

Population growth threatens Virunga tourism potential

By Billy Rwothungeyo

Unchecked population increase is putting immense pressure on the fragile greater Virunga landscape and threatening tourism in the cross border area, a new report has revealed.

The report titled *Working together to fight poaching and wildlife crime in greater Virunga landscape* explores various facets such as the impact of poaching, law enforcement, population pressure, conflicts, and extractives industry, among others.

"Within protected areas, there was

evidence of deforestation in 2016 due to agriculture or other unknown reasons. Outside the protected areas, there are some areas with no buffer between human agricultural activities," the report reads.

The greater Virunga landscape, which covers parts of Uganda, Rwanda and the DR Congo is known to have the highest rural population density in Africa, ranging from 100 to over 1,000 persons per square kilometre, according to the report.

Henk Jan Bakker, the Dutch ambassador to Uganda, warned

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The Greater Virunga Trans-boundary Collaboration is supported by The Netherlands. The area is the only place in the world that hosts the famous mountain gorillas.

that the rapidly rising population in the area does not bode well for conservation efforts around the landscape.

"With the population growth, the pressure on land becomes ever more intense. In those circumstances, reserving relatively large areas of land for nature conservation will not be understood by everyone," he said during the launch of the report on Thursday at his residence in Kampala.

"I was happy to read that the gorilla population grows by 3% per year,"

Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu, the tourism minister, said structural challenges must be addressed if conservation efforts in the area will succeed in the long run.

"As long as communities remain poor, preserving the area will be hard because their survival is dependent on poaching," he said.

James Byamukama, the programmes manager at the Greater Virunga Trans-boundary Collaboration, said stakeholders need to come together to conserve the volatile region.

The Greater Virunga Trans-boundary Collaboration is supported by The Netherlands. The Virunga trans-boundary area is the only place in the world that hosts the famous mountain gorillas.

FOREX Rates

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
US Dollar	3628	3648
Euro	4309	4405
Pound	4824	4921
Kenya	34.8	35.3
Tsh	1505	1510

