

TRANSCRIPT
***Land Body Ecologies* Podcast**
Episode 5 – Born From Here / Nkazarirwa Hanu
English Translation

16:41 Eliphazi Kabwana I was indeed young at the time of eviction but I remember a few things on my side. There was a white man called John who started training the community people. They didn't have guns, they had pangas and big sticks. They would go to the forest to fight the Batwa. When the government heard about it, they came in and trained them to use the guns and that's how they went to the forest and forcefully chased the Batwa using the guns. This is all I can remember.

00:39 Geoffrey GPS: When the forest was reserved, we were evicted and went to stay on the margins of the forest where we are living now.

Ekibahigire Abias [00:00:38.430] My name is Ekibahigire Abias, 48 years old.

[00:00:39.960] I was born in the forest and at my young age when I was growing up, my parents were still in the forest.

[00:01:05.570] My parents would set different types of snares and traps in the forest for meat, and harvest wild yams which were our (Music starts) foods' in the forest.

[00:01:47.890] We drank honey in the forest, we took it as wine, juice, porridge or milk, any time we wanted to drink.

[00:02:27.020] There are stingless bees in the forest in which we got honey, which we harvested and kept in a bag woven with forest materials for 3 days to ferment and make wine for drinking.

[00:03:09.070] We would keep the honey for three days, then get it out ready to drink as wine or beer.

[00:03:25.970] after being brewed and ready to drink. Drinking that brewed honey would make me happy.

[00:03:38.370] Happiness is the joy of being born in the forest.

Music fades down

Forest fades up

00.45 Sylvia Kokunda: I am Kokunda, Sylvia, the CEO and founder Action for Batwa Empowerment Group.

04.20 I have a bachelor's in public administration. And also I studied a second degree, a Master's in organisational leadership and management.

00.55 I grew up with my mum, I was raised by a single mother. And when I was growing up, when I was still young, it was the time of eviction. So most of my life...was with the challenges of post eviction, growing seeing the suffering my mother was going through, of which I didn't know why we are going through all of that, the way we are being treated as Bawta.

00.15 I have been learning from my parents and even my grandparents about how the culture was in the forest, how was the Batwa culture. They have been telling us that in the forest, they lived in harmony. They practised different ways of our culture like marriages, language, and even celebrations. Like in the case of making parties, how we used to do it, even like when we lost our parents, or our beloved ones, how was that one taken, all those things we have been learning them from our parents, of which now we no longer practise them. Like, our culture was passed on to the younger generation by our elders, like, on fire gatherings. In the evenings, when our parents come from hunting. That is what they would do. And mostly in the forest, they used to do hunting, they were hunter gatherers, and even fruit gatherers as you could eat wild yam, wild foods, all those things, everything was for free. And we never had to work for food.

16.39 In the forest our culture was passed on.

16.50 in the evening, the fireplaces when we have finished eating and what our Elders would sing for us with different instruments. They sing for us, and through singing these songs, they would have meanings. Then we learn the lyrics, the deep meaning of the song, and then later, we asked what was he trying to mean, then they will say this one, mostly it would

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be like Proverbs, but when they are singing, then later is when you learn and say they were trying to teach this, to tell us how to respect elders is still all this would be done in songs. Yeah, so they would even tell us like in storytelling, yet, they are trying to tell us some more rules of respecting the Elders of knowing the boundaries of what to do. That is what we used to do. *Music starts*

18.11 So all those songs have different meanings.

19.12 And now all that is fading, but still the elders are trying to teach us through that experience. *Music fades down over Abias speaking Rutwa*

Ekibahigire Abias [00:03:58.750] When in the forest, we laid one bed which was shared by all household members except the parents. If one of us was ready to marry he would go into the forest to hunt for a special animal called “Enteza.” This animal was rare and so difficult to find.

[00:04:29.770] When a young man got the “Enteza” he would bring it to the girl’s parents along with meat and honey and then they would give him a wife and bless them to go and produce children.

