

IMPROVING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE FOR PEOPLE AND LIVESTOCK TO AID APE CONSERVATION

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The critically endangered mountain gorillas of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park contracted scabies, traced to surrounding human communities with limited access to modern health services, and high population densities. Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH), a grassroots NGO was established in 2003 to deal with this issue. A Population, Health and Environment (PHE) approach is being used to reduce threats to mountain gorillas. Through a network of community conservation health volunteers, CTPH conducts education campaigns and strengthens community based health care to promote family planning, and prevent and control TB, scabies, HIV and dysentery as well as improve hygiene and sanitation particularly to homes that regularly interface with gorillas. A similar model is being used to establish a network of community conservation animal health workers to sustainably improve the health of the livestock in the community. These networks are becoming model change agents for the PHE approach while building strong links between the community, local health centers and Uganda Wildlife Authority. The community-based network has potential to enable earlier detection of disease outbreaks in the community and their livestock, thus allowing targeted investigations to detect cross species disease transmission between people, gorillas and livestock. This includes investigation of disease causing organisms in gorilla fecal samples regularly collected by park staff and HUGO (Human and Gorilla Conflict Resolution Team) community volunteers, who also look out for gorilla clinical signs. As part of the early warning system for disease outbreaks, results are shared between wildlife, medical, veterinary and other key stakeholders.

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