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Is oil and gas becoming a curse or a blessing in Uganda?

EDITORIAL

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"The Oil companies promised development but all that is seen is environmental degradation and tears of displaced families"

Uganda discovered over 2 billion barrels of oil which will be transported by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) a 1,443km pipeline to the port of Tanga in Tanzania to be processed and sold to the world markets. The EACOP starts in Kabaale, Hoima District and traverses 296km in Uganda through ten (10) districts (Kikuube, Hoima, Kakumiro, Kyankwazi, Mubende, Gomba, Sembabule, Lwengo, Rakai and Kyotera) affecting twenty-five (25) sub-counties and one hundred seventy-one (171) villages.

The oil and gas resource belongs to all Ugandans and not just private companies as it holds a very big potential for the country's development with an estimate of $2 billion (UGX 4.2 trillion) expected annually for 25 years and this could finally enable Uganda reduce its dependency on foreign aid. Many communities envisioned a future of transformed livelihoods, they hoped oil revenues would fund better infrastructure like hospitals, schools, roads and create jobs especially for the youth who make up the majority of the population which now seems to be the contrary.

Uganda should learn from a country like Botswana which was the third poorest country in the world but now has the highest rate of economic growth in the world and is the most stable in Africa because all the money got from the country's diamond mining was invested in the country to fund different sectors while preserving the natural environment. Unfortunately, Uganda appears to be following the path of Nigeria despite the fact that the country earned over $6 billion from oil, there was widespread corruption, environmental destruction, broken promises and weakened many sectors like agriculture, tourism among others which left the citizens poorer and more vulnerable than before.

As predicted by NAPE in 2019, Oil would become the center of national attention while important sectors like agriculture and tourism would be neglected. Currently, since the start of oil activities communities have started reaping the curse of oil and gas activities where their livelihoods have been compromised and they are being displaced without clear livelihood assessments plans, the environment is being degraded among others. The following are some of the important questions that remain unanswered;

- What will happen after the closure of the 20–25-year oil window?
- Where is the decommissioning plan of the oil infrastructures?
- What will be the ecological footprint?
- How much will Uganda have invested in the oil mining and what will it have truly gained?
- Has someone carried out the cost-benefit analysis on the displaced people and their resettlement conditions?
- Has anyone assessed the long-term viability of the livelihoods of Project Affected Persons (PAPs)?

Join us as we unpack these critical issues

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Impact of Oil and Gas Mining on Uganda's Natural Resources and Communities

By Ruth Kemigisha (Researcher)

Uganda's discovery of oil and gas reserves has sparked many schools of thought, some saying it's a blessing and others saying it will be the beginning of local, national and international conflicts. While the extraction of these resources comes with economic benefits, the right beneficiaries don't surface on the sharing table instead it's the corporations that end up repatriating all the benefits back to their home countries.

The oil and gas infrastructures are associated with large scale land acquisition such as the workers' camps, the airport, the road network, the feeder pipelines to the refinery and finally to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, which will run from Hoima in Uganda to Tanga in Tanzania covering a distance of 1,443 kilometers. This being the longest pipeline ever in the world for transportation of crude oil, so many communities have been displaced with inadequate compensation and those who rejected the little compensation were taken to courts of law by the government while some communities also ran to courts of law to seek for justice.

Due to laws governing land acquisition in Uganda especially under article 26 of the Constitution and the Land Acquisition Act (Cap 226) which allow the government to take land from private owners for public use subject to prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation prior to the acquisition, surprisingly some Project Affected Persons are forcefully evicted from their land even before the compensation is done and failure to accept the inadequate compensation, the government deposits the money in courts of law and the land is taken for development.

The depositing of the money in courts of law demands that you open a case against the government which will have given land to the developer and once the courts of law make pronouncement on the case in your favor then you are added money and if the case proves that the money compensated is worth the property taken then one has to go ahead and take the money whether or not the same amount of money is able to buy the land of equivalent size ceases to be their concern. This in most cases has led people to losing land to the rich and corporations in the name of development which has remained a threat to communities. Food supply in areas where oil and gas are being mined has remained a nightmare as they don't have adequate land where to grow food. In addition, livelihoods of fishing communities around L.Albert have been compromised where their boats and fishing nets were confiscated and burned to pave way for Kingfisher Oil Development Area.

