



Date 11 July 2020

Healthy habitats, healthy people in south western Uganda

Start

This World Population Day, we are proud to announce the start of a [new project](#) focussed on improving human and environmental health, by ensuring that healthy wetlands support the people and the Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes of Uganda's Rukiga District. The Endangered Wildlife Trust, the International Crane Foundation, the Margaret Pyke Trust, and Rugarama Hospital are collaborating with local stakeholders to provide the sustainable livelihoods and family planning information and services that local women and men have lobbied for. By combining human health services with wetland restoration and other conservation actions, we can secure long-term health for both the wetlands and the people that rely on them for their water, food, and livelihoods.

World Population Day has been marked every year since 11 July 1987, the day the United Nations Population Fund chose as the symbolic “*Day of Five Billion*”. In the 33 years since then, the global human population has risen from 5 billion to 7.8 billion people. These population statistics will gain coverage today, but of more importance to the project partners and the people of Rukiga District, are these lesser known statistics:

- 28% of married Ugandan women of reproductive age want to stop having children, or delay having children, but are not using contraception. This is because they face barriers to exercising their right to family planning. We want to support them to be able to exercise that right should they choose to do so.
- 87% of global wetlands have been lost in the last 300 years, and Uganda’s wetland cover has reduced by 30% in the last two decades. The livelihoods of one billion people around the globe, including those in the Rukiga District, rely on increasingly threatened wetlands. We must conserve these wetlands, which are critical for food and water security, biodiversity, flood prevention, water resource management, and as a carbon sink.
- In the last 20 years, the number of Grey Crowned Cranes *has fallen by up to 80%*. To conserve Uganda’s National Bird, we must conserve the wetland habitats in which they nest, and prevent wetland loss and fragmentation, which are the most prevalent drivers of the decline in numbers.

The multi-party project has been developed over two years, and as a result of working closely with local people, to build a partnership which responds to the connected challenges of increasing human pressures on wetland health. Sarah Uwimbabazi is the Margaret Pyke Trust’s nurse managing the project’s family planning training. She explained, “*Barriers to family planning are the obstacles preventing women and girls from accessing contraception. In Rukiga District, these barriers range from the limited access to reproductive health information, to the long distances people must walk to reach clinics, contraceptive myths, the negative attitudes of men, and a lack of trained nurses. Our project’s clinical outreach and family planning training and public education will respond to these challenges*”.

The International Crane Foundation / Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership’s community education specialist, Phionah Orishaba, explained further, “*Restricted access to family planning means unintended pregnancies and greater infant and maternal health issues. But a woman with choice can decide if and when to have children, and can take up livelihood opportunities, having a more secure future. The cranes are very important to local people, and we know they need the wetlands to nest, but there are few jobs, and often little choice other than draining wetlands to grow food. We knew we needed to do more than wetland restoration, soil conservation, and other traditional conservation actions, so we listened to the communities’ livelihood and health needs and our partnership grew as a result.*”

Dr Gilbert Mateeka, the medical superintendent of Kabale’s Rugarama Hospital, explained, “*Few men attend community health talks, but by integrating our health messages with our conservation partners’ livelihood and conservation training, we believe we can get men more involved with and supportive of family planning. This is one of many benefits of working across sectors. The community see the connections between human health and environmental health, poverty and livelihoods every day, so we listened.*”

This project has been made possible due to the financial support of the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' through "The Darwin Initiative". There is a quickly growing movement of organisations understanding that barriers to family planning are not only relevant to improving health and wellbeing, gender equality, and empowerment but also to conservation of biodiversity, climate change and sustainability. We are proud to be part of this movement and are grateful that the Darwin Initiative similarly has made the connections.

End

About the Endangered Wildlife Trust

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) has worked tirelessly for nearly 50 years to save wildlife and habitats, with our vision being a world in which both humans and wildlife prosper in harmony with nature. From the smallest frog, to the majestic rhino; from sweeping grasslands to arid drylands; from our shorelines to winding rivers: the EWT is working with you, to protect our world.

The EWT's team of field-based specialists works across southern and East Africa, where committed conservation action is needed the most. Working with our partners, including businesses and governments, the EWT is at the forefront of conducting applied research, supporting community conservation and livelihoods, training and building capacity, addressing human wildlife conflict, monitoring threatened species and establishing safe spaces for wildlife range expansion.

A beacon of hope for Africa's wildlife, landscapes and communities, the EWT is protecting forever, together. Find out more at www.ewt.org.za

About the Margaret Pyke Trust

The Margaret Pyke Trust (MPT) has been a leader in contraception for over 50 years, and provides the broadest range of sexual and reproductive health training courses for clinicians in the UK. MPT is also a Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) "Commitment Maker". MPT's "commitment" to FP2020 (the United Nations led partnership of governments, civil society, and others which aim to enable 120 million more women and girls to use contraceptives by 2020), is to change global conservation policy, to recognise the importance of barriers to family planning not only for the health, wellbeing and empowerment of girls and women, but also for the conservation of biodiversity, sustainability and as part of climate action.

MPT is the only member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature with 50 years' family planning expertise, although since its inception, MPT has always been at the forefront of developments in contraception. For instance, in the 1960s MPT opened and ran a London health centre which became the world's busiest family planning clinic, years before contraception was available on the UK's National Health Service. MPT has developed a family planning training methodology specifically for rural Ugandan healthcare institutions, with several hospitals in the Ugandan Protestant Medical Bureau (UPMB) network. Rugarama Hospital is one of those UPMB hospitals.

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