

Report, Assessment and Recommendations regarding the Batwa people

1. Report

1.1 Overview on the situation of the Batwa people

The Batwa Pygmies live in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is estimated that between 69500 and 87000 persons belong to the Batwa people, of which 3500 to 4000 live in Uganda.¹ For a general overview on the present situation, reference is made to case 30 as presented by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 15 Sept. 2010 (A/HRC/15/37/Add.1).

In the 1990s, several national parks were created in eastern Uganda, from which the Batwa were forcibly deported. They now live outside the forest, and there are several projects to civilise them. Funded by the European Union, roofed dance floors and market stalls have been built as part of the effort to use the Batwa for the amusement of visitors, for whom they shall dance and produce handicraft.² However, the numbers of tourists arriving to the places where the Batwa now live are not anywhere near to serve as a financial source for their survival. To prevent the Batwa from starving, they are allowed to enter the forest within a 2 km strip at its edge during the day for hunting, but they have to sleep outside the forest. One severe consequence of the Batwa's eviction from their forests is their exposure to the Bantu. Batwa

¹ Cf. <<http://www.unpo.org/article/9012>> (15 July 2011)

² Cf. <<http://rwide.blogspot.com/>> (15 July 2011)

women are constantly being raped, with the effect that their offspring since the eviction is genetically mixed. Furthermore, it is estimated that more than 60% of



Building for relocated Batwa, financed by the European Union

Batwa women are asked for sexual favors in exchange for money and food.³ The younger generation is one or two heads taller than the Batwa adults. From a psychological perspective, they certainly have severe problems with regard to developing a stable identity. Since they are mixed, they are neither accepted by the Bantu, nor can they develop a Pygmy identity. If these processes continue, the Batwa will even be wiped out genetically very soon. Among the other efforts to “civilise” the Batwa, there are plans to put them on farmland and make them peasants.⁴ The Batwa are subject to arbitrary rule

of external forces, while their forests have been given into the hands of foreign investors. Tourism is big business, as the fees for hunting go up to thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars for the killing of a single animal, depending on the game species. Only watching gorillas costs 500 USD per day per person. Under the cloak of conservationism, the investors want “their” forests for their purposes alone, without any Pygmies. The conservation programme was funded by the European Union, the World Bank, the Ugandan Government and several NGOs.⁵

The situation could worsen very soon, as presently, a road is being built by a Chinese company, leading westward from Fort Portal. The purpose of this road presumably is to obtain access to coltan and other minerals of the Congo basin. But whatever the purpose is, it will lead to further negative effects to the Batwa. Especially the import of HIV/AIDS could put an even more bitter end to their existence.



Signpost mentioning the founding by the European Union

³ Anthony Ayebare, Executive Director of Global Batwa Outreach, personal communication, 15 July 2011

⁴ Cf. <<http://rwide.blogspot.com/>> (15 July 2011)

⁵ Anthony Ayebare, Executive Director of Global Batwa Outreach, personal communication, 15 July 2011

1.2 Overview on the measures taken

During a visit to Uganda in December 2010, decision makers have been informed about the indigenous rights, and training of guides took place, targeting at respectful and culturally sustainable behaviour of visitors to the indigenous people.

On the academic level, two presentations were given at the Makerere University in Kampala, in cooperation with Prof. Peter Baguma, Institute of Psychology. One of these presentations was given in the course of the 6th African Conference on Psychotherapy, in order to address scientists and give incentives for their involvement in translating the Indigenous Rights Declaration into action.

On the political level, Francis Mugizi, Senior Tourism Officer at the Ministry of Tourism Trade and Industry was involved, as well as UWA officers of different national parks. The Uganda Wildlife Authority is in charge of the Batwa, who now live at the borders of the parks.

On 12 December 2010, a workshop was given at the Semuliki National Park UWA office. This workshop was attended by tour guides, uniformed rangers, and the head officer Mr. Moses Olinga. In a first part, relevant aspects of cultural theory were explained, as well as relevant aspects of the Indigenous Rights Declaration. In the second part, Batwa people nearby at the edge of the forests, who have been expelled around 2002, were visited in a minimally-invasive, integrative way, in order to practically explicate the implementation of culturally sustainable policies of tourism.

2. Assessment

The Batwa are under critically threat. Their present situation, as explained above, affects every single individual in an enormously negative way. As a manifestation of blank despair and depression, the Batwa are seeking comfort in alcohol and marihuana. In the afternoons, they usually are under influence of these substances.

