On a visit to the headquarters on Volcanoes national park in Kinigi, Musanze district in mid-August ***Rwanda Dispatch*** found activities to beautify the site underway. The famous *Kwita Izina* ceremony will return to big crowds after the two previous events were low key due to Covid-19 pandemic.

This year on 2nd September 2022, twenty (20) baby gorillas will be named, an event which has been going on since 2005 with more than 350 gorillas named since. Mountain Gorilla trekking is part of the high end tourism an essential part of Rwanda's tourism model. Gorilla permits each cost 1,500USD with more than 6,000 permits sold within the first half of 2022, a sign of recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic reduced visitors significantly. Recently there have provisions by Rwanda Development Board (RDB) for local citizens to visit at a more affordable rate.



Community outreach

Janvier Kwizera the in charge of community relations at Volcanoes national park told ***Rwanda Dispatch*** that the 18th *Kwita Izina* will celebrate partnerships and be a tool for mobilization for greater conservation. The theme of this year's celebration is around giving hope to communities as they recover from the effects of the pandemic.

The park authorities carry out community outreach programs to promote conservation. This is done through debates in schools, environmental clubs, tour visits and internships for youth. Further, there are Joint coordination meetings at each administrative Sector following up on their respective areas.

The park management solves disputes between animals and people, sensitizes against encroachment oversees tourism revenue sharing and funds from partners.

To limit wondering animals, authorities have built barriers around the park with local cooperatives in charge of maintaining it and reporting encroachers and hunters. According to Kwizera, the partnerships with local communities have solved 80% of the problems. However there are still water passage gaps in the barrier through which animals can cross and big ones like elephants just step over.

To compensate for damages caused by park animals, the Special Guarantee Fund intervenes and RDB puts 5% of tourism revenues. As part of community relations, government increased tourism revenue sharing from 5% at the beginning to now 10%. Billions of francs have supported hundred of community projects. With reduced revenues during the pandemic, government continued revenue sharing with addition funds from other government resources and support by Buffet foundation.

Planned Park expansion

The park which is currently 160km squared, was previously 340sqkm. The small space sees gorilla families fighting for territory with some young are killed. There is a10 year program to expand the park beginning with a pilot in Kinigi sector. The park will be expanded by about 23%. The project which is in partnership with the African Wildlife Foundation will cost more than 260billion francs over a 10 year period.

Studies are underway on ecological impact, social economic factors like compensations of the expansion.

Villagers who talked to ***Rwanda Dispatch*** said they had heard about the planned expansion but had little information. They expressed worry about the possible relocation and loss of fertile agricultural land. There has been controversy in some African wildlife protection areas where indigenous populations have been resettled to make more room for conservation.

Cross-border patrols suspended

Volcanoes national park is in two Rwandan provinces of Western and Northern, with territory in up to 12 sectors.

It has several programs which are; Law enforcement with armed guards, Research and monitoring which follow flora and fauna, gorilla life and observes changes, Veterinary unit, life medical and autopsy, The tourism program, Community partnership and conservation with education and awareness.

Also there is the Trans-boundary cooperation as the park is part of the great Virunga trans-boundary collaboration which includes the parks of Virunga in DR Congo, Mgahinga and Bwindi in Uganda. Currently, regionally coordinated patrols are suspended because of insecurity caused by presence of rebel groups like M23, FDLR in Eastern Congo.

Each park program has NGOs working with it, for example the Diana Forsey Fund.
Alongside Gishwati-Mukura park, Volcanoes park is a biosphere reserve with UNESCO world heritage status.

While the Volcanoes park is closely associated with the world famous mountain gorillas, there are other animals like elephants, antelopes, golden monkeys, small carnivores and birds.

However for tourism, Volcanoes park specializes in mountain gorillas trekking, mountain climbing and visiting Nyiramakibiri tomb. Other attractions in Rwanda can be viewed in other national parks like Akagera which has the big five and Nyungwe park which has 13 monkey species.