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"Evaluating a Union between Health Care and Conservation: a Mobile Clinic Improves Park-People Relations, Yet Poaching Increases"

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It is widely viewed that by providing employment or services to neighbouring communities, a protected area may increase positive attitudes towards conservation and discourage encroachment, but this is rarely tested. Our research examines this view by evaluating local attitudes towards the park and incidence of encroachment before and after the implementation of a novel conservation strategy—a mobile health clinic - in the predominantly agricultural communities bordering Kibale National Park, Uganda. The implementation of the mobile clinic programme coincided with a more positive attitude towards the park and a decrease in the number of people who "disliked" the park. Despite this, the incidence of encroachment increased. There are a number of possible explanations for this contradiction, including respondents giving answers they believe will maintain the service they appreciate, and that while the local community may appreciate the mobile clinic, this appreciation is not sufficient to make people alter their behaviour because of tradition or need (e.g., the need among the very poor to feed their family or send a child to school is very high). Overall, people typically expressed that they did not have a problem with living adjacent to the park, except for the harm done by crop-raiding animals. However, local people expressed the view that they receive few benefits from the park—a perception that might be improved with more extensive use of the mobile clinic. (Text from authors' abstract)

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