[00:05:53.170] We depended on roasted food in the forest. We would gather together to enjoy the meal as we handover a girl to the man.

Drum Music

[00:06:46.920] When our parents went hunting and collecting yams and fruits, they would build houses up in the trees and leave us there to protect us from dangerous animals like *lions and elephants*.

Drone music + nighttime forest

Orikiriza Derick [00:00:47.770] My name is Orikiriza Derick from Buhamba Kitariro Batwa settlement. I am 21 years old.

[00:01:47.570] My parents told us many stories when we were growing up, but there is one story which was very interesting to me. The story of a bush, an animal and a man

The story goes;

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[00:02:15.510] A Long time ago, there lived a man in a village. He had his piece of land which he left to grow to the level of a bush. The planting season had reached and he wanted to clear the land and plant some crops.

Bush clearing sounds

He sent ten men to clear the bush for growing crops. They cleared the land and left one small piece uncleared, which he planned to finish the following day. When they left, an animal that stayed in that land came, started singing and jumping in the land they had cleared, willing for it to grow again.

“Kambatika Kambimbi”

Drone

The land grew again and it appeared as if it had never been cleared.

The following day when the men came back to the field to clear the small piece that was left, they found the whole land was bushy again and started wondering what could have made this land grow again.

They cleared the land once more and the animal was hiding somewhere watching them. But this time the people planned to hide, to see what had made the land grow after they had cleared it.

After some of the men hid and the others left for home, the animal came back to the field and did the same thing singing. “Kambatika kambimbi*”

Drone

...the land was growing again.

Accidentally whilst jumping the animal stepped on one of the men that was hiding.

Their boss had told them not to give up and to make sure they got the person who was making this land grow after clearing, and bring them to him. They didn't know it was an animal until they were hiding and saw the animal jumping and singing and the bush was growing again.

When the animal accidentally stepped on the men, They started beating it until it pleaded, please *don't kill me*.

Drone

The animal was almost cut into pieces when it pleaded last and told them the secret of which part can be cut to get what exactly they want and that was its last small toes of the foot, which were cut last and gave them many sacks of millet and ground nuts.

What I learnt from this story is how important land is for both peoples and animals. The man was clearing land to get food and the animal was making the land grow into the bush for it to get shelter.

More so, my grandparents had ancestors which were consulted before doing anything, and when one did something without consultation of the ancestors, he/she would not succeed. Which means the man cleared the land without the knowledge of the ancestors and the time to plant in that land had not yet reached, that is why it was growing again and again.

Forest fades up

Sylvia 02.04. I realised all of the suffering we were going through My parents when they were evicted out of their land, which is the forest, we were evicted due to conservation of the forest. And we are not given alternative ways of living, which also led us to suffer and up to now we are suffering.

04.32 They evicted the Batwa from the National Park, of which the Batwa forest keepers by then, we were the conservationists, because our ancestors lived in the forest, and even in harmony with the animals in the forest. And now, like though we were hunter gatherers and even used to eat honey and some fruits - we could not destroy, we had knowledge on how to conserve that forest. Of course, we couldn't have destroyed our family or our home where we stayed. So like when we wanted to eat the wild yams, we could look for fruit, like roots. Then we keep that fruit, that tree standing, we remove a few fruits, a few roots, and then it keeps there, you go on another one, you know that by the time you finish looking, harvesting other fruits, the other one will have also grown other roots, then you come back. We could not destroy, the same applies to medicinal herbs, we could not cut these trees. Instead, we would look for the leaves, or we would remove the bark of the trees for clothes and some medicine but not harm the environment where we stayed.

...like the gorillas, which they said were conserving the endangered gorillas we could not harm them or hurt them because they were regarded as our cousins. So whenever we wanted to set a snare, we would first look at the footsteps, in case they were there for the gorilla we would say no, let us not set it here because the gorilla might come and pass and

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then we kill it, of which we could not do that. But the eviction came in as a result, they said maybe the Batwa were trying to harm the environment, they said because of the endangered species of some in the forest. That's why they evicted us saying that they are conserving. And the conservation without people, it is not good, they should have involved the Batwa into conserving this environment. Instead, even the eviction, evicting us without prior consent, was also not good to the human beings. Because they resettled us, and did not give us another alternative way of living and yet, they considered animals and the forest more special than the people.

