



BDP Moving Forward - September 2009

Brief Introduction from the Coordinator

The Batwa Development Program (BDP) was created to empower the Batwa pygmies. The BDP operates within the Batwa communities surrounding the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Southwestern Uganda and gained legal status as a corporation in January 2009. The BDP is supported by the Kellermann Foundation in the United States and is an affiliate of the Diocese of Kinkiizi in Kanungu district.

The mission of the Batwa Development Program (BDP) is to empower the Batwa community through health care, education and spiritual growth, land and food security, civic and vocational training and sustainable income generation so that they become valued and law abiding members of society.

The BDP has been able to accomplish many things, ranging from empowering the Batwa Pygmies to own and run their projects, to setting up a firm economic base that will continue to increase incomes in the Batwa communities around Bwindi.

We have received support to acquire more than 10 acres of land, built more than 40 homes, supported more than 200 Batwa and 500 non-Batwa students with education, shipped more than 2000 baskets to the United States, set up the Batwa Cultural Preservation Center and opened the Batwa Basket Banda and Cafe. Provided health care to more than 900 Batwa pygmies around the Bwindi forest and purchased a vehicle from donations. We certainly appreciate all the financial support, guidance and cooperation we have received from churches, funding organizations, individuals and friends of the Batwa pygmies all over the world.

Program Administration

Two teams, working together, is the heart of the **Batwa Development Program**. The **Executive committee** is comprised of seven Batwa members, who are responsible for the decision making process of the BDP. The **Advisory team** provides guidance and a convenient atmosphere for the executive to operate within. The executive committee consists of Benon Byarugaba – Chairman, Justice Kamara – Vice Chairman, Alivera Turyomurugendo – Woman representative, Flora Nyanjara – Woman representative, Geoffrey Mahano – Ordinary member, and Jotham Besigensi – Treasurer.

The Advisory team is comprised of Magezi Richard – Program Coordinator, Dr Scott Kellermann – Health Care, Medical director and Chief advisor, Levi Busingye – In charge of Batwa Cultural Preservation Center, Kenneth Tumuhameye – Education and Spiritual leader, Joseph Safari – In charge of Home Building and Land Acquisition, Milia Kobusheshe – Accountant, and Stephen "Blackie" Gonsalves – In charge of Income Generation and Resource Mobilization.

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Home building and land acquisition

Ownership of fertile, accessible land near water is the way forward for the Batwa. The acquisition and ownership of good land, close to their ancestral territory is absolutely essential for **self-empowerment** of the Batwa community. With the confidence that the land they live on is their own and cannot be taken from them, the Batwa culture can flourish and take responsibility.

For the first time in history, the Batwa of Bwindi own land. **Batwa Development Program (BDP)** has purchased more than ten acres of land at Mukongoro village, in Kanungu district to resettle four landless families at Buhoma. This was possible because of the donation from the Craton Foundation in Germany.

The executive committee found the land, negotiated on the price and signed the papers themselves. There was a balance that was not spent to buy the land or build their houses. With the approval of the Craton Foundation, BDP was able to buy an adjacent piece of property, which will enable the BDP to resettle even more families.

Batwa home building is going very smoothly. Our goal is one house a month and so far, since February, 16 homes have been built. This brings the grand total to about 60 homes with pit latrines and kitchens. With 250 Batwa families, just in our district, there is still a lot of work to do. So, if you're wondering what you could get a pygmy for Christmas this year? For \$750.00 you could make it possible for Santa to be sliding down the roof of a home that you just helped a Batwa family move in to.

Education

Education for the Batwa, for any culture, is extremely important. Especially if they are to meld with the communities in the areas where they are settled. The BDP puts Batwa education as one of its highest priorities. There are four areas of education comprising the BDP program: schooling of the children, adult literacy, vocational training and spiritual education. The Batwa Development Program pays school fees for approximately 700 children, both Batwa and non-Batwa, from nursery to secondary school. With the graduation in December of two Batwa students in their last term of secondary school, (seniors in high school) we should have our first university students next year.

