

**Title of the Project:** *Mitigating Poaching and Egg Collection of the Grey Crowned Crane in Lutembe Bay Wetland through Apiary Farming, Livestock Seedbanks, and VSLAs.*

**Activity 1: Identify 30 households in beekeeping and 30 household in livestock farming (especially youth and reformed poachers) (February 2025)**

In February 2026, the project team conducted a community awareness and beneficiary selection meeting across three villages (Nganjo, Lutembe, and Bulonde) located within Kajjansi Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda. This activity served as a critical entry point for implementing the project titled “Mitigating Poaching and Egg Collection of the Grey Crowned Crane in Lutembe Bay Wetland through Apiary Farming, Livestock Seedbanks, and VSLAs.”

The primary objective of the meeting was to raise awareness on wetland conservation and the protection of the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*), while also identifying 45 beneficiary households (30 for livestock seedbanks and 15 for beekeeping). Selection deliberately prioritized youth, women, and reformed poachers, ensuring inclusion of vulnerable and high-impact groups. The meeting also introduced Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) as a strategy to enhance financial inclusion and provide access to affordable credit for sustainable livelihood investments.

A total of 270 participants attended the meeting (149 Females and 121 Males), with approximately 90 participants from each village. These included farmers, fishermen, ex-hunters, and other wetland-dependent resource users. Participants were identified in collaboration with Village Chairpersons and the executive committee of the Lutembe Wetland Users Association, ensuring representation of individuals with strong local knowledge of the wetland ecosystem and frequent interaction with its biodiversity.

The meeting was conducted in accordance with the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Participation was voluntary, and the project team clearly communicated the project’s objectives, expected outcomes, and participant roles before obtaining consent. To encourage inclusive participation and active engagement, attendees were organized into smaller discussion groups based on gender, age, occupation, and proximity to the wetland. This approach enabled diverse perspectives and facilitated open, constructive dialogue.

Facilitated by the Project Coordinator and supported by a note-taker, the discussions focused on key themes including community knowledge of the Grey Crowned Crane, its distribution and behavior, perceived threats such as habitat degradation and snaring, and the cultural significance of the species. Sensitive issues, particularly those related to illegal activities, were handled carefully and respectfully, with prior guidance from local leaders to maintain trust and openness.

The meeting also provided a platform for co-designing livelihood interventions, with participants contributing insights on suitable beekeeping practices, preferred livestock species for seedbanks, and effective structures for VSLA groups. Overall, participants expressed strong interest and

willingness to adopt these alternative livelihood options as a means of reducing dependence on wetland resources, improving household incomes, and supporting conservation efforts for the Grey Crowned Crane and its habitat.

### Outcome of the activity

- Increased awareness among **270** community members (**149F:121M**) on the importance of conserving the Grey Crowned Crane and protecting Lutembe Bay Wetland
- Successful identification and selection of 45 beneficiary households (with representation of women, youth, and reformed poachers) for beekeeping and livestock seedbank interventions
- Strengthened community understanding and acceptance of alternative livelihoods as viable substitutes for poaching and unsustainable wetland use
- Enhanced community participation and ownership of conservation initiatives through a transparent and inclusive selection process
- Improved knowledge on the structure and benefits of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), laying the foundation for their establishment
- Strengthened collaboration between the project team, local leaders, and the Lutembe Wetland Users Association.



***Photo 1: Community members participating in an awareness-raising meeting on wetland conservation, Grey Crowned Crane protection, and sustainable livelihood opportunities in Lutembe Bay Wetland. © Byron Ssemambo***

**Activity 2: Distribution and training of the selected beneficiaries on animal husbandry and disease control and Apiary management (March 2026)**

### **Distribution of Beehives and training of Beneficiaries in Apiary Management (March 2026)**

In March 2026, the project implemented a comprehensive apiary management training as part of its broader strategy to promote sustainable livelihoods and reduce poaching pressure on the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) in Lutembe Bay Wetland. A total of 45 community members including 15 beekeeping beneficiaries and 30 livestock beneficiaries had previously been identified through a participatory process during the awareness meetings, with guidance from local leaders and the Lutembe Wetland Users Association executive. Selection criteria included proximity to the wetland, history of engagement in or vulnerability to poaching activities, economic need, and demonstrated willingness to adopt conservation-friendly livelihoods. Gender inclusivity was emphasized, ensuring participation of both men and women.

The apiary training specifically targeted the 15 selected beekeeping beneficiaries, equipping them with the necessary skills to establish and manage productive apiaries. Each participant received two Kenya Top Bar (KTB) hives as part of the project support funded by the Rufford Small Grant Foundation. The training was conducted over two days and facilitated by a qualified entomologist with extensive experience in tropical apiculture and community-based capacity building.

