



PARC NATIONAL DES

VIRUNGA

RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

Virunga National Park written evidence to the IDC inquiry into fragility and development in the Democratic Republic of Congo

I) This submission aims to:

- Highlight the work that Virunga National Park and the Virunga Alliance are undertaking to help build security and stability in Eastern Congo, through sustainable development of environmental resources.
- To highlight examples of successful development projects that have been implemented with support from the UK government.
- To show the tangible impact that has been made through the National Park's development activities, so that UK support can be targeted to projects that deliver a long term and sustainable future for local communities.

II) Background:

Virunga National Park

1. The Virunga National Park (Parc National des Virunga), makes up 7,800-square-kilometre (3,000 sq mi) that stretches from the Virunga Mountains in the South to the Rwenzori Mountains in the North, in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Virunga National Park borders Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and Rwenzori Mountains National Park and Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda. The park was established in 1925 as Africa's first National Park and has been a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site since 1979. The park is managed by the Congolese National Park Authorities, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) and its partner the Virunga Foundation. In recent years poaching and the Congo Civil War have seriously damaged the park's wildlife population.

The Virunga Alliance

2. In 2011 ICCN and the Virunga Foundation entered into a long term co-management agreement, which is the basis for an ambitious plan to use the park's natural resources for sustainable socio-economic development to secure its future and enhance peace and stability in the region. The plan, developed by a large community of institutions - the Virunga Alliance - involves expanding tourism infrastructure and a major investment in hydroelectric power to supply electricity to a significant proportion of the park's local community of over 4 million people. The planned multi-year development program will boost agri-business, creating at least 60,000 jobs – with most proceeds re-invested into local development projects.

3. The Virunga Alliance believes that economic opportunities and access to social services are the cornerstone to maintaining a long-term solution to conflict and violence. Working at the intersection of civil society, private sector and state institutions, the Virunga Alliance aims to deliver large-scale opportunities to tens of thousands of Congolese men and women who are ready to rebuild the region and redefine the country's future.

III) Issues raised by the inquiry:

What difficulties do DRC's high levels of fragility and instability present for DFID's efforts to reduce poverty? In light of these, how effective has the UK Government's work in DRC been on peace-building, democracy (including on elections), and strengthening and building resilience into governance structures and institutions?

4. There are a range of development and security challenges in the DRC as a whole, and in eastern Congo in particular. Virunga National Park, situated within North Kivu, has been the site of periodic conflict driven by illegal extraction and short-sighted foreign exploitation of its vast natural resources. This has left the four million people in communities surrounding the park in extreme poverty, with weak public institutions and a chronically defective public infrastructure. The ability of state institutions to uphold the rule of law is largely eroded, contributing further to instability and armed conflict.

5. It is the aim of the Virunga Alliance partners to work to find new, sustainable approaches to reduce corruption, weak governance, armed conflict, poverty and unemployment in DRC. Actions and initiatives by state and international aid organisations over the past 15 years have largely failed to address these issues effectively and with any degree of permanence. By contrast, so far we have seen a range of positive developments stemming from the work of the Virunga Alliance.

Hydroelectric power

6. The central focus of the Virunga Alliance's socio-economic development program is on renewable energy, stemming from Virunga National Park's enormous hydrological resources. These hydroelectric projects have been made possible through significant financial support from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the European Union and the UK government's development finance institution, CDC Group plc.

7. Whilst it's estimated that around 15% of the DRC as a whole has access to electricity, in the wider Kivu area, this figure drops to just 3% electrification. The Virunga Alliance is committed to changing this for ordinary people by bringing safe, clean and affordable energy to communities all over the region.

8. In 2010, the park's first hydro-electric program was launched. It is now fully operational and can generate 400kw for the benefit of the 3,600 homes in Mutwanga, a town on the park's northern border. Managed by the park authority, the Mutwanga hydro-electric facility provides electricity free of charge

to schools and hospitals. The Mutwanga plant also provides much needed electricity for industry in Mutsora, a town of over 30,000 people.

9. In December 2015 the Matebe Hydroelectric Plant in Rutshuru was opened. Constructed with funding from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation¹, Matebe Power Station is set to produce 13.6 MW of clean electricity, which will kickstart the green economy and over 12,000 sustainable jobs for people in and around the region of Rutshuru². UK Minister Nick Hurd, who attended the opening of the Matebe Power station, stated “Affordable, reliable, electricity means children can do their homework after dark, women and girls are safer at night and families are not forced to rely on expensive and toxic kerosene. This is why this investment is so important; it will transform the prospects of hundreds of thousands of people as well as boost the growth of the DRC, creating new markets for Britain to trade with.”³

10. In March 2016 the UK government announced that funding from CDC Group plc, the UK’s development finance institution, was to be committed to help support the park’s continued work in increasing access to sustainable electricity. CDC’s investment loan of up to \$9 million, with capital made available by DFID, will help to transform the lives of local people and businesses. This investment offers great hope for the future, moving towards meeting objective 7 of the sustainable development goals, as well as the British Government’s “Energy for Africa” campaign, aiming to speed up access to energy in sub-Saharan Africa and to achieve universal access by 2030.