Boats and fishing nets confiscated and burned by UPDF soldiers in the Kingfisher area which compromised the livelihoods of fishing communities. Photo by Environmental Governance Institute

Oil infrastructure developments have led to destruction of wetlands which has reduced them from 13% to 8% in coverage. This has not only changed the local climate but also destroyed local water sources which is the breeding grounds for fish and sources of art craft materials such as papyrus. As a consequence, communities that depended on fish mongering and sale of art crafts can no longer get that money hence compromised community micro-incomes as well as good nutritional foods from wetlands.

Some forests where the EACOP is passing have been destroyed and degraded including Bugoma and Wambambya as well as Taala Forest putting biodiversity and forest conservation at risk. Many important wetland ecosystems, river streams and pristine forests which used to contribute to the local economy through non-timber products like fruits, nuts, honey have been compromised. In addition, there are other anthropocentric activities done in the buffer zones where enchroachers including some Projected Affected Persons originating from inadequate compensation are settling on the river and wetland banks as it appears no man's land since it is held by government in trust for the people of Uganda. This has led to pollution of the water and soil with inorganic chemicals and pesticides, wetlands and land degradation, siltation of wetlands, rivers and buffer zones.

Continuous noise and light coming from the oil and gas activities is scaring away animal from their habitat. It was around the start of oil exploration and extraction when so many giraffes were transfered from Murchision fall National Park to Pian Upe Game Reserve situated in North Eastern Uganda inorder to protect them. However, questions still remain on the wellbeing of these giraffes, how they are coping up with the new environment, how many died and how many are left?

Giraffes being translocated to Pian Upe game reserve in Nakapiripiriti district North Eastern Uganda. Photo by UWA Media

The sector employs a very small number of locals as casual workers who work in the most toxic departments without even proper gears and contract ailments that eventually end up giving them bad life and unhealthy living at the end of the project. The revenue got from oil and gas ends up in the accounts of corporations and individuals well connected to government leaving the locals not benefiting from a resource being mined from their own land. Oil and gas as a finite resource will create the oil dependency syndrome which collapses other sectors like agriculture, entrepreneurship among others meaning that once the oil mining finishes the economy may end up collapsing.

Lastly, while there are potential economic benefits, there are also significant social, environmental and political challenges that need to be addressed. Oil and gas companies need to take full responsibility of conserving and restoring the areas they have degraded and monitor oil and gas activities that pose risks to human health and the environment. It is essential that the government, oil and gas companies prioritize transparency, accountability and environmental sustainability putting communities at the centre stage to ensure that the extraction of these resources benefits both the country and her people without compromising the future generation from meeting their future livelihood needs.

Effect of oil and gas extraction on Agriculture

By Polycarp Omony (Communication Officer & a farmer in Northern Uganda)

The oil project in Uganda is being developed under Tilenga Field Development Area operated by Total Energies which require 2901.4 acres with total of over 5,551 project affected persons and Kingfisher Development Area (KFDA) operated by China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) which require 1,258 acres with a total of over 788 project affected persons. The crude oil drilled from these two main oils fields once the production has started will be transported from Kabaale, Hoima District to the Tanzanian port of Tanga by East African Crude Oil Pipeline, a 1,443km long cross-border pipeline (296km in Uganda) which requires 2,740 acres in Uganda with over 3792 affected individuals. All these acres are required for construction of oil development infrastructures including the Central Processing Facilities, well pads, pipeline and flow line network, water abstraction system among others. In total, the oil projects earmarked over 7,000 acres with total of over 10,000 Project Affected Persons.

