-management system coordinated by an umbrella organisation would be necessary to handle the existing communication gap that currently exists between Uganda Wildlife Authority staff and the local community.

Another challenge that hindered the success of the proposed way forward by the Uganda Wildlife Authority was the absence of a direct link between Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu and a local organisation or resource user group. This made it difficult for the activities of each organisation to complement each other.

The way forward advanced by the community in Proposal 2 was feasible only if the suggestions were indeed implemented. These could have been strengthened by Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu signing an agreement with the resource users. Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu could take up the role of locating the spots with the resources the community requires, finding out the number of people who need the different resources, and requesting permission for the community to access the mountain for these resources. The success of this proposal could have depended on a good relationship between the parties involved. Vesting power in Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu by the Uganda Wildlife Authority could have been one way of engaging the local community in the planning and management of the park. The Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu, based on its nature as a traditional cultural institution, has the capacity of mobilising the local community and contributing the necessary traditional religious beliefs and practices and structures for effecting collaborative resource use. However, it may be limited in technical skills and finances to effect conservation actions. In this regard, it needs the support of the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The two institutions working together could mitigate the limitations of each organisation in implementing conservation actions independently.

One of the ways the Uganda Wildlife Authority could support the local community would be through the creation of an income stream based on a tourism product encompassing traditional religious beliefs and practices. A lack of this community tourism was one of the concerns that the community had with the Uganda Wildlife Authority management as one respondent pointed out:

> *One major thing that has failed to help the community achieve is the establishment of community tourism around the protected areas that is based on local people's traditional religious beliefs.* (Community interview 4)

Given the livelihoods needs of the local community, a strong consideration of community-based tourism as a source of income for the local communities would further enhance a positive relationship with the park management.

7 Key lessons worth noting from the case study

There is now an emerging body of knowledge generated by both biological and social scientists that describes the complexity and sophistication of many indigenous religious practices. These practices are associated with natural resource use in understudied regions such as the Rwenzori Mountains. Conservation efforts worldwide are slowly being directed towards understanding the basis for natural resource use among indigenous communities (Mutebi 2005). The need to understand the basis for natural resource use among indigenous communities provides an opportunity to investigate the traditional religious practices that could potentially enhance the conservation of biodiversity in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park.

The investigation of those practices is important because as the case from the Rwenzori Mountains National Park shows, prior to 1941, the Rwenzori Mountains were without marked boundaries and were managed and

controlled by local communities (McCall 1996). For centuries, the Rwenzori Mountain people depended on the mountain resources, and regarded the mountain as a free gift of nature (Stacey 1996). The Rwenzori Mountains had always been important for the livelihoods and culture of the local communities until part of the area was gazetted as a national park, which disenfranchised local people by making access illegal (McCall 1996). Ridge leaders and elderly members of the local community, just like elsewhere where local people are displaced during the creation of a protected area, claimed that the important natural resources were well conserved through indigenous practices. Before the area was declared a national park, there were traditionally set norms and customs that were followed while certain religious rituals and the harvesting of resources was carried out. Local people were enthusiastic about revitalising traditional religious practices in order to improve their welfare.

Although it was claimed that the Rwenzori Mountains were a cultural symbol to the Rwenzori Mountain people (Stacey 2008), a comprehensive inventory of traditional religious beliefs and practices associated with natural resource use was lacking prior to the CVCP. Without such an inventory and taking it into account, the management of the national park and conservation efforts could not succeed. This is because at the present time some local people engage in the illegal use of resources from the park as a result of the need for spiritual enrichment through traditional religious beliefs and practices. These were not recognised during the establishment of the park and even presently they have been ignored in the implementation of community-based conservation strategies.

The creation and management of national parks and the resources therein is a highly scientific endeavour (Colding and Folke 2001; DeGeorges and Reilly 2008; Maffi and Woodley 2010) and yet many traditional religious beliefs and practices associated with biodiversity conservation lack scientific explanations. The traditional religious beliefs and practices are based on folklore which is not based on a scientific method of inquiry. Scholars have not empirically demonstrated a link between these factors and the intention to conserve (Alvard 1993; Diamond 1986). For instance, on scientific grounds, the Irungu spirit described in this case study (Table 7.1) cannot communicate with wild animals in the Rwenzori Mountains. Similarly, there is no scientific or logical explanation for how an insect scratching its head with its hind leg or spreading its wings could mean that somebody would die. Also, various rituals were used to foretell happenings but did not show how they ensured the sustainable utilisation of resources.

What is known in the literature is that some trees cause allergies but there is no scientific relationship or logic between cutting a tree and a person cutting that tree going mad. Similarly, there is no scientific explanation for the death of someone's wife or children and the killing of young monkeys. Also, why would women become barren if they climbed far into the mountains or went to sacred sites? In addition, the scientific literature does not offer a logical explanation about why a hunter was not supposed to have sexual intercourse with his wife the night before going to hunt. Could the reason have been that the hunter sleeps better and could be more alert during hunting or he is able to save energy for hunting since sexual intercourse is biologically known as an energy-consuming activity

(MacDonald 1997)? Taboos are spiritually based, superstitious, fatalistic, and are not based on any scientific premise (Snively and Corsiglia 2001).

The factors associated with traditional religious beliefs and practices have not previously been considered in the realm of conservation science (Byarugaba 2010; Ceríaco *et al.* 2011; Maffi and Woodley 2010) and this could be the same case for the Rwenzori Mountains National Park. This is a common shortcoming of community-based approaches. Even if they are not acceptable to scientists, it does not mean that they have no influence over the natural resource use practices of local people. They need to be considered in strategies for addressing some of the problems associated with the conservation of biodiversity in rural areas. For the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, the influence of the integration of traditional religious beliefs on biodiversity resources has not yet been ascertained, but what is evident in this case study is that the integration has improved relations to some extent between the park management and the local community.