The training combined theoretical instruction with practical, hands-on demonstrations, ensuring that participants gained both knowledge and confidence. Key topics included bee biology and behavior, identification of different bee kinds, and understanding colony dynamics. Participants were introduced to apiary establishment, including site selection based on environmental suitability, hive placement, baiting techniques to attract swarms, and proper orientation and shading to optimize productivity.

A central focus of the training was the management of Kenya Top Bar (KTB) hives, a cost-effective and locally adaptable technology. Participants were guided through hive installation, routine inspection, and maintenance practices. The facilitator demonstrated sustainable honey harvesting techniques, emphasizing non-destructive methods that protect the colony and ensure long-term productivity.

To build confidence and ensure safety, participants received practical instruction on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including bee suits, gloves, and veils. They practiced safe approaches to hive handling, use of smokers to calm bees, and techniques for minimizing disturbance during inspections.

The training also addressed colony health management, including identification and control of pests and diseases, maintenance of hive hygiene, and seasonal management practices such as

supplementary feeding during periods of low nectar availability. Emphasis was placed on environmentally responsible practices, discouraging the use of harmful chemicals and promoting conservation-friendly apiary management.

By the end of the training, participants demonstrated improved knowledge, practical skills, and confidence in managing their apiaries. Importantly, the training reinforced the project's broader conservation message, that sustainable livelihood options like beekeeping can reduce dependence on wetland resources and contribute directly to biodiversity conservation. Participants expressed strong commitment to applying the skills gained, recognizing that improved incomes from honey production can coexist with, and support, the protection of the Grey Crowned Crane and its fragile wetland habitat.



**Photo 2: Beekeeping beneficiaries receiving Kenya Top Bar (KTB) hives as part of the project's support to establish sustainable apiary enterprises. © Byron Ssemambo**

#### **Distribution of Livestock and Training of Beneficiaries in Livestock Management (March 2026)**

In March 2026, building on insights from the February awareness and community engagement meetings, the project team implemented a key livelihood intervention through the establishment of livestock seedbanks in Nganjo, Lutembe, and Bulonde villages surrounding Lutembe Bay Wetland. A total of 30 female pigs were distributed to carefully selected beneficiaries as part of a strategy to provide sustainable sources of protein and income, thereby reducing dependence on bushmeat hunting and pressure on wetland biodiversity, particularly the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*).

The choice of pigs as the preferred livestock was community-driven, having been proposed and agreed upon during the awareness meetings. Pigs were selected due to their high reproductive potential, adaptability to local conditions, and relatively low input requirements, making them suitable for vulnerable households. Beneficiaries included reformed poachers, smallholder farmers, and other economically vulnerable community members who demonstrated a clear commitment to conservation and willingness to adopt alternative livelihoods.

Prior to distribution, all beneficiaries underwent practical training in livestock management to ensure effective utilization of the animals. The training covered key aspects of pig husbandry, including proper feeding practices, housing and shelter construction, disease prevention and control, breeding management, and general animal welfare. This capacity-building component was essential to enhance productivity, minimize losses, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the intervention.

A central element of the livestock seedbank model was the adoption of a “pass-on-the-gift” approach. Under this system, each beneficiary commits to passing on the first female offspring (piglet) to another household within the community. This mechanism ensures that the benefits of the project extend beyond the initial 30 households, creating a multiplier effect that gradually increases the number of beneficiaries over time. It also promotes community unity, shared responsibility, and accountability, strengthening local ownership of both livelihood and conservation outcomes.

The distributed pigs provide dual benefits to participating households. Firstly, they enhance household nutrition by increasing access to animal protein. Secondly, they offer a reliable source of income, as pigs reproduce quickly and can generate revenue through the sale of piglets or meat products. Beneficiaries were encouraged to reinvest proceeds into improving their livelihoods while maintaining sustainable practices.

The activity was successfully completed with the distribution of pigs to all 30 trained beneficiaries, marking a significant milestone in the project’s implementation. As the project progresses, the livestock seedbank initiative is expected to serve as a cornerstone intervention, reducing reliance on illegal hunting, improving household resilience, and fostering a stronger coexistence between local communities and wildlife within the Lutembe Bay Wetland ecosystem.



