



Working together to reduce and remove the equivalent of the VELUX Group's historical CO<sub>2</sub> through forest conservation and restoration

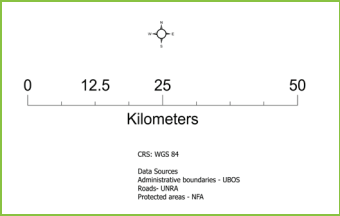
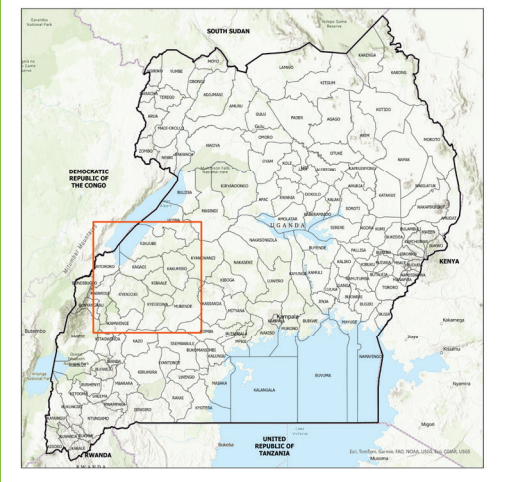
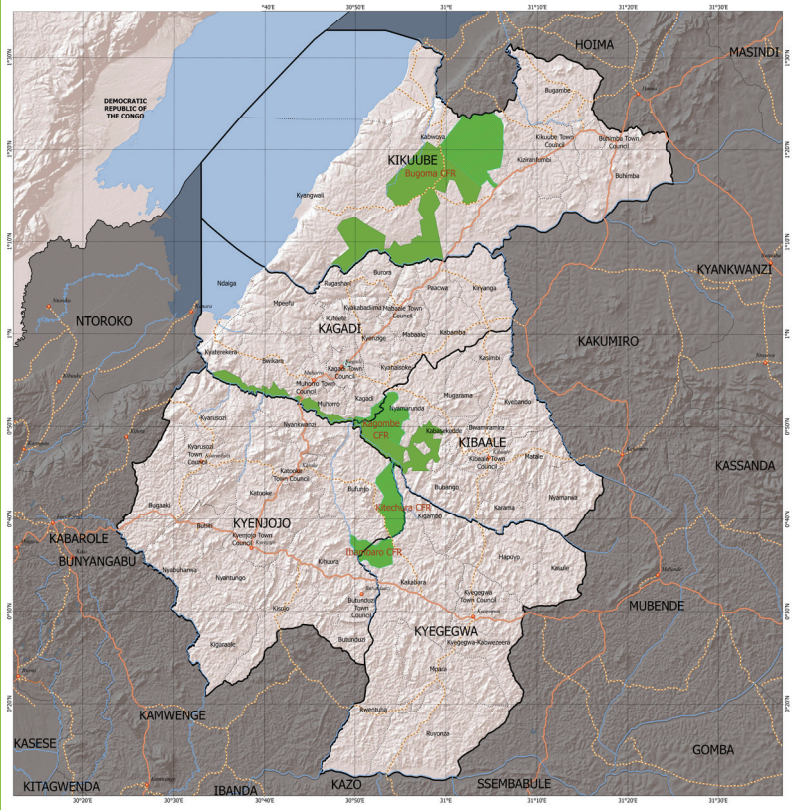
**VELUX**



The Natural Forest Regeneration for Enhanced Carbon absorption in the Albertine Rift (FRECAR) Project

**WWF UGANDA**

# Our Area Coverage



- Legend**
- Major towns
  - ⊙ WFP office
  - Main roads
  - Secondary roads
  - Rivers
  - Targeted Protected Areas (FPAs)
  - FRECAR planting areas
  - District boundary
  - Country border
  - Major water bodies

WWF Uganda through WWF-Denmark received funding from the Velux Group to implement the Natural Forest Regeneration for Enhanced Carbon absorption in the Albertine Rift (FRECAR) project aimed at regeneration of the natural forests for carbon sequestration.