Government for many years has been prioritizing oil development projects being brought by oil corporations over biodiversity conservation and recreation. Government gave the oil and gas industry generosity to access community land where oil has been found but the repercussions of its extraction always come back to the nation's natural resources and indigenous communities whose lives solely depend on the land covered by oil and gas projects for farming. These are local farmers who grow crops for food and sell the surplus in order to cater for daily needs and school fees for their children. A number of farmers have raised concerns about the acreage of arable land destroyed by oil and gas companies laying pipelines in rights of way. They were poorly compensated and were forced to move to infertile land with low crop productivity due to forced displacement by oil corporations in order to open space for oil activities and these have increased low-income levels among farmers.

I have witnessed a rise in the number of human-wildlife conflicts especially in districts bordering Murchison Forest National Park. Nwoya district is one of the most affected districts by animals such as elephants leaving their natural habitat and entering human settlement areas because of the oil and gas activities that are introduced. The light and sound coming from oil and gas activities is scaring away the animals which are now living among people adjacent to the park, farmers can not harvest anything unless they sleep outside guarding their gardens. It is unfortunate that some people have lost their lives to stray elephants causing havoc to the communities, livelihood is being deliberately damaged by elephants destroying crops, houses demolished and education of school going children disrupted. My worry is that with the ongoing oil extraction, other wild animals that are life threatening to people will also follow suit by leaving the park to the human settlement areas. Prioritizing oil and gas may bring wealth but of what value is development if people are losing their lives being hunted by wild animals displaced by oil and gas activities.

The grave of the late Walter Opiyo who was killed by elephants on March 3, 2024, near Purongo Cultural Centre and was buried at his home at Lyec Cam Village -Photo By Simon Wokorach

The transportation and storage of oil and gas if not managed well in future would pose risks to soil quality and agricultural productivity. Oil spills and leaks will contaminate soil with toxic substances rendering it unsuitable for farming and other land uses leading to serious implications on food security and livelihoods particularly in rural areas where agriculture is a primary source of income and sustenance.

Are we going to be like Nigeria where farmers around Niger Delta are battling farming crisis after departure of Shell oil company? This oil company which was operating oil exploration and extraction in the region has made Niger Delta one of the most polluted places and damaged a lot including farmlands after so many decades of oil exploration and extraction. The farmlands which were once fertile and have supported families for decades have turned barren due to oil pollution rendering farming impossible leading to poverty and low crop yields to farmers.

Farmers and fishermen who used to support their families now struggle to buy food, pay school fees and access healthcare. There were repeated spills which affected their crop yields and this has led to a decline in local food production and deepened poverty in communities in the Niger Delta. Due to low crop yields and very low income among farmers, many could not feed their family and train their children in school. Crops always died after planting and they had to replant repeatedly with poor harvest because the plants were stunted. Other farmers in the community have waited for two years for their plantain seeds to yield but all in vain.

Farmers in Uganda will most likely face the same challenges as witnessed in Niger Delta communities during and after oil activities. More so if the government is prioritizing oil project development, there is need to anticipate the repercussions that might come through on both the environment and local communities. They should learn from the mistake of other oil producing countries on how the activities have affected biodiversity and put in place measures like instituting a multi-stakeholder monitoring committee with people from government, civil society organizations, local leaders and community representatives from every district where the pipeline is passing for closely monitoring and reporting anomalies of East African Crude Oil Pipeline.

An oil slick polluting a farmland as seen in Ibeno village in Nigeria's Akwa Ibom State. Photo by Tife Owolabi

Implication Of Oil and Gas Mining on Women and Youth in Uganda

By Betty Ninsiima (Grassroots women movement Officer-NAPE)

Uganda's discovery of oil and gas resources has brought about both opportunities and challenges. While the extraction of these resources promises economic growth and development, it also poses significant risks to the environment, livelihoods and human rights. Women, youth, elderly and people with disabilities (PWDs) are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of oil and gas mining.