11. Planning has also begun for a third hydro-electric plant, to be commissioned in the town of Lubero. The new plant will generate 1.1 MW of power that will supply energy to more than 7,000 homes. A larger 12.6MW plant will also be commissioned for the benefit of the hard hit community of Rutshuru. Some 140,000 users are expected to benefit. The aim is for an additional 80MW are set to come online by 2025, providing power to almost a million users.

12. By providing access to electricity for local people, the Virunga Alliance also aims to offer an alternative to expensive and unsustainable charcoal, which is a often used by local communities as fuel. The illegal charcoal trade is a significant challenge for the park, it has resulted in vast areas of forest being destroyed through the burning trees for the production of charcoal.

Water reservoir site

13. DFID has supported the decentralisation of the DRC’s water sector. In March 2016, Minister Nick Hurd attended the opening of a water reservoir site, created through collaboration between the Provincial government of North Kivu, the REGIDESO, the operator and Mercy Corps. The reservoir provides a regular daily water supply to 130,000 previously unserved people in Goma and is a hugely positive development for local communities, in particular for women and girls.

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-congodemocratic-buffett-idUSKCN0QP13V20150820>

² <http://af.reuters.com/article/drcNews/idAFL8N14526520151216>

³ <http://www.cdcgroup.com/Media/News/News-CDC-investment-brings-electricity-to-Eastern-Congo/>

Sustainable Fisheries

14. Virunga National Park has been working closely with fishing communities around Lake Edward to help maintain sustainable levels of fishing activity in order to preserve healthy fish stocks. With the lake producing about ten thousand tons of fish annually, this is one of Virunga's top conservation priorities. Forty thousand people make up several fishing communities on the banks of Lake Edward who depend on healthy fish stocks for food and employment. Virunga National Park invested resources in building strong, functional relationships with the local fishing communities and associations.

15. Cold storage facilities would enable the industry to access a larger part of the value chain. The Park's investments in hydro-electricity will benefit the fishing industry by boosting refrigeration capacity along the supply chain. These investments will open new markets and increase revenue. The new fishery management plan is expected to boost employment by 200 percent. Fishing is expected to rise to 16,000 tons/year equivalent to \$64 million dollars.

Tourism

16. In the 1960's to 1980's, Virunga National Park was the francophone equivalent of Serengeti/Kruger as a world class tourism destination. Yet, since then, conflict and illegal resource extraction (poaching, encroaching and forest clearance) have taken a heavy toll. The Park has survived these significant challenges, and in 2009 tourism was re-launched around the Park's principal attractions of gorilla trekking and volcano hiking. This period saw 5,800 guests (worth \$1.75m) visit Virunga, until the Park was forced to close due to a resurgence of armed conflict just four months after the park's luxury accommodation at Mikeno lodge opened in January 2012. By comparison Rwandan gorilla tourism has ~11,000 tourists per year, worth \$24 million⁴. Uganda's gorilla tourism is of a similar size to Rwanda's.

17. Virunga National Park's massive potential for tourism was relaunched in January 2014 after the end of the civil war. A secure Virunga could generate billions of dollars in revenue for the country. It is a clear growth industry for eastern Congo and a sustainable future for the region. Virunga's tourist industry is expected to grow 90% annually. This projected growth could drive expansion of the park's accommodation to 120 beds and drive significant employment in the hospitality industry. The hope is that Virunga can be fully integrated into the thriving east Africa tourism industry and no longer an off-the-beaten-path destination. In addition to the indirect economic growth that tourism can generate through the local commerce, handicraft production, and private transport, tourism revenue could eventually contribute about USD \$5.5M to the park's community Development Program.

How effective has DFID's work on gender equality been in DRC, including its work to eliminate violence against women and girls and to empower adolescent girls? What could DFID be doing better?

18. DFID's work in assisting with legislative moves to allow for decentralisation of the water and energy sectors in North Kivu have assisted in helping to bring new water and energy supplies to local villages.

⁴ Based on a daily visitor rate of 30, permits at \$750/person and the average tourist spend of \$200/day x 7 days

Access to clean water is a particular issue affecting women and girls, who are often required to travel long distances to gather supplies of fresh water for their families.