The project is implemented in the Bugoma-Kagombe landscape. The area is important because it has endangered species yet it has high degradation rates. The project targets regenerating the most deforested natural forests in the Bugoma-Kagombe landscape covering Muzizi and Budongo ranges under the National Forestry Authority (NFA).

According to the State of Forests Report 2015, forest loss in this landscape is high with over 60% of the forests on private lands in this region having been lost between 2005 and 2015.

The approaches being used by the project include; active planting on the Central Forest

Reserves (CFRs); strengthening the forest management by providing clarity on forest boundaries; and engaging communities to participate in the protection of the CFRs, reduce pressure on the natural forest cover and have improved livelihoods.

For decades, the communities in this landscape had primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture for their livelihood.

However, their livelihoods had declined tremendously due to their sensitivity to weather shocks. Rainfall had become very unpredictable and unevenly distributed, with recurrent and prolonged droughts.

The once forested hillsides had also been depleted with trees cut down and used as construction materials, household firewood, and commercial forest products. The expansion of farmland coupled with minimal reforestation programmes on CFRs had also contributed to increased vulnerability to climate extremes.

Understanding the critical link between livelihoods and environment/forest conservation, WWF, the National Forestry Authority and Kitara Civil Society Organizations Network (KCSO)-a local CSO began a collaborative partnership with the communities at the onset of the project.

**This partnership aims at increasing food security and income generation while maintaining the existence of the central forest reserves. We believe that when the communities have alternative sources of livelihoods, then the forest and environment as a whole will be allowed to regenerate.**

In this publication, share with you stories of how the alternative livelihoods interventions are transforming lives and healing the environment.



## From Encroacher to Guardian:

### **The Story of Businge Angelica, Mama Kagombe**

In Kibaale District, amidst the lush greenery of Kagombe Forest Reserve, a remarkable transformation has taken place. Businge Angelica, a resident of Kabale LC1 in Nyamarunda Sub County, once made her livelihood through activities that threatened the very existence of the forest she depended on.

Like many women in her community, she grew maize and beans within the forest, burned charcoal, and cut down trees for firewood. But as the forest shrank, so did the stability of their lives.

“***Unpredictable weather patterns became the new reality. The rains came too late or too soon, and the scorching sun withered our crops before they could yield a harvest,***” she recalls.

The extensive degradation of Kagombe Forest, which had once regulated the climate and nurtured their farmlands, had taken a heavy toll.

## A Turning Point: Embracing Conservation

It was during this period of hardship that the National Forestry Authority (NFA), in partnership with WWF-Uganda and funding from the VELUX Group, launched the Natural Forest Regeneration for Enhanced Carbon Absorption in the Albertine Rift (FRECAR) project. The project aimed to restore the degraded forest, and Businge, along with other women, was given a second chance—not just for the forest, but for their own livelihoods.

Kitara Civil Society Organisations Network (KCSO), a local NGO, was brought on board to implement the project at the grassroots level.

Under the initiative, Businge and other former encroachers were trained in forest conservation techniques, including tree planting, fire line creation, and sustainable resource management.

The training transformed her understanding of the value of forests, and she soon became a champion of restoration efforts.

To support sustainable community engagement, the project organized Businge and her peers into a Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) group. This group later evolved into a Village Savings and

Loan Association (VSLA) named Kagombe Environment Conservation Association), enabling its members to save and borrow money for personal and business growth.

Businge and her fellow group members were hired to plant trees within Kagombe Forest, earning a wage for their work. With this income, she built a house, purchased a television, and even bought a smartphone—symbols of the improved quality of life she had once thought unattainable.

She also received goats under the project, which have multiplied, further enhancing her financial security.