Ekibahigire Abias

Nighttime forest – audio distortion

[00:08:48.640] In the same way, when we harvest and hunt in one place and find that the food has reduced, we would then relocate to another place where there is still plenty of food and leave that other place to regrow - for example like leaving “Congo and going to Rwanda”. We lived a nomadic life in the forest in search of food because we were not farmers.

Bush clearing sounds

This was our way of conserving the environment because by the time we returned back, we would find that everything had grown again and the animals had multiplied.

[00:09:59.970] While moving to different places looking for food, some of the non-Batwa encroached on the forest, cut down trees, built houses and did farming thus destroying the land. It led to our eviction, that the government forced us to leave the forest to conserve it. We entered a community that was full of people and activities we were never used to.

When we wanted to go back to the forest, game rangers beat us and strictly stopped us from accessing the forest again.

[00:10:58.130] So, after the eviction we were not compensated by the government, we were left to be squatters on other peoples land working as casual labourers to get food and somewhere to stay. The situation has not changed since then which has kept our lives miserable longing to go back to our ancestral homes.

[00:13:19.970] It is a long story that I can still recall. Young researchers came and requested that our parents take them through the forest as guides, they counted trees and leaves and then they went back.

Another big group came and this time never used our parents as guides. A few months later, soldiers came and divided the forest into two parts and told us one is a forest reserve and another one is a National park.

[00:17:34.930] The eviction struggle continued they didn't stop until every Batwa was chased out of the forest and left to suffer.

[00:18:04.330] Since then they have never allowed anybody to access the forest. Because of everything that happened even when we go near the park, you cannot find any footsteps or anything like a person trying to enter.

[00:19:07.210] We were not happy about the eviction process because we lost our people, our homes and everything in the forest, that is why we want to stay close to the forest.

[00:20:00.450] We were extremely sad, as we were conservationists of the forest, having traditional knowledge on how to conserve the forest, not like other people who go there to destroy it.

Forest fades up – birds

Geoffrey Kikoko 00:00:27.350 I am Geoffrey Kikoko, born from the forest where my parents lived.

[00:00:36.740] When the forest was reserved, we were evicted and went to stay on the margins of the forest where we are living now.

[00:00:48.540] We were working for non Batwa as casual labourers, as well as learning from them and adopting their ways of living, because in the forest we were hunters and fruit gatherers.

[00:03:17.850] How I got the name Geoffrey GPS? I was recruited by Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to work as a park ranger.

Whistling composition/birds

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Walking in the forest sounds

[00:04:06.960] Being a Mutwa I knew all the places in the forest and I could easily track where the Gorillas were for the visitors and so they called me GPS. Being one of the Batwa elders around who had knowledge and experience in the forest, UWA recruited me as a park ranger to guide others through the forest.

[00:05:30.130] Having that job made me happy because I got the chance to go back to the forest, I showed visitors my ancestral places of origin.

[00:06:44.570] When I lived in the forest we did many things like worshipping, hunting and eating roasted meat and yams, and eating honey. We did barter trade with non Batwa by giving them meat in exchange for other foods and then we would go back to the forest. Some of the activities we do now are to entertain and perform for tourists, taking them through our cultural experience and life in the forest. Some of our children are porters and carry bags for tourists in the forest.

[00:09:21.030] If under supervision of park rangers I can take you through the forest, show you our places of worship. All types of bees and honey, the caves we stayed in and the food we ate.

