

The Oil Industry in Uganda



Raising Women's Voices: Community perspective



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E-mail: nape@nape.or.ug
www.nape.or.ug*



Background

The petroleum potential of Uganda was first documented by A.J Wayland in 1925 based on seepages he mapped at that time. Based on his work, the first oil well, 'Waki B1', was drilled in Butiaba area in 1938. Drilling was abandoned from then on through 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1980s due to World War II and the subsequent post-independence political crises and instabilities.

In July 2004, Heritage Oil and Gas Company conducted extended oil drilling. In 2007, 12 oil wells were confirmed in the Kaiso- Tonya area. Since then production sharing agreements have been signed between the government of Uganda and the different oil companies, including Heritage oil and Gas Company, Energy Africa, Hardman Resources, Tower Resources, Global Petroleum, Dominion, a Chinese On-shore Oil Company, Total and Tullow Oil.

To-date some 65 oil wells have been drilled. 58 have proved successful, a success rate of approximately 96% (<http://www.petroleum.go.ug>). The industry is governed by the 2008 Oil and Gas policy and an inadequate legal regime based on the 1985 Petroleum and Gas law. However, the emerging oil and gas industry is characterised by bad governance (i.e. lack of transparency, lack of accountability, bribery, and limited participation of vulnerable groups including women in oil debates).

Efforts to bring the rural women on board in oil issues have been minimal. In particular, the voices of rural women have not surfaced in most of the debates on oil yet these constitute a vital group of stakeholders in the industry and are custodians of homes that form the foundation of a nation. It is against this background that NAPE embarked on documenting the voices of rural women in the oil region so that their issues in relation to oil are amplified, known and mainstreamed in the industry.

The Oil Development Process

Government and oil companies have held several meetings. There was, for example, a meeting to discuss the early production scheme. Environmental impact assessments (EIAs) have been done on oil. Studies have also been conducted, discussions held, and promises, policy choices and consultations made. However, issues regarding benefit sharing and restricted access to some areas such as Kabwoya Wildlife Reserve where many communities (e.g. Sebagoro, Kyehoro and Kaiso) obtain thatching grass and firewood for the survival of their families have remained unaddressed. The game reserve is the only source of these resources for the communities.

Women's Participation

Unfortunately rural women from the communities in the oil region have not been participating in all these oil debates. Issues of women regarding compensation of those likely to be affected and /or displaced have been ignored. Therefore, on the whole, women's voices have been thin in oil debates, in Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs), discussions, consultations, and studies.

Effects of Oil on Women

Already, women in the oil region are experiencing the negative effects of oil on their livelihoods. For example, in areas such as Nguedo (where the pipelines are going to



pass) in Buliisa district and Kabaale (where the refinery is going to be constructed) in Hoima, people's land is being grabbed and their crops destroyed without adequate compensation. In fact, the situation is likely to worsen as more oil wells are drilled. Women are being affected most because they are the ones responsible for providing food.

Whereas the oil and gas policy of 2008 and other policies on oil mention stakeholder participation in oil activities, women are not catered for. Also, as the Uganda oil sector moves from exploration to production stage, a multitude of conflict impacts of oil remain to be addressed by government and the oil companies.

Exclusion and Disillusionment

A sense of exclusion of some primary stakeholders from government decision making over oil developments is likely to lead to disillusionment, especially of rural women from the oil region who are directly affected by oil development activities.

Women are also concerned that their voices have not adequately been considered among the issues of concern of the oil-affected communities.

Absence of Gender Responsive Policies

Government has not put in place gender responsive policies, strategies and mechanisms to address some of the issues and concerns of stakeholders in the oil industry. Without gender responsive policies the voices of women will continue to be absent in both the oil industry and debates.

NAPE's Interventions

NAPE has been sensitizing the women of the oil region on the human rights aspects of the oil industry so that they can understand, demand and defend their rights. In the process, NAPE has captured key voices of women on the negative Effects of oil on women and the communities.

The voices of Women.

Voices obtained focused on major themes that is; food security, health, environmental degradation, displacement and compensation, participation and consultation of stakeholders, unemployment and human rights abuse.



Voices of Women on oil impacts on their livelihoods

Human Rights

It is the right of every Uganda to enjoy fundamental human rights (e.g., the right to participate in the affairs of government individually or through representatives in accordance with the law, Article:38(i.) of the constitution of Uganda). Government, individuals, and development agencies must observe the fundamental human rights. However, oftentimes these rights have been violated. People especially in the rural communities have suffered in the name of development. They are sometimes left homeless, landless and, therefore refugees in their own country, and without food.

