The Rwenzori Mountains National Park (RMNP) is unique tourist attraction that serves as a global biodiversity hotspot and regional economic hub. It was gazetted as a National Park in 1991. In 1994 it was declared a World Heritage Site because of its cultural and scenic beauty and therefore raising its conservation status to an International level. Margherita Peak, one of Mount Stanley’s twin summits, is Africa’s third highest peak with a height of 5,109 m (16,762 ft). Africa’s fourth and fifth highest peaks Mts Speke and Baker are also located in the park. The park has glaciers, snowfields, waterfalls, and lakes and is one of Africa’s most beautiful mountain areas. The park is under the management of Uganda Wildlife Authority.
Importance of the RMNP Landscape

Mountain landscapes and water catchments have enormous economic, socioeconomic and conservation importance in Uganda. This Landscape supports about two million people most of whom are engaged in agricultural livelihoods. RMNP is important in the following ways:

- **A Water Tower:** The RMNP landscape is a water catchment that supplies water for domestic and public use; industry, institutions and community livelihoods. The importance of this resource is demonstrated by the presence of:
  - Agricultural/irrigation schemes
  - Power generation by four mini-hydropower stations
  - Development of an additional hydropower power station underway
  - Potential hydropower output from the catchments approximates 50 Megawatts (ERA 2015).
  - Domestic support to one of the leading urban industrial bases in the country (NWSC 2015).

  This water also feeds into Lakes George and Edward, forms part of Lake Victoria and Albert Nile and Wetlands that are significant for water purification in lower catchment areas.

- **Tourism Destination:** The Park is a host to 70 mammals, 217 bird species including 19 Albertine Rift endemic species as well as snowfields and glaciers on the steeply rugged peaks.

- **Mineral Extraction:** The landscape is home to mining interests including Kilembe Mines, Kasese Cobalt Company Limited (KCCL) and Hima Cement plant, among others. Employ in excess of 100,000 people from the District and beyond (Kasese DLG 2015).

- **Climate regulation:** The Mountains are also strong regulators of climate. This is because the Park is a host to a tropical forest that is good for carbon storage

- **Research:** The RMNP has aided medical research, studies in anthropology and in climatic patterns. This is attributed to the presence of some of the world’s rarest and virgin vegetation the landscape.

- **Ecosystem services values:**

  A recent economic study commissioned by WWF Uganda on the value of RMNP showed an annual economic value of UGX 790 billion/year in watershed ecosystem services for a narrow area of 233,340 ha; i.e. an economic return per year of UGX 3.4 million/ha. Watershed ecosystem services values comprise of domestic use and supply, regulated water abstracted for electricity, wetland annual values, forested land and stumpage value and carbon sequestration values.

Status of the catchment

The landscape and its ecosystem are under threat of degradation. A combination of climate change related factors (including heavy rains, extreme dry seasons) and human actions like unsustainable land management practices (including historical and on-going diversion of rivers, construction of power plants, farming on steep slopes etc.) have increased susceptibility of landscape and are threatening the sustainability of the catchment. These climate related factors have brought about high levels of water siltation and irregularity flow which increasingly pose operational, regulatory and reputational risks to businesses downstream. Increasing population and poverty levels of communities adjacent to the park remain a big threat. Eventually, if unattended to, the communities will encroach on the park. Besides, the park is inadequately funded.

Efforts being undertaken to address the issues

An appraisal conducted by WWF Uganda recently showed that very few conservation options and little or no sustainable financing mechanisms exist for conservation of the RMNP landscape.

The private sector companies like Bugoye Hydro Power Plant and Hima Cement Limited have been very active in financing catchment management activities in the sub catchments. Their efforts have seen over 10km of river banks and once deforested areas restored. Tibet Hima Industry Company Ltd. National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) and Barclays Bank Kasese branch have equally been undertaking conservation activities in the landscape.

The Kasese District local government introduced by-laws to protect the ecosystem and supported community sensitization on human activities that would conserve the environment.

Reasons for Private Sector Involvement

- The private sector gains much from credit associated with supporting and protecting the RMNP that is both a Ramsar and World Heritage Site.
- In partnering with RMNP, the private sector would gain good visibility on international scene.
- RMNP is already enjoying International media visibility. During the COP21 meeting in Paris, France for example, images of the Rwenzori Mountain peaks