(Music of Elders fades up as if coming from the caves)

[00:11:18.030] I always tell my children and grandchildren how we worshipped in the forest. I bring alcohol, roasted meat, and look for some specific herbs. I bring all these in one corner of the house, call all my ancestors to come and eat the food I have prepared for them. I demonstrate to my children and grandchildren some rituals we performed in the forest when we wanted things to be done. For example, having a successful hunt, marriage and children. It is now told as a story to the young generation because we no longer practise it after loosing our ancestral sites of worship.

Music on Elders long fade

[00:13:09.860] I am no longer close to my ancestors because after gazetting the park, I cannot access the worship sites of my ancestors. All I can do is to tell a story and demonstrate to my kids and grandchildren how we worshipped in the forest for them to have a sense of Batwa culture. I would love to demonstrate my culture to my children in the forest, teaching them my culture but with no access now I do it from the community I live in.

Birds composition continues

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Sylvia Kokunda 04.33 Even when we were resettled by different NGOs and the church. We continued to face and suffer injustices and discrimination. Even in the community we live in, even after a few are educated, we continue to face discrimination through not being given jobs. Even when you go to hunt for jobs, they will not give you the job, who is going to employ the Batwa.

04.48 It is the church that bought us the land where we stay in and in that land which we stay in, still we don't have the ownership of that land. We are just like squatters on that land, they buy for you the land but they don't give you the land ownership, the title, the agreement. And that leaves us in the fear to know that it may be tomorrow or some other day, we'll also be evicted out of *this* land.

Ekibahigire Abias

[00:08:25.710] our life span in the forest was high. When we lost one of our community members, when someone died, we would shift from that place of death, because we believed that that place is cursed or has bad omens.

Sylvia Kokunda 00.31 One of the Elders, he told us that at times you do not go in the forest when he wants meat, who do some, perform some things. And then the animal comes and finds him at home, and then he eats meat, you tell me when I want the meat, I wouldn't go in the forest, I just the do my things, I perform my rituals, and then the food, the animal comes here. But you know, the I say, then why did you stop those things? Now we stopped them. Because missionaries (music changes to gospel) came and now we stopped those things. We now worship in the churches, we no longer do that. But there we believed in our God and they were very strong, whatever you will do, it will come.

Sylvia 01.44 However much as I told you, still we feel that our culture is fading, because today, those Elders are there tomorrow, they are no more and when they are no more, how will we know our culture, it won't be normal. There are 11 communities, 10 communities here.

04.03 I feel hurt that we are only listening to this as history, now it is going to be history. So we have not been able to practise it to see it physically or to witness it ourselves. Yeah, so they tell us we just worship in the seats such a God so we had our own god of which now we don't know.

1.37 Our life expectancy was somehow long, because we're not exposed to these diseases, and we could eat only the natural foods, which are not manufactured and what, but when we risk outside, now, even our culture is losing slowly, because we have lost a lot. And we have not, we have not been even practising our culture, because we don't have where to practise it from. Because even where we are, it does not favour us like the worshipping, we don't do it, we have now copied our ways of worship (music continues) for the people for the place where I would have gone. And even we would have lost our family ties, because when they were we were evicted. People were displaced from different directions. So now, wherever the Batwa displaced from it is the language they adopted, some were displaced to going to Kisoro others, others to Kanungu, others to Bundabujo. And all those places where they have gone displaced from it is the languages they have adopted. And our language now it has started fading because they even don't allow us to practise our culture, when even we could speak, to try to speak our culture from our parents. The people still refer to us, they'll say you look at those people the way they speak. Look at those people the way they behave, look at those people. So the environment, the way they look at us. It has also hindered us to practise our cultures.

Forest fades up

Background of forest tour fades up

Elphaz Kabwana

00:29 I am Elphaz Kabwana, a Mutwa from Buhoma.

01:01 I am forty one years old.

08:41 Previously in the forest, we never had a church . We used to worship our own god and we had our own way of worship. The church is fighting to get its own income and I feel they are using us as a business to get their income.