An abandoned child by a Chinese man who was working in Uganda. photo by GPJ

The displacement of communities and loss of livelihoods are significant concerns. Oil and gas projects often require large tracts of land leading to displacement of communities and loss of access to land and resources. Women who are primary farmers and often the daily breadwinners may lose their source of income and food security. This has exacerbated poverty and inequality particularly for women and girls. Furthermore, oil and gas extraction has led to environmental pollution posing health risks to nearby communities. The extraction process can contaminate water sources, air and soil leading to serious health problems. Women and children are often the most affected by environmental pollution as they are more likely to be exposed to contaminated water and air. Also, the influx of workers including foreign workers has led to increased risk of rape, sexual harassment and exploitation of women and girls leading to spread of diseases like AIDS. For instance, in some areas where chinese workers had contracts, women including school going children were reported to have been gotten pregnant which led to school drop-outs and some of the female workers who were sexually harrassed ended up abandoning the work. This is not an exception in the oil region, where oil and gas activities are being carried out since the same scenario could happen once the project is completed hence increasing vulnerability of women and girls in these areas.

Another significant concern is the issue of communities signing agreements in darkness often due to ignorance or lack of understanding of the implications. Many community members particularly women and the elderly may not fully comprehend the terms and conditions of the agreements leading to loss of land and livelihoods. This has resulted into communities losing their ancestral lands, cultural heritage and sources of livelihoods without adequate compensation or benefits as proved by Beatrice Nyamahunge who narrated her story to one of the NAPE Community Green Radio Journalists *"I ignorantly signed the documents consenting to free takeover of my land, when oil officials came in 2021, they told me to sign on the forms as a resident adjacent to the feeder oil pipeline route. Later, I realized that I had signed not to be compensated for my land acquired for 200-meter buffer zone from the feeder pipeline"* regrettably recalls a 50-year-old Beatrice Nyamahunge Nyamahunge, a member of NAPE Grassroots Women Movement residing in Kigoya parish in Buliisa district.


Nyamahunge showing a form she ignorantly signed. Photo by NAPE

The social impacts of oil and gas mining are also significant because the disruption of community structures has led to social cohesion and community disruption. Women and girls may be vulnerable to violence and exploitation in mining areas and the distribution of benefits from oil and gas extraction that are not evenly distributed as they often favor men over women. Compensation for land acquisition often goes to men neglecting the rights and needs of women who are often the primary caregivers and breadwinners.

Youth are also affected by oil and gas mining. While oil and gas projects may create some jobs, they often require specialized skills limiting opportunities for local youth who are not educated. Youth are also vulnerable to substance abuse, child labor and other negative influences in mining areas like reduced education opportunities, health risks but also increased capital in mining areas has led to social problems like increased prostitution, alcoholism and family breakdown.

The elderly and people with disabilities (PWDs) are also vulnerable to the negative impacts of oil and gas mining as they face challenges in accessing benefits and services related to oil and gas projects including limited employment opportunities due to inaccessible work environments, reducing access to resources like water and land and these may be more vulnerable to displacement and loss of livelihoods.

To mitigate these impacts, it is essential to ensure inclusive decision-making processes that involve women, youth, elderly and PWDs. Environmental and social impact assessments should be conducted to identify potential risks and impacts but also measures should be implemented to mitigate negative impacts. This includes providing alternative livelihoods, ensuring access to basic services and prioritizing the rights and needs of local communities particularly women, youth, elderly and PWDs.

The government and oil companies should also prioritize accountability and transparency in the management of oil and gas resources. This includes ensuring fair compensation for land acquisition, providing support services for survivors of rape and sexual harassment, protecting the rights of women and girls. Additionally, community members should be fully informed, involved in the decision-making process and agreements should be transparent and fair.

The extraction of oil and gas in Uganda has the potential to benefit the country economically but it also poses significant risks to the environment, livelihoods and human rights. By prioritizing the rights and needs of women, youth, the elderly and PWDs, Uganda can ensure that oil and gas extraction benefits all members of society while minimizing negative impacts.

Culture erosion due to population influx in the oil region.

By Margaret Carol Kizibaziba (NAPE Board memeber)

Culture is a complex concept that includes everything from art and literature to lifestyles, traditions and value systems. It encompasses customs established practices, the shared beliefs, values, knowledge, traditional behavioral patterns of action and interaction, expressions, symbols, traditions and ways of life transmitted with in a group of people or society for collective identity. Cultural erosion refers to the weakening or disappearance of cultural identity and social norms in a society usually as a result of large-scale migration and rapid economic changes.

