

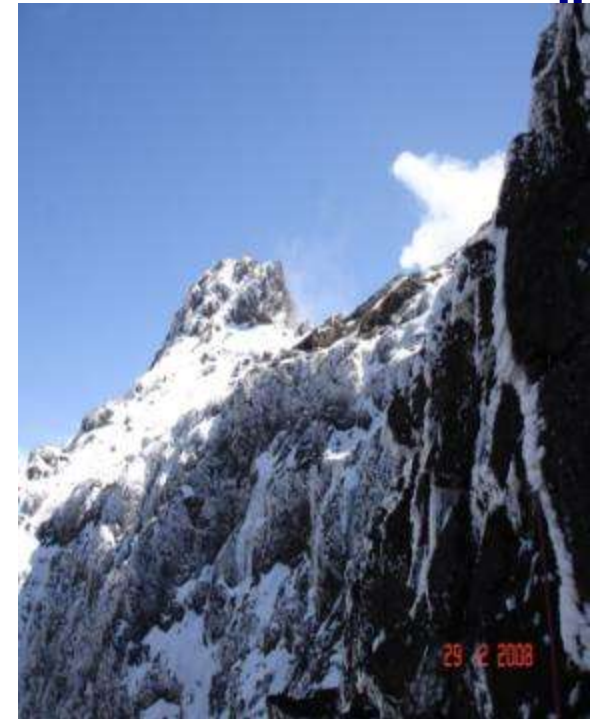
The role of cultural values in the conservation of the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

Olivia Biira and Moses Muhumuza



Background

- Establishment of Protected Areas (PAs) was only based on biodiversity values with little or no consideration for human based values.
- Their management have been characterized by conflicts between neighboring communities due to lack of interest, resulting in;
 - negative attitudes
 - active or silent resistance
- Recent experiences recognize that local people are indispensable from PAs for long term integrity of PAs
- A number of efforts have been initiated such as awareness raising and community enterprises to interest neighboring communities in PA management
- However negative attitudes and conflicts continue to characterize community – PA relations.



Key words

- Culture - sum total of the ways in which society preserves, identifies, organizes and expresses itself.
- Values - a set of ideals that are normatively shared among the community. They are shaped by a number of factors e.g. religion, history and politics.
- Conservation – wise use of resources for the benefit of the present and future generations.

Culture, values & Conservation Project

- In an attempt to garner community support, Uganda Wildlife Authority, in partnership with Fauna and Flora International designed a culture, values conservation Project. implementation began in 2006, in L.Mburo & Rwenzori Mountains National Parks.
- The project goal is to demonstrate how integration of cultural values in PA management can improve relations with local communities.
- In RMNP cultural analysis identified sacred sites as key cultural values
- More research was undertaken to understand how to integrate their management in the framework of RMNP.