19. Virunga National Park is committed to empowering women in DRC. In 2015, the park opened up applications for women to join the park's ranger programme, leading to a number of talented and committed female rangers rising through the ranks⁵. Employees at the park's hydro-facilities include female engineers and key staff members. Additionally, Virunga's Fallen Rangers fund⁶ is working to help secure work for the widows of rangers killed in action, to ensure that they can continue to support their families. This includes the development of a sewing workshop, which will allow widows to work on handicrafts that can be sold locally or to the park's tourists.

How much success has DFID's programme on private sector development in DRC, including Élan RDC, had in supporting jobs and livelihoods?

20. As mentioned above, DFID is supporting the work of DRC Government decentralisation by assisting the Virunga Alliance to bring sustainable private sector investment and participation to North Kivu. Two major areas of focus are the water and energy sectors. Increased decentralisation and liberalisation of these two sectors is essential in meeting the DRC's Sustainable Development Goals. The UK government has assisted in the liberalisation of energy laws in North Kivu, in order to allow the Virunga Alliance to begin the production and distribution of electricity in the region. This has been achieved through the establishment of a set of Provincial concession agreements, signed by the Governor of the province of North Kivu, Julien Paluku. The signing of this agreement was attended by the UK Minister, and marks a positive step forward in the Virunga Alliance's aim to roll out electrification to the wider North Kivu region. The rural population of Rutshuru will be one of the first areas to benefit from this agreement.

21. Access to electricity through hydro-power will boost the local agricultural transformation industry. A recent report from Bloomberg identified the impact that the hydro-electric facilities in Virunga have had on local businesses; allowing Sicovir, a Democratic Republic of Congo palm-oil processor, to expand their business and invest \$4.5 million in a processing facility that provides work for 400 people and can produce as much as 30 metric tons of soap a day.⁷

22. The CDC Group's Investment Director, Daudi Lelijveld, noted that "800 direct jobs have been created in infrastructure and 420 in rural industry" through agro-industry developments. Mr. Lelijveld also made clear the focus on "reintegrating 5000-8000 ex-combatants into productive activities by 2022."⁸ It is hoped that a minimum of 60,000 new jobs will be created in North Kivu as a result of investment in agro-business opportunities. In order to ensure that development of the Virunga Alliance energy programme can continue, it will be essential to have the continued support of the UK government and DFID.

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/15/gorillas-guns-volcanoes-congo-virunga-park>

⁶ <https://virunga.org/projects/fallen-rangers-fund/>

⁷ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-08-29/congo-palm-oil-startup-sees-growth-opportunity-in-unstable-east>

⁸ <http://www.cdccgroup.com/Media/News/News-CDC-investment-brings-electricity-to-Eastern-Congo/>

What has DFID's work on mining sector reform achieved?

23. In 2012, territory within Virunga National Park's borders faced exploration for oil from the British Company SOCO international, whose Block V concession included areas of the National Park surrounding Lake Edward. The granting of exploration rights was in direct contravention to Congolese law, which upholds the protection of UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Virunga National Park from oil and mineral exploration. The actions of SOCO International, in seeking to explore for oil within a World Heritage Site, undermined the rule of law. Additionally, allegations of bribery and corruption (made by *Virunga: The Movie*⁹ and supported by investigations by Human Rights Watch¹⁰ and Global Witness¹¹) surrounding SOCO's contractors on the ground provoked significant concerns, and were submitted to the UK's Serious Fraud Office.

24. Virunga National Park recognises the assistance of the British Government, including the FCO and APPG for the Great Lakes, in helping to bring public attention to the threat the National Park faced during this time.

Film campaign against oil exploration in Virunga National Park

25. In 2014 a documentary film, *Virunga: The Movie*, detailing the challenges the park faced by conflict and resource exploration, was launched globally on the online streaming platform NETFLIX. The film played a critical role in raising public awareness of Virunga National Park, the work being done by staff and rangers to protect the park's critically endangered mountain gorilla population, and highlighting the activities of SOCO International. The *Virunga: The Movie* film team campaigned to prevent SOCO International from continuing its illegal exploration of Block V. The film team worked in collaboration with many partners in this effort.

26. In June 2014, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) announced that it had made a conditional agreement with SOCO not to explore for oil in the park¹². However, the film team raised concerns that the wording of this agreement was extremely weak and contained a lack of detail to hold the oil company to account¹³. There was particular concern that the agreement, made in private without local consultation, would lead to a redrawing of the boundaries of the National Park. Indeed, SOCO International's Deputy CEO Roger Cagle's spoke to The Times on 11th June, stating: "if the DRC wanted to benefit from its oil, it could even apply to UNESCO to remove Virunga from the list of World Heritage Sites. It forces DRC and UNESCO to come to some kind of accommodation, as has been demonstrated in many other places where they have accommodated things in world heritage sites by redrawing boundaries and by agreeing to certain activities being conducted in certain ways"¹⁴.

