



## **Community Conservation Meetings and Workshop To Benefit Conservation of Gishwati National Forest**

### **Collaboration between Community Conservation (CC) and Forest of Hope Association (FHA)**

#### **Summary of Activities June 2<sup>nd</sup> to June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

This June 2014, Forest of Hope Association (FHA) arranged a series of community meetings for Dr. Robert Horwich, Director and Peter Clay, Associate, of Community Conservation (CC) in the USA. These meetings were within Nyabirasi, Ruhango, Kigeyo and Mushonyi Sectors, precisely in Nyagahinika, Rukaragata, Rurara, Rundoyi, Gihira, and Mubuga Cells. These are the Sectors and Cells within Rutsiro District which surround and touch upon the Gishwati National Forest. FHA Coordinator Thierry Aimable Inzirayineza provided oversight and coordination for all activities during the two weeks of community outreach. A leaders meeting with Executive Secretaries and Agronomists from the Sectors and Cells around the forest preceded the community meetings. We have met local community at five sites: Mubuga, Kinihira, Bitenga, Rundoyi, and Nyagahinika. Following the community meetings, which were attended by over 500 people, FHA and CC hosted a workshop on community-based conservation at the Health Center in Kinihira Village, Rukaragata Cell, Kigeyo Sector.

The goal of the collaboration between FHA and CC is to build on the achievements of FHA and further animate surrounding communities so that Gishwati may become a model for Rwanda of how communities may actively join in protection and stewardship of their forests. Two main objectives support this goal. The first is to generate excitement among local stakeholders by learning of other communities around the world who are actively protecting their forests, including some of the different ways this is being done. The second is to facilitate an inclusive, participatory process of awareness and empowerment for local communities that may lead to formation of one or more community based organizations focused on protecting Gishwati Forest and helping local people. If such groups form, they will be strong allies of FHA and of the Rwandan government.

The leaders meeting took place at the FHA Field Station in Kinihira Village, Kigeyo Sector, Rukaragata Cell, on June 6<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Horwich has worked for the past 30 years in 15 countries and with 26 projects. His work is focused on how communities can mobilize effectively to protect their forests. In the leaders meeting he presented a number of examples of effective community conservation programs from Belize, Peru, India and Ghana, showing how people everywhere are effectively protecting forests. Peter Clay then spoke about Gishwati Forest. He emphasized many benefits conferred by the natural forest for the people who live around it. Mr. Clay spoke about the opportunity for local people to create one or more new community organizations to help protect and restore the natural forest of Gishwati. He pointed out that, as the forest is becoming a national park, the best time for the community to become active and advocate for a proper role in protection and management of Gishwati is now.

After the presentation, Thierry Aimable, FHA Coordinator, summarized the main points of the talk in Kinyarwanda and generated an active discussion amongst participants. In the discussion, participants suggested raising local awareness by starting with the community representatives and local leaders. One approach might be to create a federation that includes existing cooperatives, other community groups and stakeholders. This federation can help evaluate how each area around the forest is being protected and coordinate activities for communities that benefit conservation. We asked the leaders for their help in mobilizing people to attend community meetings that will help them to take the next steps for protecting the Gishwati Forest Reserve.



*FHA Coordinator Thierry Inzirayineza with Mr. Baptiste, Executive Secretary of Kigeyo Sector, Dr. Robert Horwich and Executive Secretaries of Rukaragata and Gihira Cells before the Community Conservation meeting at FHA Field Station on 6 June, 2014*

The following week, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> community meetings were held at five locations around the forest. In collaboration with local leaders we have met a large number of local people residing in all Villages around Gishwati. During these meetings, Dr. Horwich and Mr. Clay spoke about the power of communities to protect their forests and help their people, giving convincing examples related to his 30 years of experience working with communities. Mr. Clay emphasized that this is the time for communities around the forest to become active and organized. He discussed with local people that Gishwati Forest is becoming a new national park and needs the strong support of local people to help protect it, for the benefit of all stakeholders. The FHA Coordinator then was addressing the gathering about FHA's Community Forest Protection Initiative, emphasizing why their help in protecting the forest was so important and showing that this will be the next step to strengthen this initiative. The reception for these meetings was excellent and there was exceptional enthusiasm and interest shown by those who attended. In the discussion following each presentation, people clearly expressed their understanding of the many benefits that Gishwati natural forest provides to them and were excited about the possibility of organizing a new community organization to help both the forest and the people around it.



*FHA Coordinator Thierry Aimable Inzirayineza greets a participant at the meeting For residents of Rundoyi Cell, Ruhango Sector*



*Dr. Robert Horwich of Community Conservation speaks with residents of Rukatagata Cell, along with FHA Coordinator Thierry Aimable Inzirayineza*



*David Mpogazi, SEDO/Mubuga cell, speaks to the meeting participants in Mubuga Cell, with Dr. Robert Horwich and Peter Clay of Community Conservation*





*FHA Coordinator Thierry and Peter Clay of Community Conservation meet with residents of Nyagahinika Cell, Kigeyo Sector*

On June 17<sup>th</sup> the Community Conservation Workshop was held in Kinyihira. The workshop participants were: Executive Secretaries and their representatives from Sectors and Cells, heads of local cooperatives and associations and other community leaders. Dr. Robert Horwich, Director and Peter Clay, Associate, represented Community Conservation (CC) and FHA President, Madeleine NYIRATUZA, Coordinator Thierry Aimable INZIRAYINEZA and the leader of the Community Agents, Jean Damascene UWANYIRUJURU, represented the Forest of Hope Association.