**Her group member, Harriet Atuhairwe, has also reaped the benefits of the project. With her earnings, Atuhairwe has been able to pay school fees for her children and, through the VSLA, has saved enough to purchase her own land and secure a land title. She urges other women who might still be engaging in illegal activities within the forest to abandon degradation and join in the conservation efforts.**



# Mama Kagombe: A Beacon of Change

Businge's passion for restoring Kagombe Forest has earned her the affectionate nickname "Mama Kagombe," meaning "Mother Kagombe." Her journey from an encroacher to a guardian of the forest stands as an inspiration to her community. She now dedicates her life to protecting and restoring the very forest she once exploited.

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***"I will never think of degrading the forest again,"*** she says with conviction. ***"We have seen so many advantages in restoring our Kagombe Forest, not just for our homes, but for our community at large."***

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Businge Angelica's story is a testament to the power of transformation, the impact of sustainable development, and the resilience of communities when given the right support. Through conservation and restoration, she has not only changed her own life but has also contributed to securing the future of Kagombe Forest for generations to come.





## From Forest Encroacher to Sustainable Farmer.

### **The story of Christopher Turyatunga**

In Nyamarunda Sub County, another inspiring change story unfolds. Christopher Turyatunga, once a close neighbor of Kagombe Forest Reserve, heavily relied on the forest for his livelihood. He farmed within its boundaries and engaged in charcoal burning, contributing to the widespread degradation that left large portions of the forest bare.

According to Richard Kyalisima from the National Forestry Authority (NFA), up to 80% of the forest had been degraded, severely affecting the surrounding environment and communities.

Recognizing the urgent need to relieve pressure on the forest, NFA collaborated with WWF-Uganda under the FRECAR project to introduce alternative sources of livelihood for those dependent on the forest.

Turyatunga was recruited and trained on sustainable co-existence with the forest. With his 20 hectares of land, he received 500 coffee seedlings and 600 seedlings of various tree species, including indigenous species like Grevillea. He was also given banana suckers and a heifer to support his transition to sustainable farming.

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***“The FRECAR project supported the constructed an improved cook stove for me. Unlike traditional stoves that consumed large amounts of firewood, the new stove requires just a single piece of firewood to cook an entire meal. This has significantly reduced my reliance on forest resources while providing a cleaner and more efficient cooking method,”***

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Turyatunga says.

Today, Turyatunga’s coffee plants have flourished, and he sells bananas to pay school fees for his children and meet household needs. He also uses the dung from his heifer as manure for his coffee and banana plantations, increasing productivity.

Turyatunga acknowledges that the income from these initiatives far surpasses what he previously earned from farming and charcoal burning in the forest. Additionally, the improved cook stove has not only reduced firewood consumption but also minimizes smoke emissions, improving his family's health while allowing for faster cooking.



His livelihood has drastically improved, and he has firmly decided never to return to forest encroachment. He calls on other community members living near the forest to embrace sustainable alternatives, ensuring a peaceful coexistence with nature.

His story stands as a powerful example of how thoughtful intervention and sustainable practices can create lasting change, benefitting both individuals and the environment. Through projects like FRECAR, the restoration of Kagombe Forest continues, one transformed life at a time.



## A Woodlot Champion

Busobozi Moses, a resident of Bujogoro Parish in Nyamahondo Sub County, Kibaale District, was once an encroacher of Kagombe Forest Reserve.

Being close to the forest, he was often unaware of its boundaries, leading to conflicts with authorities over agricultural activities conducted inside the reserve. These conflicts persisted until the advent of the FRECAR project.

Longing for a stable and sustainable source of income that did not involve forest destruction, Busobozi found an opportunity through the FRECAR project. Implemented by WWF-Uganda with funding from the VELUX Group, in collaboration with KCSON and NFA, the project educated him on the benefits of conservation.

Inspired, he chose to establish a woodlot on his land.

With support from the project, Busobozi received eucalyptus tree seedlings for 11 hectares and indigenous tree seedlings for 3 hectares.

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***“Additionally, I was provided with coffee seedlings, which I planted on seven hectares to further diversify his income sources,”*** he notes.