Sylvia Kokunda 05.29 When I say we have been used as business, in most cases, there are many individuals and NGOs who are business taking, oh, I've been taking us as a tourist attraction. When visitors come, they say, you come and we show you the Batwa culture, we show you the Batwa. And then they call us. We come. We dance as the Batwa, we perform

as the Batwa...And then that word is give the money to those individuals or NGOs. And the money does not benefit the Batwa directly. There are men who are given some handouts...

06:37 And they want the Batwa to keep in that poverty line too.

Sound leaves to almost silence

6:52 And now more to that, it also hurts us that people use our culture for business. So it is as if they are our selling culture, or they will say, You come, we'll show you the Batwa how they perform their culture and what and then they charge the tourists a sum of money, which doesn't even benefit us. And the money goes to benefit themselves.

Babitha George 11.41 How long have they been living in that place? The communities like how many years

Sylvia Kokunda 11.46 like for Kanungu communities since the eviction, which is around 30 something years. Then for other settlements, it is when the church resettled them. So it is about 15 years there.

Sound transition but not forest

00:05 Yusef Kule : I prefer to be called Kule, Kule is my surname. Then, my first name is Yusef or Joseph, for that matter. Yeah. I am a community health coordinator and Bawta coordinator in the hospital. We are responsible for overseeing the health of the Batwa, but also of the general population. So I've been here for the last nine years working with this department and also head the mental health programme - community mental health. I mean it's a community based programme it's not hospital based - because our services are just 25% the based 75% of it is in the community.

03:31 Yusef Kule: Water and sanitation is another big problem. Especially when it comes to water supply, water supply among the Batwa is very poor. They depend on wells, protected wells in some settlements or villages. But these days because of the climatic changes, there are some wells that are drying up. So, so water supply is now a fairly huge problem.

04:42 Yusef Kule: The other challenge that we've noticed again, as you said, you know much of their life, their livelihood before was in the forest, but now it is a gazetted place.

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They no longer access it. In fact, they don't access it. Now when it comes to foodstuffs, food supplies, it's a very big problem previously before Corona partners used to send in food, relief and during Corona, during the period, there was some relief sent. But thereafter, like these days, there's a lot of hunger.

06:15 Yusef Kule: I think their culture is not that of cultivating you know, I think that's one of the other issues. They're just learning to do the cultivation, especially settlements that are around Buhoma. We are Bwindi here, Buhoma Town Council.

06:39 This year, the survey we did in July in August last year, we also asked them the main source of income. In fact, our main source of income for most of them, most of the households, almost over 90% is casual labour. And these days, casual labour activities are going down. Sometimes, some families these days, we're asking them, especially the half of last year and part of this year, they can hardly get a meal in a day in some families.

41:23 Yusef Kule: Then the HIV issues or sexually transmitted diseases also became higher during the pandemic. And those are some of the issues we've been right from the beginning when you hear the story. That's how it has been. Yeah.

43:52 Yusef Kule: There is some cultural kind of belief around here. I don't know whether again, my colleague will, will bear me witness. I had some people in the local community, even including the Batwa, that is a belief by the non Batwa that if you say you are a man, and you have a backache, and then you have sex with a Mutwa woman or girl, the backache will be healed. So somehow, if that is the case with some men, maybe they are using it just as their remedy, and that's reflected in the data that we are seeing here. Because they impregnate them, they don't care about the children. And in fact, among the Batwa it is a concern. They are saying, our culture, our generation is going to be wiped off.

25.17 There are, of course, many challenges that come in, it's by these Non-Bawta who impregnate Batwa girls, and at times they do defilement when the girls are under age. But all this needs money, which the batwa don't have, because they have to say you have to bring this money to open up the file, then you have to bring this much like 100,000 to do the test. Because we want to be sure if you were defiled or raped. You have to bring into this match to take the victim to the prison or to the police. You have to bring this money to do the testing or to. So it involves a lot of money, which the Bawta don't have. And these culprits for them,

they have money. So instead they'll pay those people and say ah you tell them that we cannot manage. So that is the challenge we are going through. Like times when those Batwa don't have money - they come to us. And we find we don't have that budget in too far up all those cases.