The recent discovery and development of oil reserves in Uganda particularly in the Albertine Graben has positioned the country as a potential key player in East Africa's energy sector. As oil exploration and extraction activities expand, the region has attracted a growing influx of people from different parts of the country including migrant workers, investors, government officials and multinational corporations. While this has sparked economic hopes and infrastructural development, this rapid population increase is not without consequence as it has introduced profound social and cultural changes. Indigenous communities such as the Banyoro, Batoro, Acholi, Alur, Bagungu and other ethnic groups native to the oil zones as population pressure intensifies are increasingly witnessing the dilution of their cultural identity, traditional practices, languages and values challenged by the spread of external influences, urbanization and a growing consumer culture for example the cultural leaders are not adequately involved in oil and gas decision making processes. This has resulted into cultural erosion which is emerging as a silent but serious consequence of Uganda's oil boom.

Oil exploration often leads to land acquisition, evictions and restricted access to areas considered as sacred or culturally significant. The communities are displaced from their land to make way for oil infrastructure like roads, pipelines, drilling sites while the sacred sites, communal lands and ancestral grounds are lost or made inaccessible. This in return breaks the spiritual and cultural connection to their heritage accelerating cultural decline between the people and their land because once roads are constructed the access to their cultural sites is lost.

Alex Wakitinti, chief custodian of sacred sites in Buliisa worried about the restricted access posed to the sites which undermine their culture. (AP Photo/Hajarah Nalwadda)

The migrant populations influence their external cultures through bringing diverse beliefs, languages and lifestyles which become normalized in public spaces, schools and markets. The media, religion and consumer culture from outside the region also shape new identities especially among the youth and the lifestyle i.e. eating, dressing, greeting and ways of doing things.

Women have historically been the custodians of indigenous seeds but because of introduction of alien seeds by the oil companies under their program of community livelihoods and improvement, that are not sustainable. The women have lost ownership of indigenous seeds because the alien seeds are grown once and are not regrown. The indigenous seeds are not just for farming but they are tied to food security, identity, biodiversity and culture for example seeds like sorghum, millet are used in performing rituals like cleansing, riches, children, good health but these have been replaced with improved species. Commercialization and erosion in agricultural systems has led to women losing control over these indigenous seeds.

There is economic shifts and loss of traditional livelihoods as many locals shift from traditional activities like fishing, farming and making cultural crafts like baskets, mats among others to oil-related jobs or informal sector work. This economic transition weakens the transmission of traditional skills as mentioned above and knowledge that are deeply tied to cultural identity.

Uganda's development policies have prioritized economic growth often neglecting cultural preservation because there are limited legal frameworks or active programs to support indigenous language use, traditional leadership or cultural education in oil-affected regions. This leads to land grabbing where people are taken to other areas and the land grabbed goes with seeds, houses, granaries, man power and the culture of barter trade exchange eroding self-help among the community members. There's a decline of traditional authority and institutions as local cultural leaders' for example elders, clan heads and traditional healers lose influence in decision-making. The formal governance and corporate interests often by pass traditional structures.

Population influx introduces new influences that overwhelm traditional systems as economic and structural changes tied to oil development undermine the daily relevance of the indigenous culture. There's need for deliberate efforts to protect and integrate cultural heritage into development planning like putting cultural leaders on monitoring committees for the resource, capacity building for the leaders and communities or else this erosion is likely to intensify. Further research is suggested to ascertain the lost cultural aspects with the coming of oil and gas.

Some of the Bagungu people worried about the spiritual power of at least 32 sacred natural sites in Buliisa that keeps deteriorating because of oil and gas activities. (AP Photo/Hajarah Nalwadda)

Legal Framework Governing the Exploration and Mining of Oil And Gas in Uganda.