Kojo Nafutali Irumba, the parish chief of Nkondo Parish in the oil region is bothered by Tullows' denial of access route to vital community resources. Kojo says;



Source: NAPE_file photo

Ngasa II oil rig within Kaiso Tonya



Source: NAPE_file photo

An affected woman carrying firewood from the game reserve near L. Albert

“Women in Sebagoro have been denied access to firewood from the game reserve and the escarpment, where the oil wells are located. Infact they are given only two days in a week. We hear these areas near oil wells are no-go zones. As leaders of the community, we have not been consulted or even told anything yet it is our right to know what is going on in our area. This is violation of our human right to know as Ugandans!”

Fishing

Fishing as a livelihood activity has been severely disrupted by oil exploration activities leading to negative impacts to many fisher folks in Lake Albert. Communities in the oil region say that they no longer get the fish they used to get because some of the fish rich areas in the lake have been demarcated and we are not allowed access them”.

Gaturida Kusemererwa of Kyehoro says,





A woman in the oil region preparing fish for the market.

“I am a fish monger; I derive my livelihood from selling fish to support my family. I also obtain water for my domestic use from Lake Albert. But I hear Ngasa oil well is 30 kilometers deep in the lake. How will oil be drilled without spillage into the lake? In case of an oil spill, where shall I get water for cooking, bathing, washing clothes? Will I still be able to get fish?”

Women like me, have been engaged in petty trade in fish. Other women own fishing boats, others are fish mongers. Now I see us being forced out of business in case of an oil spill in the lake. Most of us have been here for more than ten years and we entirely depend on fish from Lake Albert for survival.”

Job opportunities

There were promises of jobs to the local communities that have depended on fishing for their livelihoods but fish stocks have declined because of the influx of people into the area. The fish stocks are dwindling because of bad fishing methods. Government seems not to be paying necessary attention to the fishing sector for long and concentrated on oil instead.

Nyamusana Constance of Kaiso; “I am sure that Tullow will not employ us because I see many immigrants coming in from many different parts of the country to look for jobs. Those foreigners are getting the jobs and we locals do not even have the required skills.”

Rose Kabonesa of Sebagoro: “This oil is on our land. Why are we not being given jobs? Why is it that people from elsewhere are getting the jobs even with no skills? Nothing seems to be left for us and our children? This is unfair!”

Environmental Degradation

The environment of the oil region is slowly being degraded by oil related activities, such as the numerous road excavations. It is likely to be degraded further when oil exploitation starts. The communities are already worried about soil pollution, water land and the air. This is what Victor Asaba of Sebagoro says: *“I see many oil wells near our village and the lake, . Tullow has not assured us on how they will deal with accidental oil spills? Is our Village safe, is our lake safe, are we safe? I hear they are*



going to put pipes. In case an oil pipe bursts and contaminates our lake, where shall we get clean water for cooking and washing? Won't that be the end of fish. Why are these people selfish, why are they thinking of themselves?

Source: NAPE file photo



Ngasa II oil well sunk on the shores of L. Albert poses a threat of water pollution from oil spills



Source: NAPE file photo

Polluted Ogoni River - Oil in Uganda if not well managed, will pose a threat to community livelihoods

Land Grabbing and Community Displacement

There is fear that people will be forced to leave the area. A lot of land grabbing is going on and there are no alternatives for the people. Hear this voice.

Margaret Kiiza of Kyehoro lost her land to road infrastructure development that connects to an oil well tells her ordeal.

“Hardman Oil Company demolished my house to give way for the construction of an access road to the oil well. I was not compensated for my land, and my crops were destroyed. Our leaders have not told us anything and Oil activities are still going on. This means more suffering for me. What is independence if foreigners can come with the blessing of government to destroy my future and the future of my children?”

Source: NAPE file photo



Will oil revenues improve the living standards of such communities?



Source: NAPE file photo

Margaret (centre) and other women from Kyehoro narrating their ordeal on loss of their land



Margeret Kiiza continues:

“I now do not know where I will go with my family. Now I have to look for an alternative income. We were promised compensation, but even when it finally comes, it will be my husband to receive the money and decide on how to spend it”.

Health Security

Government and Tullow Oil want oil but are unbothered about the health of the people. Health services in the oil region are in shambles. Women who are pregnant are suffering because maternity facilities are virtually absent. Robinah Talemwa, a resident of Sebagoro says:

Tullow is constructing a hospital for us. I hope the hospital will have enough space, enough qualified staff, medicine, theatre and maternity facilities”.