⁹ <http://virungamovie.com/>

¹⁰ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/04/dr-congo-investigate-attacks-oil-project-critics>

¹¹ <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/democratic-republic-congo/soco-in-virunga/>

¹² <https://www.socointernational.com/soco-and-wwf-agree-way-forward-on-future-activity->

¹³ <http://virungamovie.com/blog/details/8001/soco-internationals-latest-move-in-virunga-national-park-leaves-more-questions-than-it-answers>

27. Additionally, SOCO International's conditional agreement to leave the park did not address the serious and detailed allegations that had been raised concerning SOCO sub-contractors and supporters in eastern Congo. It was not until March 2015 that SOCO announced an investigation by Clifford Chance into some of the allegations presented in *Virunga: The Movie*.¹⁵ A number of high profile organisations took steps to divest shares and pension funds from SOCO International. This includes the Church of England, which divested its £1.6 million stake¹⁶. The Ethical Investment Advisory Group publicly stated its dissatisfaction “with SOCO’s failure to adequately address the concerns raised in the movie and subsequent reports.”¹⁷

28. In November 2015 SOCO made a public statement that the company no longer held the license for the Block V concession in which they had been exploring for oil. The Block V concession is now unallocated, and the park will continue to work with partners to monitor the status of this and other mineral and oil concessions which cover Virunga National Park.

IV) Impact from media and film projects

29. *Virunga: The Movie* brought high profile supporters, including the film’s producer Leonardo DiCaprio, and was shown to key audiences at screenings at EU, Belgian, Dutch and UK Parliaments, on Capitol Hill, the German Development Ministry and the UK Development Ministry. The film campaign also generated engagement with a number of eminent organizations including; UNESCO, the UN Development Program, the EU, the World Bank, Royal Foundation, United for Wildlife, Transparency International, and Virgin Unite.

30. Since the film’s launch in April 2014, there have been over 600 global media articles on Virunga including: CNN, BBC, *LA Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Sun*, *The Guardian*, as well as 10 pieces in the *New York Times* alone, including a front page feature. In addition, there were multiple appearances on international TV channels and radio stations, including CNN, Al Jazeera English, Al Jazeera America, MSNBC, PBS, NPR and CCTV Africa as well as in-depth articles in *Der Spiegel*, *Men’s Journal* and the aforementioned Huffington Post Op-Ed by Archbishop Tutu, Sir Richard Branson and Howard G. Buffett.¹⁸

31. Media attention has worked to shine a spotlight on an area of the world that has been overlooked by the public for so many years. The media interest surrounding the film brought extensive coverage about Virunga National Park and the activities of the Virunga Alliance, including a much- expanded interest in the park’s tourism industry. Virunga National Park was featured in the *New York Times*’ “Top

¹⁴ <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/environment/article4114929.ece>

¹⁵ <http://virungamovie.com/blog/details/12304/soco-international-announce-investigation-into-allegations-by-virunga-the-movie>

¹⁶ <http://virungamovie.com/blog/details/13793/the-church-of-england-divests-its-16-million-stake-in-soco-international>

¹⁷ <http://virungamovie.com/blog/details/12295/teamvirunga-progress>

¹⁸ A detailed report on the impact of *Virunga: The Movie* can be found at <http://www.docimpactaward.org/files/virunga.pdf>

52 places to go in 2016”¹⁹, Town & Country’s Top 100 Best Hotels in the World²⁰ and a Condé Nast China piece²¹, demonstrating Virunga’s global reach. More importantly, since the film’s launch in April 2014, tourism in the park has increased and the number of visitors is currently at an all time high. This could not have been achieved at such pace without the film and it’s surrounding publicity.

V) Conclusions:

32. Through the work of the Virunga Alliance, Virunga National Park and key partners are building a more peaceful and secure future for the people who live within a day’s walk of the park’s borders. Yet Virunga National Park continues to face challenges, including the risk of violence that is faced by the park’s ranger team²². The success of our work will be dependent upon the ongoing support of the international community and the public. Despite the challenges, we are hopeful that we will be able to continue to build positive relationships with local communities. By helping to build key infrastructure, as well as new opportunities for investment, the park and the Virunga Alliance believe that DRC can begin overcome decades of poverty, political instability and conflict.

¹⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/07/travel/places-to-visit.html>

²⁰ <http://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/travel-guide/news/g1521/tc-travel-100-best-hotels-in-the-world/?slide=52>

²¹ <http://www.cntraveller.com/recommended/active/volcano-trekking-holidays-and-tours/page/nyiragongo,-democratic-republic-of-congo>

²² Over 150 rangers have been killed in the line of duty in the last 10 years.