Now, Busobozi envisions a future where Kagombe Forest regenerates without pressure from surrounding communities.

***“In a few years, I anticipate earning significantly from both my coffee plantation and woodlot,”*** he says.

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Encouraging others, he advises community members to establish woodlots if they have land, reducing reliance on the forest for charcoal, firewood, and timber.





## Beekeeping: A Sustainable Alternative Transforming Lives of Former Forest Encroachers

For decades, Kitechura Central Forest Reserve in Kyenjojo District, Western Uganda, faced heavy encroachment. Spanning approximately 5,330 hectares, the forest had been progressively shrinking due to deforestation for farming, charcoal burning, and firewood collection.

**Many community members relied on these activities for their survival, unaware of the long-term environmental consequences. The loss of tree cover disrupted local weather patterns and threatened biodiversity, prompting urgent intervention. Recognizing the need for a sustainable solution, the National Forestry Authority (NFA), WWF-Uganda and local CSOs joined forces to address the crisis.**

**WWF-Uganda, mobilized the communities around the forest to form Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) groups, including the Kiteega Community Environmental Sensitive Association. This group, composed primarily of former forest encroachers, was introduced to the benefits of conservation and sustainable livelihood options.**

To ensure that conservation efforts aligned with the economic needs of the community, WWF and partners facilitated the formation of a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) with 71 initial members. WWF-Uganda provided a startup capital. This VSLA enabled members to save, manage finances, and invest in alternative income-generating activities.

To further promote sustainability, the members were given tree seedlings and coffee seedlings to plant on their own land.

Over time, more community members joined similar VSLAs, bringing the total membership to 204, comprising 100 women and 104 men.

One of the most transformative initiatives introduced to the community was beekeeping. WWF-Uganda through implementing CSOs provided beehives, gum boots, overalls, and other essential equipment to support the beekeeping business. The first honey harvest was a success and the money generated from the sales was reinvested in the association (purchase of piglets).



According to Mugarura Angelus, the Chairperson of the Association, the goal is to ensure that every member benefits. As the pigs reproduce, their piglets are distributed among members, gradually expanding the project's impact. This cycle of growth is ensuring that members have sustainable income sources, reducing the temptation to revert to forest encroachment.

# Community Impact and Testimonies

Several members have already experienced tangible benefits from the initiative. Mugisa Byaruhanga, a member of the association, acknowledges the transformation in his life. He received 250 banana suckers, a piglet, and an energy-saving cook stove through the Forest Restoration and Community Alternative Resources (FRECAR) project.

“My cook stove saves a lot of fuel, and I sell bananas to educate my children and sustain my family,” he says, emphasizing how these interventions have provided a better alternative to illegal activities in the forest.



Similarly, Asiimwe Jeninah, another beneficiary, appreciates the support. She received 250 banana suckers and an energy-saving cook stove, which has significantly reduced her need for firewood.