8 Conclusion

This chapter aimed at describing the process undertaken in attempts to integrate traditional religious beliefs and practices into the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park. These traditional beliefs and practices were closely linked to sacred sites. Therefore, sacred sites were identified as an avenue for involving people in the management of the park despite access to them being illegal, as were the other resources in the park.

Although sacred sites were located in the park, they are traditionally owned by the respective ridge leaders who had interests in managing them. Access, utilisation, and management of sacred sites are not expected to be exactly as they were in the traditional context prior to the creation of the park. For instance, in addition to cultural interests, the local people also expressed economic interests that were not associated with the sacred sites in a traditional context. Re-accessing these sites would involve having legalised access to them, making and maintaining access trails to them, constructing sanitation facilities at those sites, and developing some of them into tourist destinations and camping sites.

The process for the development and implementation of collaborative management of national park resources that are based on traditional religious beliefs and practices should consist of a series of consultative workshops with representatives of the different stakeholders in the community. Planning needs to be a legitimate formal process with extensive consultations carried out by a group of selected, relevant, and neutral parties, as outlined in this case study.

The major stakeholders (in this case the Uganda Wildlife Authority) need to be an important part of the process because they have a legal mandate. The traditional institutions need to be involved as they are a key interested party. One of these institutions should be an identified local organised group, preferably with a traditional management role, and one which represents community interests. Other partners could be part of the committees that could coordinate and monitor access and use. In order to bring some of the identified partners on board, more painstaking collaboration strategies, stakeholder meetings, seminars, and workshops are necessary in an attempt to integrate traditional religious beliefs and practices into the management of national parks.

Annexe 1 Focus group discussion (FGD) guide for community members close to the park

Case study on integrating Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in development or humanitarian programmes in and around the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, Western Uganda

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS AROUND THE PARK

Introduction

Dear respondents,

You are kindly invited to participate in this focus group discussion as part of a research process where Universal Institute of Research & Innovations has been engaged by the Institute of Development Studies through the Coalition for Religious Equity and Inclusive Development (CREID) to write a case study on the **"The struggles and opportunities for integrating freedom of Religion and beliefs (FoRB) in development in Humanitarian Programme".** The research is purely for gathering information for development purposes in understanding how religion and belief are integrated in development. Your responses will be handled with utmost confidentiality without at any one time singling out one individual respondent in any analysis in such a way that their responses could be recognised. Participation in this case study is voluntary and thus you can decide not to answer any question or all questions.

If you have further information and questions at any time about this research or the procedures used, you may contact Prof. Moses Muhumuza OR Dr. Mark Kaahwa.

Familiarisation phase

1 What do you understand by freedom of religion and beliefs?
2 How easy is it to integrate freedom of religion and beliefs in development work?

The traditional religions/beliefs and how they are expressed

1 What do you understand by traditional religions?
2 What do you understand by traditional beliefs?
3 Give examples of traditional religions and beliefs that you know.
4 Explain if you have freedom to express your religious beliefs.
5 Why do you think the traditional religious beliefs of the local people were not initially considered in the establishment of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park?

Approaches and strategies that were used in the integration of religious beliefs in the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

1 What traditional religious beliefs were eventually integrated in the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park?
2 What approaches and strategies were used to integrate the traditional religious beliefs in the management of the park?

Successes and failures of integration of traditional religious beliefs in the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

1 Can you point out and explain what you consider to be the successes in integrating your traditional religious beliefs in the management of the park.
2 What are some of the failures encountered during the integration of religious beliefs in the management of the park?
3 What testimonies can you give concerning the integration of traditional religious beliefs in the management of the park?

---Thanks so much for your precious time---

Annexe 2 Key informant interview guide for Uganda Wildlife staff working in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

Case study on integrating Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in development or humanitarian programmes in and around the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, Western Uganda

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR UGANDA WILDLIFE STAFF WORKING IN THE RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Introduction

Dear respondents,

You are kindly invited to participate in this key informant interview as part of a research process where Universal Institute of Research & Innovations has been engaged by the Institute of Development Studies through the Coalition for Religious Equity and Inclusive Development (CREID) to write a case study on the **"The struggles and opportunities for integrating freedom of Religion and beliefs (FoRB) in development in Humanitarian Programme".** The research is purely for gathering information for development purposes in understanding how religion and belief are integrated in development. Your responses will be handled with utmost confidentiality without at any one time singling out one individual respondent in any analysis in such a way that their responses could be recognised. Participation in this case study is voluntary and thus you can decide not to answer any question or all questions.

If you have further information and questions at any time about this research or the procedures used, you may contact Prof. Moses Muhumuza OR Dr. Mark Kaahwa.

Familiarisation phase

1 What do you understand by freedom of religion and beliefs?
2 How easy is it to integrate freedom of religion and beliefs in development work?

The traditional religions/beliefs and how they are expressed

1 What do you understand by traditional religions?
2 What do you understand by traditional beliefs?
3 Give examples of traditional religions and beliefs that you know.
4 Why do you think the traditional religious beliefs of the local people were not initially considered in the establishment of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park?

Approaches and strategies that were used in the integration of religious beliefs in the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

1 What traditional religious beliefs were eventually integrated in the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park?
2 What approaches and strategies were used to integrate the traditional religious beliefs in the management of the park?

Successes and failures of integration of traditional religious beliefs in the management of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

1 Can you point out and explain what you consider to be the successes in integrating traditional religious beliefs of the local people in the management of the park.
2 What are some of the failures encountered during the integration of religious beliefs in the management of the park?
3 What testimonies can you give concerning the integration of traditional religious beliefs in the management of the park?

---Thanks so much for your precious time---

Notes

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