Study Area

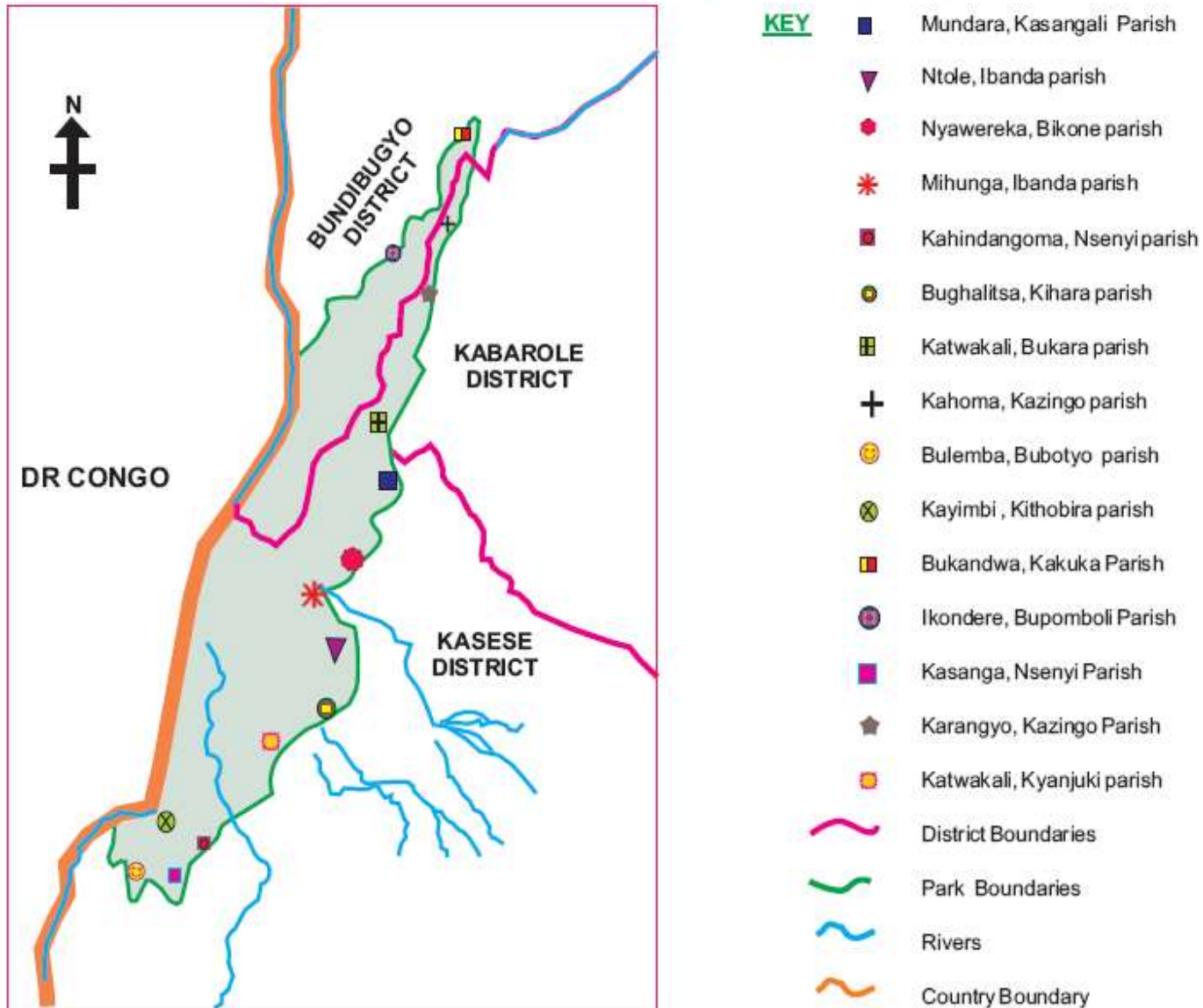


Characteristics of the area

- Terrain above 2200m in the Rwenzori Mountains
- Covers 996 km²
- Has a rich biodiversity
- A world heritage site

Location of sacred sites

Map of Rwenzori Mountain National Park (RMNP) showing Sacred Sites



Methods

- Individual interviews
- Expert interviews
- Impromptu group interviews
- Focus group discussions



Different methods enabled independent data triangulation to improve validity and reliability of data.

Data were manually analyzed.

Results

The Rwenzori mountains referred to as a sacred place.