Sound from meeting at settlement in background

Tushemerirwe Oliver [00:00:23.490] I am called Tushemerirwe Oliver from Kihembe Batwa Settlement.

[00:01:02.770] I lived in the forest and I accessed everything freely. After the eviction I lost everything and I no longer eat what I used to eat which has made my body weak and miserable.

[00:01:37.050] Now when I fall sick and don't have money for transport to the hospital or money to access the hospital, I remain home and wait for my death. Not like in the forest where we treated ourselves whenever we fell sick.

Mixing sounds - rustling

[00:03:14.190] I would treat my children when they had a headache, I mixed charcoal, ash and herbs then put small cuts on the forehead of a sick person. He gets well. The same when any of my kids would develop high fever I would get different herbs, boil them and leave them to cool down and then make him drink and bathe him with herbs.

[00:03:49.770] When I was pregnant and time to give birth reached, I would get herbs, drink them and smear others on the belly. Squatte and give birth to my baby. To cut the umbilical cord, we used an African giant fern.

[00:04:26.530] Since then, after the eviction I have lived a miserable and a complicated painful life because I no longer access what I used to get in the forest.

[00:12:55.130] It is always a memorable, painful moment for us not being able to access the health services when we need it. No means of transport to go to the hospitals or to visit relatives when they are sick. When they die we can't go for burial because we don't have means of transport.

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Sylvia Kokunda 1.3 There is no way you can say you're preserving the culture when you're just talking you like like history verbally, not physically or practically doing the things. Now, when you tell me this medicine used to show this, you show me the medicine exact I know this the medicine and how was it using you show me practically how it was used, not just telling me it was the type some kind of type of the tree, you could do this, then I don't know what type of a tree.

Geoffrey Kikoko [00:15:39.750] It is very important for young people to live close to the forest of their ancestral home because it keeps them connected. It is easier for us parents when teaching our children to show them the forest in which we lived.

[Charity Clip 1]

Forest fades up

Water composition fades up

Jovilo Naume [00:00:50.370] I grew up with my parents and I used to stay with them. I would go with them to the forest to collect and pick the herbal medicine such as Mukulu and Rukokota.

[00:00:56.130] When we stayed in the forest we had knowledge on herbs. I learnt a lot from my parents and now know many herbs and how to treat many diseases with herbal medicine.

[00:01:15.830] When the kids have different diseases such as Kwashiorkor, we mix them and give them to the kids to drink.

[00:01:24.650] I looked for Mukuru, Rukokota to boil the roots and give to the children to prevent them from Kwashiorkor. Even adults can drink such medicine for their good health.

[00:01:54.370] Men went fishing and brought mudfish which we also gave to the children as a balanced diet for malnutrition. Our children never suffered from such diseases. If we still had access to the forest, we would be getting medicine to deworm our children, they wouldn't be having swollen stomachs and cheeks like now.

[00:02:20.650] We came to know about hospitals after the eviction. All our life we used herbal medicine and other community members would come to me for herbal medicine to give to their children and I would treat them.

[00:02:26.110] If an adult has malaria I know the medicine to give them. Mix some herbs, drink and wake up very well.

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[00:02:59.610] The other community members knew that we had knowledge about these medicines and they started coming to us for those different types of medicines. We would prepare the medicines and their children would get better. I still know all the herbal medicines, even non Batwa come to me to treat them with the few herbs I can get from the village.

[00:03:33.730] If you were not in a hurry, I would give you medicine to take to my grandchild.

[00:04:00.090] The medicine has many functions such as deworming in young children and even ladies when they have complications in their stomachs, Then for women who are on their periods and have some complications, they can just take the powder and they get better immediately as if one has been given an injection. This type of medicine is now in the community. You just get its roots, you clean them thoroughly, pound them and get its powder.

[00:08:47.830] Mostly we used “Mukuru” which was very special to us and treated many diseases.

