

# Gorilla Highlands Experts Hubs — Concept Paper

## A. Introduction

On Saturday, 18 June 2022, the General Assembly of Gorilla Highlands Experts (GHE) will take place in Kigali, Rwanda. Building on a decade of efforts in the transboundary Gorilla Highlands region shared by Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo, this nonprofit organisation is being registered to:

- (1) encourage peace, security, economic and social development of the region
- (2) project a positive, unified image of the region that transcends national borders
- (3) strengthen livelihoods and cultural self-respect of Indigenous peoples
- (4) help find a sustainable global way of living

At the core of the GHE purpose lies creation of opportunities for Rwandans, Ugandans and the Congolese to cooperate and prosper together. GHE Hubs project presented below is to be piloted in Musanze in 2022-23 and expected to become the central activity of the organisation.

## B. Context

The Gorilla Highlands region — one of stunning beauty and abundance — remains in a shaky security and economic state due to the paradox of personal poverty amidst richness of natural resources, persistent militarisation, mistrust and endemic corruption. Young people of Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo lack business opportunities and models for effective activism to advance their communities. The right mix of entrepreneurship, conservation, creative activities, sports, practical support, peacebuilding, and movement mobilisation could forge relationships, nourish grassroots solidarity and enhance problem solving.

The future of this region will remain questionable unless people become more confident leaders and advocates in and for their communities. Person-to-person exchange and organising done at scale can make a significant contribution to regional peacebuilding and civic engagement. Given the young average age, we see a chance to envision and co-create home-grown solutions to the various challenges facing the region.

## C. Project Mission Statement

We create physical and virtual hubs in Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo to connect the youth of these countries and give them practical skills that lead to personal development, civic engagement and regional peacebuilding.

## D. Theory of Change

If we make a conducive and stimulating environment for young people, they will feel more empowered and confident to lead positive changes in their communities. This, coupled with economic development, will boost peace and security in the transboundary region.

## E. Pilot Project Concept

Create a one-year pilot project in Rwanda's Musanze district offering young people (15-30 years of age) connections, support, solutions to their problems and active exposure to societal issues. It will attract the youth by having an emphasis on entrepreneurship skills and transboundary personal connections but include much more (see *F. Major Elements*). No permanent location is planned during the pilot phase.

The pilot project will mostly target the students of educational institutions around the Karisimbi area of Musanze Town while remaining open to the youth who don't have access to school.

## F. Major Elements of the Pilot Project

1. partnerships with businesses, organisations and individuals ready to share their space and skills
2. seed funding capital (available to members for conservation/environmental businesses)
3. personal growth sharing meetings and sports gatherings
4. social responsibility program focused on Historically Marginalised People
5. leadership training sessions
6. eco-friendly small business development campaign
7. international friendship camps

## G. Major Milestones/Key Events

date	milestone/event
15/7/2022	Form the project management team
20/7/2022	Start social media promotion
1/8/2022	Enrol 10 experts to lead different activities
1/8/2022	Acquire operational funding
15/8/2022	Partner up with 5 physical space providers
31/8/2022	Launch a dedicated website (member registration and online sessions)
10/9/2022	Enrol the first cohort (20 members)
16/9/2022	Start activities
15/10/2022	Obtain funding for Christmas international friendship camp
30/11/2022	Obtain seed funding (to be awarded at the camp)
26/12/2022	Hold the first camp (up to a week long)
31/1/2023	Review the first cohort, plan for the second cohort

## H. Assumptions

1. Having entrepreneurial trainings for local businesses, international retreats, social gatherings and startup grants can attract the target audience.
2. The project is in line with Rwanda's socioeconomic objectives.
3. Due to gains in Covid vaccination physical meetings will not be restricted again.

## I. Central Risks & Mitigation

1. Cultural tendency to not share information and express feelings → Volunteers to take the lead sharing their personal experiences and discussing social life before engaging in more private issues. Assure potential members of confidentiality of their membership and information.
2. Misconception about project objectives by local authorities → Clearly communicate our intentions and keep all communication channels open.
3. Inability to fundraise target amounts → Tap into personal networks, prepare a general fundraising campaign for other audiences.

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