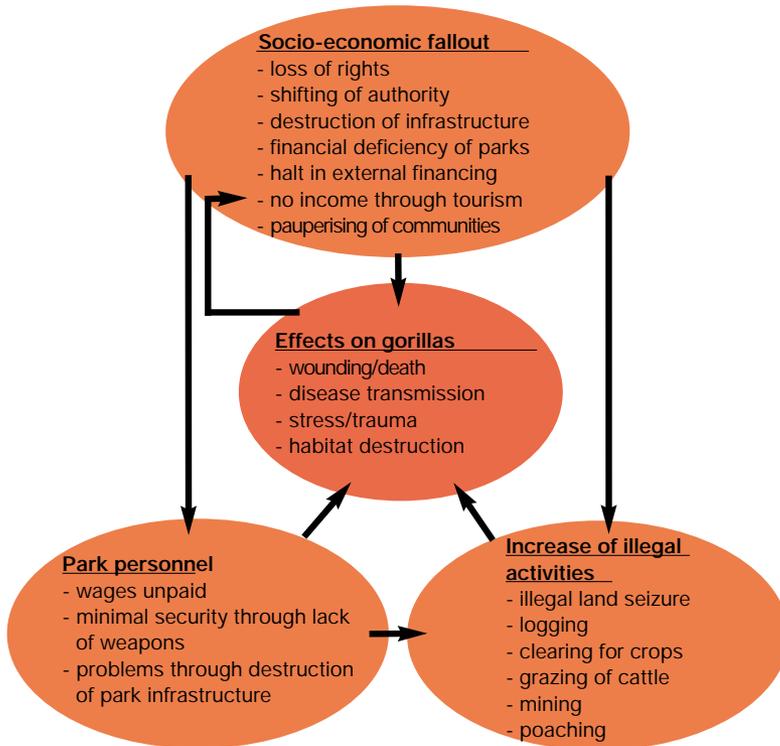


Many states in Central and West Africa are in crisis. The political instability of the region increases the risk for endangered animals through human influence.

Effects of political instability on protected gorilla areas



6 out of 10 gorilla habitat countries have been recently affected by crises.

The state budgets finance mainly their armies; for other purposes, money is not available. External support is frozen in times of crises, and tourism stops.

The people sink into poverty and try to make their living out of the park resources. The loss of rights leads increasingly to illegal activities such as logging and poaching in the national parks.

The direct effects of poaching or military presence in the forests is felt by all species, but in particular by large and rare animals. These are shot or trapped. The soldiers have no knowledge about the gorillas' friendly nature. They killed several (officially 4) mountain gorillas in 1997 in the DR Congo alone - out of fear!

DR Congo as an example:

An influx of refugees from Rwanda began in 1994 and soon reached 750,000 people in the protected gorilla areas.

The chaos in the Virunga areas led to at least a half of the bamboo stands being cut, which removed a vital food for the mountain gorillas.

Trapping has increased and foreign commerce in baby gorillas occurs.

Civil war broke out in 1997 and the park personnel were not paid for long periods. Their equipment was stolen by militia, their weapons taken by the army, leaving them unarmed against well-organised and well-equipped lawless bands.



Many gorillas, which had been habituated to tourists, were killed in DR Congo.

Indirect influences on great apes and other species in those regions magnify the threat:

- refuse left by humans could infect great apes

- human activity displaces great apes from their own areas, increasing territorial conflict with others

- stress lowers the immune response and leads to increased intraspecific aggression, resulting in higher (juvenile) mortality

- destruction of the habitat displaces animals and reduces their food resources



Hunger is their biggest enemy.