[00:09:58.060] Even if you asked my fellow Batwa, “Mukuru” was very significant to us. We used Mukuru and Kamaramahano.

[00:10:48.060] For bad luck and bad omens, for instance when someone died, we would eat the herb before leaving the place of death such that his or her spirit doesn't follow us. It was mainly for protection, blessings, and success.

[00:11:48.730] Every Batwa used to have this medicine with him for protection.

[00:12:23.890] We would pick the leaves and at times mix them with the roots and then drink them. Mainly we would chew the roots or squeeze leaves and mix them in water to drink

[00:13:11.910] I now passed the knowledge to my daughter.

[00:13:27.860] I taught my daughter by showing her every type of the medicine and what it does such that when time comes and she is far from me, she knows what type of herb to pick according to the kind of the sickness or disease she is having. This is how she came to learn all this knowledge from me.

[Charity tour clip 2]

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[00:05:40.510] We had no medicine for anger or sadness. We would go to some quiet place for isolation, think about the cause of anger and then pray to the gods to take away the anger.

[00:06:34.090] We didn't have any specific medicine for the sadness and grief. We didn't have any medicine for anger

Sylvia Kokunda 2.2 1.28 Mental health wise, some of the behaviours they do. They are the ones that can tell that maybe this person mentally they are not upright, because of the violence they live in. Mostly when you come when you come and you don't know this Batwa. And they want to tell you about what they will say, The Batwa are violent, the Batwa are very harsh, the Batwa are abusive, the Batwa take alcohol, they are alcoholics.

So they have many words of how they can describe the Batwa. And to me, I believe that all this life they live in, it is because of the life they have lived in, the violence, it is because of how they treat them. And even that abusive aggressiveness they have, it is all that caused by the nature they live in, like getting outside the forest. Now, wherever you are, you're not treated very well. And all that stigma that lives in you also hinders your thinking, capacity, your ways of living. And at times, you end up behaving the way you behave, because of all this.

Fragmented drum piece returns – a bit like fireworks

Because even when you're doing others, Ah your like a Mutwa or for your tough like a Mutwa, for you're violent like a Mutwa. So that is what leads to their mental wellbeing, maybe that picture which they live in.

5.42 We are also human beings, I can know that this person is trying to demoralise me, or this person is maybe trying to stigmatise, talk to me sarcastically, and you know, that one also makes someone react.

Sylvia Kokunda 2.1

02.20 Being near, close to the national park or the vermin, wild animals, they come in and encroach on their crops, which is the biggest problem and when their crops are eaten, the government doesn't compensate them again. And at times when they try to chase away the animals far to the forest so that they can reach very far. At times they are imprisoned, like a

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one, like last year. One of them the Chairman, that Kokunda David, he was trying to chase away the baboons. Then he entered the forest and they have set some satellites and they have a drone. They saw him entering the forest. And they thought that he had entered the forest to collect meat, maybe for poaching. Then they came at night, he found the soldiers came, the Rangers came, knocked on his door. And they said, You you open your door. He was like what's wrong? We saw you entering the park and it means you have killed some animal. He said I didn't kill an animal. I was just chasing away the baboons. They said no, we have to take you to prison, they beat him, they took him to the prison to the then after that. He had no matter what he did, he was like please let me sell my tea plantation and then you release me. He sold his tea plantation, part of it and it is when he was relieved.

5.50 Babitha George Did you say the chairperson was in jail? Yes. When was this?

5.57 Sylvia Kokunda It was the last year, because last year, we involved in many cases with UWA and the community members. It is even last year that one of our Mutwa was killed in the forest and he went missing. And when we claim that they killed the person, they say this, since we don't have evidence that he died, they cannot say they killed the person because his body went missing up to now but never recovered it.