Source: NAPE file photo

Will proceeds from oil help communities get better health facilities?

In the photograph, is Robinah Talemwa of Sebagoro

Diseases

The influx of immigrants into the oil region is likely to increase population size, the demand for local goods and services, and trigger tribal and cultural conflicts and prejudices. Many people are flocking to the oil region in search of jobs and businesses. However, they are bringing along with them behaviours which are unacceptable in the community. Already prostitution on the rise.

Hear the voice of Constance Manyireki:

“Prostitutes are coming in from different parts of the country, and even from Congo. We fear a rise in HIV and AIDS infection in the future. The HIV status of the incoming men, women and girls is unknown. Life style is changing. People now marry for a few days. Our girls are putting on trousers and skimpy skirts.

Participation in oil decision-making

Promoting and sustaining multi-stakeholder participation in decision-making in the oil development process is the key to building confidence, consensus, relevance, legitimacy, acceptability and effectiveness in the oil and gas sector. Simultaneously accountability and transparency are ensured towards improving community livelihoods. Unfortunately,



so far, selective consultations on issues of oil has left out critical concerns of the rural woman.

Government and Tullow Oil have tended to focus their consultations on men. Consequently, the voices of women are virtually absent in their consultation reports. Yet women are the managers, are responsible for ensuring that food is on the table for their families and are suffering the costs and risks of oil development most. Women's voices in regard to compensation for loss of land, crops and benefit sharing are unrecorded.



Source: NAPE file photo

Communities in the oil region discussing why they should participate in decision making on oil

This is what Zerida Beitaka from Kaiso says on the consultation process:

“I saw Tullow surveyors come here. They started demarcating our land without consulting us. I was told they were preparing for the construction of an oil refinery. I do not know what benefit will be got from the pipeline. I would like to be part of the consultation meetings and also contribute my views. Why should my destiny be determined by other people? I would love to see government put in place strategies to ensure that women are reached out in this era of oil because when land where I grow crops is taken, I will suffer looking for food and firewood to sustain my family.”

Increase in prices of essential commodities

Basic needs are becoming difficult to get in the oil region. Prices of food and other essential commodities have skyrocketed as a result of very many people who have flocked the area and are engaged in fishing.

This is what Betty Bagadira of Kaiso says:

Fishing licenses have more than doubled. The common person can no longer afford essential commodities!”



Source: NAPE file photo

Betty Bagadira and other women of Kaiso sharing their problem on the ever increasing commodity prices

What do men say?

Men in the oil region are concerned about the costs, risks, problems and challenges being faced by the women.

This is what Sadiki Mawa of Sebagoro had to say:.



“We fishermen earn little money. We get money by selling fish and sometimes by engaging in casual jobs. I wonder if our marriages will still stand when oil production starts. Our wives might run away from us for rich men”.



Source: NAPE file photo

Godfrey Byaruhanga of Kyehoro says:
Oil in this village has raised expectations of everyone, young and old. Everyone thinks there will be plenty of jobs and money. Our wives too are eagerly waiting to get the jobs yet in our culture it is their responsibility to look after children and husbands, cook food and maintain cleanliness. With oil, I strongly doubt if they will still fulfill their roles as wives”.

Irimba Asuman (center) expresses worry that their women might leave them for richer men who are coming to work in the oil industry

Conclusion

The oil industry in Uganda is currently gender blind. It does not take in account the costs, risks and challenges to the communities in general and women in particular. The government of Uganda and oil companies need to rethink their plans, philosophy and actions in the emerging oil industry and take action to design strategies and mechanisms of addressing women's numerous issues and concerns. Besides, there is need to build confidence, consensus, relevance, legitimacy, acceptability and effectiveness in the oil and gas sector. Simultaneously, accountability and transparency should be ensured towards improving community livelihoods.

Looking forward

- Women feel that there is urgent need for the government to put in place gender sensitive policies and strategies so that all stakeholders feature and benefit from the growing oil industry in Uganda.
- There is need to organise women in form of pressure groups to demand for good governance on oil. There is an urgent need for further sensitisation of women on their human rights, entitlements and what steps to take where their rights are violated.
- There is need to educate government and oil companies on the benefits of good governance to the oil sector.
- There is need for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to carry out action oriented research on the negative effects of the oil industry on women and their livelihoods.
- There is need for donors to prioritise support for CSOs working on issues of women in the oil region.