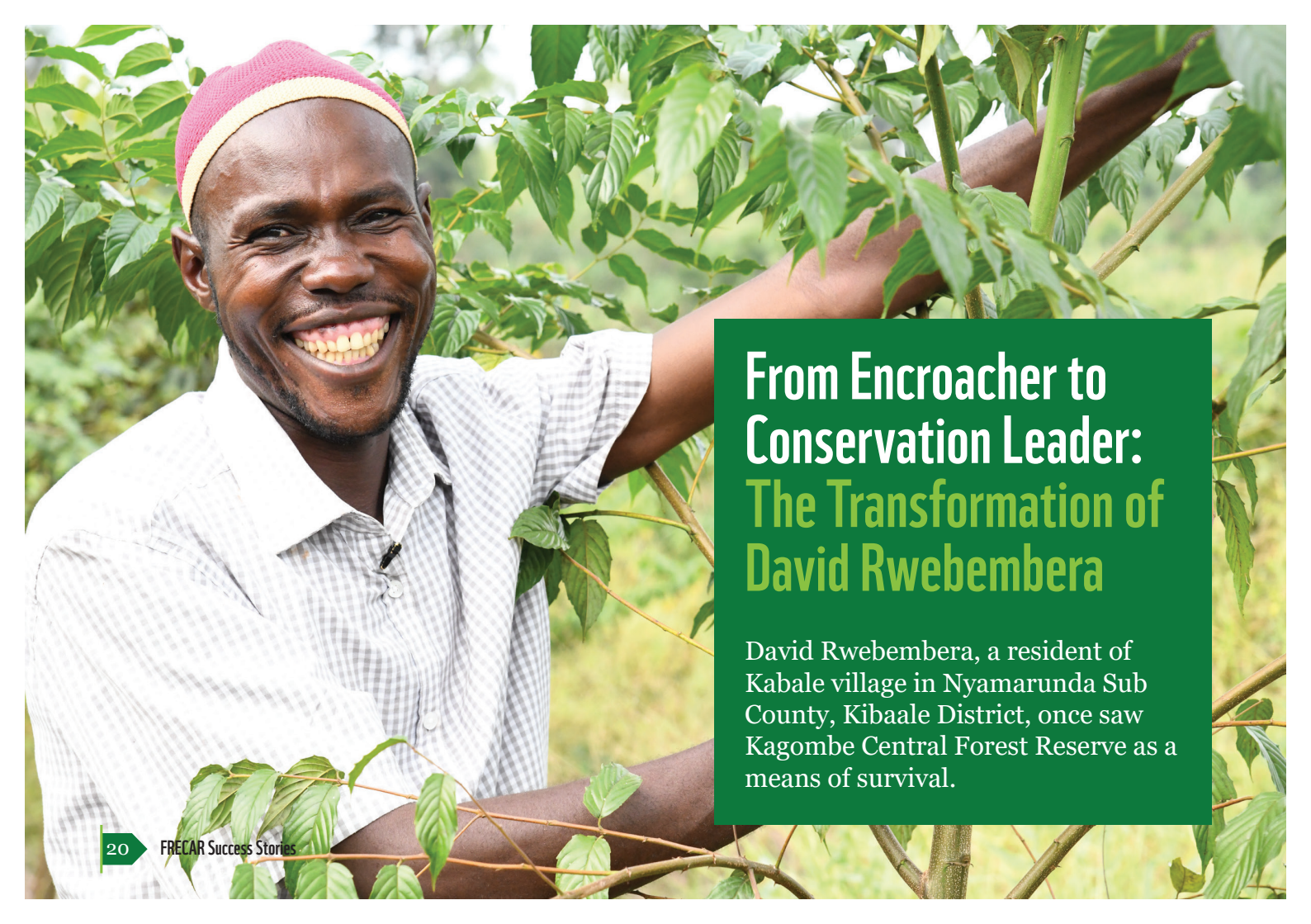
“Collecting firewood used to be a burden, especially for women in our community. Now, I have more time to engage in productive activities at home,” she shares.

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Beyond economic benefits, the association members have taken on the responsibility of environmental advocacy. They hold community meetings to raise awareness about the importance of forest conservation and offer guidance on alternative livelihoods. Their efforts have strengthened local commitment to sustainable practices, reducing deforestation while improving household incomes.

The community members of Kitechura Forest Reserve are now living proof that environmental conservation and economic empowerment can go hand in hand. Thanks to the intervention of WWF-Uganda, KCSON, and NFA, former encroachers have transitioned into conservation ambassadors.

Their gratitude towards these organizations is immense, as they continue to build a future where the forest thrives alongside improved community livelihoods. With beekeeping and other sustainable ventures, the people of Kitechura Forest Reserve have found a way to secure their future without compromising the environment.

A photograph of a man, David Rwebembera, smiling broadly. He is wearing a red and yellow headband and a white and grey checkered shirt. He is standing in a lush green forest, with his arms resting on a tree branch. The background is filled with vibrant green leaves and branches.

