



Environment: journeys through a changing world.

The Positive Effect of Gorilla Tourism

Dr Paul Williams, Bwindi Community Health Centre

My name is Dr Paul Williams and I work as a doctor here at Bwindi Community Health Centre. Bwindi Community Health Centre is in the village of Buhoma, which is about a mile from the northern entrance to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. It's about a mile from where tourists come to trek the habituated gorilla groups. Tourism has undoubtedly benefited this area in many ways. Now, one of the things that it's done is it's made the area richer and there is a direct connection between economic wealth and health. Richer people, up to a point, are healthier people and many of the diseases that we encounter in this area are diseases of poverty.

This health centre costs about US\$300,000 or £150,000 to run every year. The health centre running costs are got from two different sources. One is by charging user fees and for the sustainability, the long term sustainability of an organisation like this, it's really important that the community are contributing something towards the cost of their health care. But we only actually manage to get about 20% of our income from user fees. Now, if we ran the whole health centre on that, then the quality of healthcare that we delivered would be very low, but it would be sustainable. So we make up the other 80% by donations from the gorilla tourism in this area. Part of my strategy as a fundraiser here is to use the goodwill of tourists to help fund the health centre. It enables us to have doctors: it enables us to make sure that we have very high quality, highly trained staff here.

In the last year, through spraying inside all of the houses and by helping people to access mosquito nets, at prices that they can afford, we've managed to almost eliminate malaria – as a big problem – within this area. You can't be complacent about a disease like malaria but malaria has become a rare disease, just within the last year, rather than a common disease. I'm able to tell tourists these positive stories I'm able to, if people want, to show them around the health centre to expose them to some of the work that we're doing. I've been very fortunate that people have been good natured and kind enough to give either one-off donations or, my strategy is, to try and get people tied into the health centre and giving longer-term donations.