

From Hayley, Community Development Volunteer.

My first overlook over the wall of the Rift Valley and into the vast expanse of Queen Elizabeth National Park yielded such profound insights as, "wow, beautiful!" and "that cliff looks steep!" Little did I know that the struggles of the farmers living along the park border would become my work also. Or that I would soon be huffing and puffing (and falling) up and down that very escarpment!



Can you imagine a project that combines saving and financial training with beekeeping and wildlife conservation? Community service with traditional dancing and eco-tourism? A few committed young Ugandans and I co-founded the 90-member Kataara Community Wildlife Conservation Group, which seeks to harmonize the historically negative relationship between the people and the national park. Nightly, elephants cross the park border to destroy crops and livelihoods of subsistence farmers. In turn, villagers harass and at times poach the wildlife, while otherwise misusing park resources such as grass and firewood.



Because elephants fear bees, the group (in partnership with Uganda Wildlife Authority) is establishing an apiary inside the national park border. By utilizing local knowledge of beekeeping and establishing Village and Savings and Loan Associations, group members are funding and maintaining their own project with their own resources. The bees will prevent elephant crop-raiding and therefore increase crop yields, generate income (and nutrition!) from honey and wax products, and pollinate trees, crops, and medicinal plants. I am also working with group leaders to establish the site as an eco-tourism activity, with training assistance from the

Sustainable Tourism in the Albertine Rift (STAR) Program. Conveniently located near lodges and the park, tourists will soon be able to enjoy traditional dances, local food, and a culturally-informative Agro-Tour Walk through farmlands and down into the apiary.