## From Encroacher to Conservation Leader: The Transformation of David Rwebembera

David Rwebembera, a resident of Kabale village in Nyamarunda Sub County, Kibaale District, once saw Kagombe Central Forest Reserve as a means of survival.

Like many others in his community, he relied on the forest for charcoal burning and farming food crops such as maize, groundnuts, and beans.

The forest's seemingly fertile soils promised good yields, and encroaching on it appeared to be the only viable way to sustain his family. However, the consequences of this unsustainable practice soon became apparent.

**“As time went on, the impact of deforestation began to show. The once lush forest was disappearing, and unpredictable weather patterns emerged,”**  
he says.

Rwebembera and other encroachers started experiencing prolonged droughts, making it difficult for crops to thrive. The scorching sun destroyed their yields, leaving them in an even more precarious state.

Additionally, the continuous conflict with the National Forestry Authority (NFA) made their lives difficult. Encroachers faced frequent evictions, and crops planted in the forest were often destroyed. The situation had become unsustainable, but Rwebembera and his peers saw no alternative.

**“Hope came in the form of the Forest Restoration and Climate Adaptation Resilience (FRECAR) project, spearheaded by WWF-Uganda in collaboration with NFA. This initiative sought to balance conservation efforts with the livelihoods of communities living around the forest,”** Rwebembera says.

The organizations initiated dialogue and sensitization meetings in Nyamarunda Sub County, educating community members about the importance of forest conservation. They explained how protecting Kagombe Forest Reserve would not only restore biodiversity but also improve local livelihoods. Rwebembera was particularly moved by these discussions and began to rethink.

With the guidance, Rwebembera and hundred others took the bold step of forming a Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) group—the Greater Kabale-Kagombe Environmental Conservation Association. They were trained on conservation practices and how they could actively contribute to reforestation efforts.



To facilitate their work, WWF-Uganda and partners provided them with essential office tools, including calculators, staplers, files, and record books. Encouraged by this support, Rwebembera took it upon himself to mobilize more community members, spreading the gospel of conservation throughout the village.



## Reforestation and Livelihood Transformation

The CFM group embarked on an ambitious reforestation drive, initially planting 226 hectares of trees in the forest. Unlike their past encounters with the forest, this time, their work was recognized and rewarded.

They were paid for every tree they planted, providing them with an alternative income source while restoring the forest. Over time, their efforts expanded, and they managed to plant an impressive 1,126 hectares of trees in previously degraded areas. As their conservation work gained momentum, more community members joined the initiative.



## Diversification: Beekeeping and Energy-Saving Initiatives

To further reduce reliance on the forest for survival, the group was introduced to alternative income-generating activities. They received training in beekeeping and were provided with 160 beehives. With the NFA's approval, these hives were placed in the buffer zone of the forest. The group was also equipped with honey collection buckets, gumboots, overalls, and other essential tools for apiary management.

In addition to beekeeping, the members were trained in making energy-saving cookstoves.

These stoves require significantly less firewood compared to traditional ones, further reducing pressure on the forest.

Through these initiatives, the group has collectively saved over 12 million Ugandan shillings, which members can borrow in times of need and repay later.

Now officially registered at both the Sub County and District levels, the Greater Kabale-Kagombe Environmental Conservation Association is taking on a broader role in the

community. They hold regular meetings to educate others on the importance of conservation and the benefits it brings.

Looking to the future, the group has ambitious plans. As the forest regenerates, they aim to invest in social enterprise by purchasing tents, chairs, and public address systems for hire. These items will be labelled to highlight their origin—forest conservation—further reinforcing the message that environmental protection yields tangible benefits.

David Rwebembera's journey from a forest encroacher to a conservation leader is a testament to the power of awareness, community engagement, and sustainable livelihood alternatives. His leadership has not only helped restore Kagombe Forest but has also provided his community with a new path to prosperity.

Today, he and his team stand as guardians of the forest, ensuring that no one returns to exploit it destructively. Their story serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that when communities and conservation efforts align, both nature and people thrive.



To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and  
to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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