10.12 And what has left us in fear that we are not safe is that the land which we stay in, we don't have any ownership, we don't have land ownership of those land agreements, land agreements for those lands where we stay. And we believe that maybe what happened to us like in the forest might still happen again. Because in the forest, that was our land, we had peace, who had everything we used to do. And the forest sustained us. We thought nobody would take us away from our land. But one day we wake up, we found that people said, get out of this forest we want to use it, to conserve it. And they said you should not enter again, not access it again. The same way, since we don't have any land agreement on where we are staying. We assume that it may be one day, one time someone, those people who buy for us this land, one time, we may wake up and say, Please get out of this land. And then we start the same life again, which we were in when we were evicted.

12.55 That one leaves us with mental distress. Oh, oh, like maybe because some of...as I had told you that we are living in fear and even we don't - we are not proud that were we are staying is our place. Because at times it has been happening like one of these NGO BDP

that has been buying for them land, there is someone who was they gave someone land, and then that person left for work in another district, in another district. So a few months later, after leaving, they brought another person and put up that person's land, so we went today and said please this is someone's land, just that she left to go for another job. It doesn't mean that you take away this land or you give it to someone else. One person who is in charge of the land said did you buy any land here? Do you have any land ownership on this land? We can use it the way we want. So that one is the is the thing that doesn't make us proud that maybe we are we are staying it is our land. It means that may be the person who gives you money when he he's no longer there. You're free to chase us from that land.

Karimunda Benon [00:00:40.570] My name is Karimunda...

Music interlude

...Benon from Kihembe Batwa Settlement.

I want to share with you how we came here and have spent some good years since the eviction.

Batwa we are scattered in many places, Bundibudyo, Kabale, Kisoro, Rubanda and Kanungu.

[00:20:26.600] We have lost hope of getting our land back, because the government is silent about it. We are staying in an environment full of violence.

[00:22:47.990] - In ten years to come, how will the young generation be? We need our land back, we need to preserve our culture,

Gov song

Sylvia Kokunda

05.05 We can fight for the rights of the Batwa, we can speak, we can be the voice of the Batwa as long as we are Batwa ourselves. So that's why we started it as the Batwa who are educated such that we can advocate for our rights, from the government, from the NGOs that work to support the Batwa.

06.51 And we also advocate for political representation because for us as the Batwa we are not represented at any position, even from the local government, up to the national level, even when our Batwa try to contest those who say the Mutwa cannot head or lead other

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community members. And that is why we believe because of not being represented in all these positions. That's why our voices are not heard. That's why we are not represented, why our issues are always not represented.

Sylvia Kokunda: At times they could kill us, they will beat us in the communities, they look at us there are the injustices, we could not talk. But now we stand and talk and they hear because they know when they don't listen to us our organisation will come in and it has been helping. But now [23.49](#) we feel proud to see that our young girl is the one who is fighting for our rights. But now we stand and talk and they hear because they know when they don't listen to us our organisation will come, Sylvia will come, and indeed it has been helping.

[12.35](#) You saw how there are many communities in different places in Uganda, you see we have in Kisuri, semuliki, where, so we are not in one place, even when that's why maybe I think even getting a leader, it's always difficult. So who is going to be a leader of all these Batwa from different communities? But hopefully, we think one day to be solved and we get our leader who can speak for our rights, at least when someone is there, he will say because we face the same challenges will say at least in the Bundabujo, they are going through this and here they are going through this and then we'll be able then when we have our own land and we are settled - we will be telling that we use it to live in the forest having all this but now we have our own land where we stay in the community. And we are getting ABCD ...that will be our story now to tell. *(laughs)*

Forest fades up

Ancestors' music fades up

Birds up

Ekibahigire Abias [00:22:09.890] I will tell you a story of my two children who came from school and sneaked into the forest.

[00:22:40.900] The forest rangers came and asked me if I had seen my children and I told them they were already home. I have always taught my children forest behaviours, like how we moved and lived in the forest.

Our walking habits are kind of related to those of animals. No making the sound of footsteps in the forest and no leaving traces of footsteps behind. Even if I don't tell the Batwa children the forest behaviour, they know it - it is a way of being inherited from their grandparents. The forest is in their blood.

End.

Song plays from Ancestors clip