**Photo 3: Some of the pigs distributed to reformed poachers in Lutembe Wetland as part of the livestock seedbank initiative supporting alternative livelihoods. © Byron Ssemambo**

#### **Outcome of the activity**

- Beneficiaries gained practical knowledge in livestock husbandry (feeding, housing, breeding, disease control) and apiary management (hive management, honey harvesting, colony health), enabling effective and sustainable management of their enterprises.
- A total of 45 beneficiaries (30 livestock, 15 beekeeping) successfully transitioned toward conservation-friendly income-generating activities, reducing reliance on poaching and unsustainable wetland resource use.
- Access to livestock (pigs) is expected to improve availability of animal protein at the household level, contributing to better nutrition.
- Training reinforced the link between sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation, increasing community commitment to protecting the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) and its wetland habitat.
- The “pass-on-the-gift” system was successfully introduced, ensuring future expansion of benefits to additional households and strengthening community cooperation.

- Active participation in training and distribution fostered a sense of responsibility and ownership among beneficiaries, supporting long-term sustainability of both livelihood and conservation outcomes.

**Activity 3: Formation and Training of Community Members in Governance, Savings, Loan Management, and Record Keeping of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) (April 2026)**

In April 2026, the project team implemented a key intervention aimed at strengthening community financial resilience and reducing poverty-driven pressures on Lutembe Bay Wetland through the establishment of a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA). This initiative targeted community members from Nganjo, Lutembe, and Bulonde villages and was designed to complement ongoing livelihood activities such as beekeeping and livestock seedbanks.

Although the original plan was to establish one VSLA per village, a participatory decision-making process during the February 2026 awareness meetings led community members to form one consolidated VSLA group across the three villages. This approach was intended to allow members to first build experience, unity, and trust within a single group, after which trained members would mentor and support the formation of additional VSLAs within their respective villages.

The VSLA was formally established through a community-led process, including the election of an executive committee responsible for leadership, financial oversight, and coordination of group activities. For the VSLA group to operate smoothly, the project provided a seed fund, which was handed over to the VSLA leadership as initial capital to support internal lending. This fund will enable members to access small, low-interest loans to invest in income-generating activities, including apiary enterprises, livestock rearing, and small-scale businesses, as well as to meet essential household needs such as education and healthcare.

Prior to disbursement of the seed fund, all VSLA members (30 members) underwent comprehensive training from the Livelihoods & VSLA Facilitator in financial literacy and group management. The training covered key areas including savings mobilization, loan disbursement procedures, interest calculation, repayment schedules, record keeping, and governance structures. Emphasis was placed on transparency, accountability, and collective decision-making, ensuring that members fully understand and adhere to agreed-upon rules and procedures. Members also developed by-laws and operational guidelines to govern the group's activities, reinforcing ownership and sustainability.

The VSLA operates through regular (weekly) meetings, where members make savings contributions, review loan applications, track repayments, and discuss group progress. This structure promotes a culture of financial discipline, planning, and mutual accountability. Importantly, the VSLA also serves as a platform for social unity, bringing together individuals from different backgrounds to work toward shared economic and conservation goals.

By improving access to affordable credit and encouraging savings, the VSLA initiative supports income diversification and economic empowerment, reducing reliance on unsustainable activities such as poaching and wetland resource exploitation. Beneficiaries will be able to reinvest in productive ventures, including those supported by the project, thereby strengthening the link between livelihood improvement and biodiversity conservation.

As the VSLA matures, it is expected to generate a revolving fund through interest on loans, part of which will be reinvested into conservation activities, including support for community wildlife monitoring or in raising awareness in wetland conservation. In the long term, the model is designed to create a self-sustaining, community-owned financial system that underpins both livelihood security and environmental stewardship. This activity lays the foundation for a scalable conservation-finance model, where empowered communities are better equipped to manage their resources sustainably while actively contributing to the protection of the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) and the Lutembe Bay Wetland ecosystem.



**Photo 4: Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) members receiving training from a VSLA facilitator on financial literacy, governance, savings, and loan management. © Byron Ssemambo**

## **Outcomes**

- Community members now have access to affordable credit and savings mechanisms, reducing reliance on high-interest informal lenders
- Members demonstrate improved capacity in savings discipline, loan utilization, and record keeping
- The VSLA has fostered trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility among members across the three villages
- The established VSLA is serving as a learning and demonstration platform, with trained members expected to mentor the formation of additional VSLAs in their respective villages

## **Upcoming activities**

1. *Facilitate community dialogue meetings to co-create conservation strategies (July 2026).*
2. *Conduct community outreach and youth engagement programs (August 2026).*
3. *Data collection and Analysis (August 2026)*
4. *Monitor and evaluate the impact of the project (livelihood) improvement activities on reducing poaching (August 2026).*