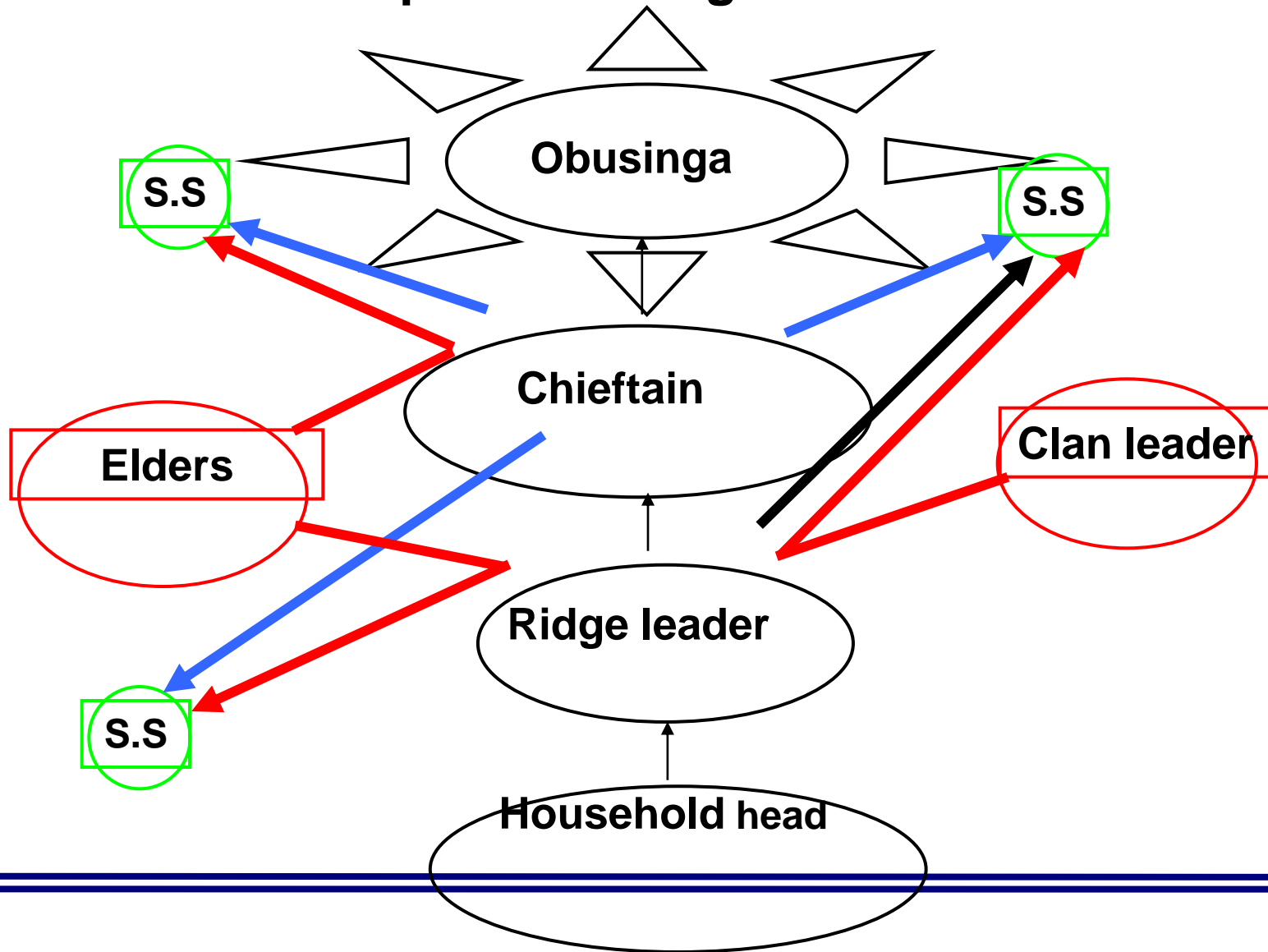
Sacred sites appear in form of;

- Trees- Kaghoma site
- Shrubs - Ntole site
- Hills - Mundara site
- Stones - Nyawereka & Kayimbi sites



Results Cont.

Ownership and management of sacred sites



Results cont.

Uses and values of sacred sites

- Places where gods reside.
- Places for rituals (worship & sacrifices) for:
 - Health
 - Peace
 - Cleansing
 - Rainfall

Results Cont.

Conservation and cultural values

- **Totemism**- each clan has a totem that is respected and protected.
 - Baswagha - the leopard.
 - Abahira - a guinea fowl.
 - Abathangi - the Chimpanzee.
 - Abahambu - the Red eyed dove.
 - Ababinga - the Baboon.
 - Abasukali - the Bush back.
 - Abalengha- Black and white colobus monkey

Banishment, fines, and hard labor as punishments to anyone who disrespected a totem.



Conservation and cultural values cont.

- Access to sacred sites was well regulated;
 - Only ridge leaders and Chieftains had direct access. Others had to seek permission.
 - On return they had to report to ridge leaders/Chieftain.
 - Some places were completely reserved e.g the peaks
- Some trees were protected as homes of gods (e.g. Omuhati – *Afrizian afraizio*).
- Rituals and sacrifices were done at specific times of the year.
- Collection of resources was restricted to some members of the community.

Conservation and cultural values cont.

- Herbalists were not supposed to rotate around the herbal tree.
- Hunting of some animals was totally forbidden.
- Wild animals wouldn't be killed for attacking a person.



Discussions

- Sacred sites support high levels of biodiversity.
- Taboos, traditions and traditional administrative structures are key to natural resources management

Culture is a key ingredient that promotes conservation.

- It is one way of interesting the local people to embrace conservation objectives

Discussions

- Rural poor as custodians of tradition
- Culture and conservation is a complementary approach.
- Cultural values versus biodiversity values; traditional versus scientific understanding



Conclusion and Recommendation

Sacred sites achieve conservation goals through a stricter controlled access to natural resources through ridge leaders, as well as strong beliefs and taboos attached to them.

Recommendation

- More research is needed to understand intrinsic aspects of culture and conservation.
- Recognize cultural wisdom of local people in addressing challenges of biodiversity conservation

Mwasingya