After welcoming participants to the workshop, the FHA coordinator briefly summarized the program and accomplishments of FHA over the past six years. Dr. Robert Horwich, Director of Community Conservation, then gave a presentation on how community-based conservation has worked in different countries around the world. Dr. Horwich focused on the benefits people receive from having community forests of native trees and from forming strong community organizations to help protect their forests. The presentation ended with a focus on Gishwati Forest and the opportunity for communities around Gishwati to form new organizations to protect their forest, in collaboration with FHA and the Rwandan government.

The next activity was the naming of community strengths, as a means of exciting and empowering the participants to think positively and creatively about the ways they could increase their activities and effectiveness in protecting and helping to restore Gishwati Forest. The strengths that the workshop participants mentioned included improving infrastructure such as roads, schools and health centers, knowledge of how to form strong cooperatives, associations and other community groups, good governance with good policies and significant goals, strong collaboration of locals with the Forest of Hope Association to raise local awareness about environmental protection in general and finally the Gishwati Forest itself.

Next the FHA Coordinator divided the workshop participants into four groups. Each group included people from different villages or cells to increase mutual understanding among the communities around the forest. After choosing one person as the spokesperson, the first activity for each group was to consider where new community forests of native trees might be created near or next to the existing Gishwati natural forest, using small maps with the outline of the forest shown.

The next activity, in the same small groups, was to gather many ideas for increasing community participation in the protection and management of Gishwati Forest. They were asked to decide on what the next steps should be for creating community organizations around the forest to work in partnership with FHA and the Rwandan government for the protection of Gishwati. Finally, they considered who the key people should be who will animate this process and what the next steps are to continue after the workshop is concluded.



*Workshop participants during the groups exercise*

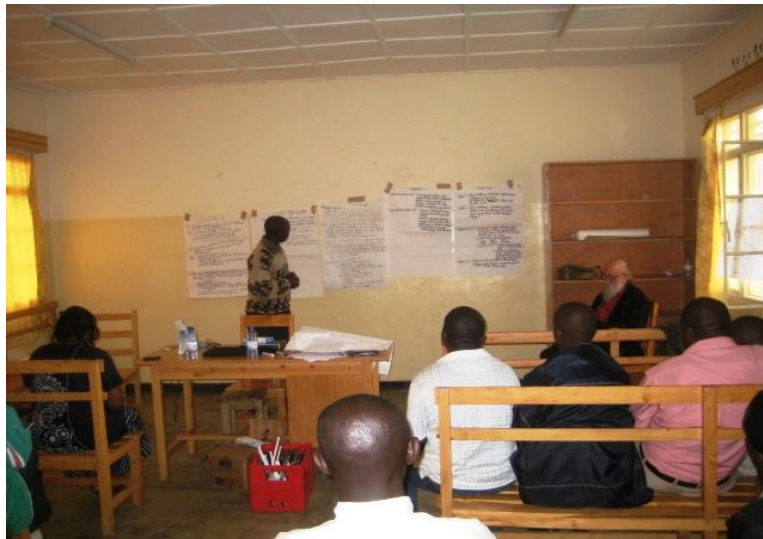
The final portion of the workshop brought all participants back together to share what was discussed in the smaller groups. Many ideas were brought before the group for increasing community engagement with forest protection and for enhancing a sense of “ownership” of Gishwati Forest among the people living around it. The workshop participants suggested creating community forests in plots owned by the government, in pastures owned by local communities and to mix some native trees with their crops as agro-forestry, considering their impact on other crops. They also suggested that it is better to start with nurseries of native trees and then distribute the seedlings among the local population. Afterwards, people may start to plant them in their pastures and the government land after discussing this with local governance.

They also mentioned that they need training in forest protection and to maximize sensitization in local people to minimize the conflict between people and the forest. There is human-wildlife conflict due to crop raiding by primates and illegal activities conducted by people, though much reduced, still continue within the forest. Participants spoke of the target to work as a team in other activities related to both forest protection and local development and the need to strengthen this program.

On the question of what the next steps should be for creating community organizations around the forest, all participants suggested forming groups at the village level, considering that people in each village are close to each other. For the group activities they mentioned: Sharing ideas about the importance of Gishwati forest, raising local awareness about the need for protection of Gishwati, expanding the forest cover by creating nurseries of native trees and planting them around Gishwati and building a museum about Gishwati’s history and biodiversity for tourists. They also discussed initiating eco-tourism activities such as visits to cooperatives that produce handicrafts, training for local guides, building lodging for visitors and improving local health care facilities.

Dr. Horwich and Peter Clay of Community Conservation and the FHA Coordinator have appreciated the participation of local community representatives in activities and thank them, and all participants, for

attending and for discussing how they are going to help local communities to strengthen conservation of the Gishwati Forest Reserve.



*Workshop participants sharing what they had discussed in the smaller groups*

In her speech, FHA President Mrs. Madeleine Nyiratuza, encouraged everyone to continue to meet and discuss the best ways for new groups to form, for other forest protection actions, and activities to arise from the communities living around Gishwati Forest. She also mentioned that FHA is confident that local people are strong enough to protect their own forest, Gishwati, and added that what remains is to put their force together working in groups and doing activities aimed at local development and environment protection in general.



*FHA President Mrs. Madeleine Nyiratuza speaks to the workshop participants*

Closing the workshop Kigeyo Sector executive secretary representative, Mr. Felix Nzaramba, mentioned that local leaders in the four sectors will put significant effort into mobilizing communities to create groups that will strengthen forest protection. He promised that they would provide ongoing follow-up so that this process will be successful.