By the extreme cultural dominance exerted over the Batwa by Bantu and by visitors, the indigenous social system becomes further destabilised. The dominant encounter the Batwa in an insensitive way, which is absolutely inappropriate with regard to respecting, accepting, maintaining and protecting the indigenous Batwa culture, as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples requires.



The younger generation is significantly taller and has different features due to genetic influx from the Bantu (cf. para. 1).

The impact of the dominant culture implies the induction of non-indigenous behaviour patterns, especially the wearing of clothes, which not only destabilises indigenous identity, but which also are generally in a shape that facilitate the thriving of germs and dermatophytes and entail the risk of serious skin disorders.

The Batwa lifestyle, which for millennia was characterised by its stable systemic relation with the environment, has abruptly been stopped. Like in other cases, where national parks have been established under the guidance of the WWF and other external forces, the indigenous population that had lived there for hundreds or thousands of years in a sustainable way, has been evicted from their forest. The Batwa are now forced to live in buildings, which have been supplied by donors. The compromise to allow them to hunt during the day within a 2 km strip of the forest boundary is not apt to maintain the balance within the complex eco system, which up to the eviction, owing to the nomadic hunter-gathering, reactivated after each temporary exploitation. As the Batwa have to start each hunting and gathering from their permanent residence, this is not possible any more. Traditionally, the Batwa, like other Pygmy peoples, did not stay more than two months in the same place, so that the environment could recover. For this lifestyle, only temporary huts were built. If the traditional huts weren't put up occasionally for the tourists, the skills of doing this would soon be lost.

An aspect to be mentioned is the chance that the UWA, which is now an instrument of a policy that violates Indigenous Rights, could actually be employed for the implementation of these rights. During the workshop, all officials related to the UWA seemed to be relatively compliant, but they also seemed to be reluctant to truly accept the Batwa culture and translate this acceptance into action by integrative behaviour during the visit. Further training and a policy that ensures the compliance of the rangers, tour guides and other relevant persons is necessary.

3. Recommendations

In order to halt the destructive processes and to rescue the culture, the following recommendations are given:

The Batwa have to be allowed to return to their forests immediately and to stay there permanently. These forests have to be protected from external influences. In order to harmonise this protection of culture and nature, measures need to be taken to restore and strengthen indigenous self-confidence. To obtain this, the Batwa forests should be defined as a territory in which every person has to follow the traditional lifestyle. This can be restricted to material culture, including visual appearance, but it is extremely important that this is done without any compromise, because any aberration would undermine the semiotic system of the indigenous culture as a whole.⁶

It should be well noted that this regulation pertains to a territory. This strategy ensures the adherence to Human Rights in general, and Indigenous Rights in

⁶ Compromises could even worsen the situation. With regard to body semiotics, accepting that women cover the breast despite the former tradition would not only point out that exception, but even further a destabilising psychological mechanism of denying essential positive concepts related to motherhood, female self-confidence, feeding, comfort, cosiness and shelter.

particular, as anyone, both indigenous and non-indigenous, enjoys the freedom of choice in the sense that he or she can choose whether to stay inside or outside the traditional territory, and can also freely move in or out. For the protection of this area, it is necessary to ban non-traditional / non-indigenous weapons, metal, synthetic materials, as well as textiles. With regard to the latter, attention has to be paid to the fact that individuals define their identity primarily by their visual appearance. Intervening on the level of material culture also serves the objective of ensuring Freedom of Information.⁷ However, equal rights for all have to be guaranteed. Visitors, regardless of their position, have to either obey to these rules or keep out of the territory.

Since the members of the non-indigenous, dominant culture are responsible for the external factors, which could bear on the indigenous culture in a destructive way, it is their obligation to keep these factors out of the indigenous territory. When entering it, they should only do so as human beings, and refrain from carrying in material signs of the dominant culture.



The installation of such a protected territory will have a number of positive effects and be of major importance for the cultural self-confidence of the Batwa people. And for visitors, integrating into such an authentic setting is a unique experience, which even has the potential to innovations in tourism, as respect and acceptance are paid through their own behaviour, and thus, the indigenous peoples' cultural self-confidence will be strengthened further. This effect has been investigated and proven in our field studies in several different indigenous contexts.

Minimally-invasive field encounter with the Batwa, Dec. 2010

The aspect of opening up an attractive segment in the tourism market, which concords with Human Rights in general and with Indigenous Rights in particular, could be a potent argument with regard to finding a solution for the future role of the investors, who are presently concerned with the Batwa forests.

Article 10

1. Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

S.A.C.S. will be happy to answer questions with regard to translating the Indigenous Rights into action.

Dr. Arnold Groh

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⁷ Controlling what people should know, think or belief would be a violation of Human Rights.