The Batwa, children or adults, if interested in learning about God and the church, instruction is made available to them. In addition, adults would be taught the benefits of marriage in the church and the baptism of their children. So far, there have been two marriages in the Anglican church and ten baptisms.

There are two adult literacy teachers and two vocational schools. Both are in the settlements of Kitariro and Byumba. There are ten Batwa settlements, just in our district. Much more work needs to be done in these areas. A generation of Batwa children with educations will be coming to take their place in society. Literate adults will be able to make more informed decisions, not be taken advantage of and take better care of their families. Young adults with a craft and skills to better their earning capacity will become respected tradesmen and craftsmen. Education is the key that opens those doors. Thank you for your continued support and we welcome new interested groups and individuals because we can't do it, without YOU.

Health care

The Batwa Development Program has continued to facilitate the Batwa communities from Bwindi to access medical care, gratis, at Bwindi Community Hospital. BDP also defrayed the cost of referrals to other health facilities and hospitals, when necessary. This was possible because of support from donors and by the proceeds from the sale of Batwa baskets to the U.S. market.

With all our efforts to provide care for the Batwa, it was very sad that in the last six months we have lost a number of Batwa members. Furthermore, it was very unfortunate that we lost Aida Mary Kigabirwe, the oldest Mutwa woman at Karehe Batwa village. It is very sad that we continue to lose the Batwa at such an alarming rate. Aida's death is a very big loss to the Batwa Community; she will always be missed.

We have been challenged with lack of transport means to reach out to the individual Batwa settlements and monitor their health. Because the Bwindi Community Hospital has cut down on outreaches to the Batwa villages, the situation has been terrible, especially for those who cannot easily access services at the hospital.

Thank God, an anonymous, very generous donor, along with the rest of the congregation of **Holy Trinity Church in Nevada City**, heard our cries and raised funds to procure a van. The **"Batwamobile."** As a result access to the Batwa villages has greatly improved. The BDP is now able to transport Batwa patients from their respective villages to Bwindi Hospital and some lives have already been saved. Thanks, to **All of You**. BUT, we still need to by fuel and tires. What these roads can do to a vehicle is not pretty. Much maintenance is necessary, what with tightening up and replacing everything that these roads can shake loose.

Income generation in the Batwa

The **Executive Committee** has earmarked two projects as their principal sources for income generation: The Batwa Cultural Preservation Center and the Batwa Basket Banda.

The **Batwa Cultural Preservation Center** is a cultural site created by the Batwa Pygmies to educate their children and to enlighten the rest of the world, to the rich heritage and traditions surrounding the culture of the "Keepers of the Forest."

The **cultural center** lies on 100 acres, half of which is virgin forest. The cultural center is situated about a one hour walk from the Bwindi Community Hospital. Five elders have been resettled to a quaint setting on the property where they live. The elders have created a

program for the Batwa school children to come and spend two days learning and living in the forest. Every Batwa child will be taken to the cultural center every year, until they graduate from primary school. The center will generate income by also having presentations for groups and tourists.

The **Batwa basket program** is two fold. Baskets made by the Batwa are collected and purchased from the weavers. Most are packed and shipped to the U.S. for sale. Others are sold at the Batwa Basket Banda. This is a shop owned and run by the Batwa. Also another first, the Batwa are shopping and running their own business. Only Batwa handcrafts are sold by Batwa sales people. Coffee, tea, cinnamon bread and other pastries are also sold and can be enjoyed by the tourists on our deck, which features a beautiful view of the forest. The proceeds from the basket program go towards paying medical fees for all the Batwa. So, aside from being a sustainable, income generating business, it also allows the Batwa to have free health care.

In closing, all of us here at the Batwa Development Program hope you have enjoyed our first newsletter. We will be publishing this newsletter once a month. Our first letter has been longer than we anticipated. Our goal is to make everyone aware of all the work that the BDP is involved with, so thanks for your patience. The newsletter will normally be two pages and it will highlight a different aspect of our work each month. Next month you can look forward to hearing about the experiences of our volunteers and also how you can become a volunteer.

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