By Ainomugisha Shiba (Legal Officer-NAPE)

The legal framework governing the exploration and mining of oil and gas in Uganda is primarily established by the following statutes and regulations;

The first one is the 1995 Constitution of Uganda: This foundational document provides the overarching principles for the management of natural resources including oil and gas.

The Petroleum (Exploration, Development, and Production) Act, 2013: This act specifically regulates the exploration, development and production phases of petroleum resources.

The Petroleum (Refining, Gas Processing and Conversion, Transportation and Storage) Act, 2013: This legislation governs downstream petroleum operations, encompassing refining, gas processing, transportation and storage.

The National Environment Act, 2019: This act provides the framework for environmental protection and conservation including specific regulations applicable to oil and gas activities such as section 93 of the act that stipulates National Oil Spill Contingency Preparedness and Response.

The National Oil and Gas Policy, 2008: This policy document outlines the government's vision, objectives and strategic direction for the oil and gas sector.

The roles of this legal framework include:

- The Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU) that holds the responsibility for issuing licenses and permits necessary for undertaking oil and gas activities.
- Regulatory Oversight where the PAU and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development are tasked with overseeing the oil and gas sector, ensuring adherence to all relevant laws and regulations.
- Compliance with environmental regulations is mandatory for all oil and gas activities, including the undertaking of environmental impact assessments and the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures. In so doing, the environment is being protected.
- The government has established a framework for the management of revenues generated from oil and gas which includes the establishment of the Petroleum Fund.

David Bryan Kusolo Wakwale, an environmental lawyer on his research analyzed several weaknesses within the statutes governing oil and gas exploration in Uganda. These include poor enforcement of health and safety standards, as research indicates widespread non-compliance with risk management standards, leading to occupational health and safety risks. Furthermore, the institutional and legal frameworks contain grey areas where ambiguities in laws and regulations contribute to non-compliance and hinder accountability. Studies also reveal a significant lack of risk management compliance resulting in occupational diseases, injuries and hazards.

Assessments of Uganda's legal and policy regimes indicate inadequate local content provisions, revealing gaps in ensuring the participation of Ugandans in the oil and gas sector. Additionally, there are insufficient environmental safeguards and comprehensive legal and regulatory reforms are recommended to improve environmental protection and ensure sustainable development. Finally, limited transparency and accountability pose challenges to preventing corruption and ensuring equitable benefits sharing.

The East African Crude Oil pipeline (EACOP) for Example violates Ugandan law and regional African agreements including the

Ugandan constitution Article 26 that gives land owners exclusive rights over their land until they are adequately compensated or resettled.

Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community: The EACOP project violates the spirit and letter of Articles 5 (3) (c), 8(1) (c), 111 (1) (b) & (d), 111 (1) & (2), and 114 (1) of the Treaty for the Establishment of The East African Community (EAC) on the protection of the environment. The above articles obligate the EAC partner states to mutually cooperate in the environmental field.

Protocol for Sustainable Development of Lake Victoria: Under Articles 4,5,12, 13 and 14 of the Protocol for Sustainable Development of Lake Victoria a 1999 regional requirement developed by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to fairly and effectively manage the resources of Lake Victoria.

Violating protected areas, such as World Heritage and Ramsar sites: For instance, EACOP's proposed route will negatively impact a number of protected areas including the Ngorongoro National Park, a World Heritage site as well as the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Wetland System, a designated Ramsar site.

Violating the Paris Agreement: As a fossil fuel project with significant estimated emissions, EACOP will also violate the Paris Agreement of which China, Tanzania and Uganda have signed.

Violating the free, prior, informed consent rights and best practices of Indigenous and affected communities along the EACOP right of way.

Violating Chinese guidelines for Green Development in Overseas Investment and Cooperation which obligate Chinese companies "to conduct environmental assessments and due diligence for a proposed project in accordance with international practices to identify potential environmental risks" as well as "push for prevention of ecological risks".

Violating Chinese guidelines for Ecological Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment Cooperation and Construction Projects which obligates Chinese entities to conduct biodiversity surveys and if high biodiversity risks are identified, the company must justify its decision for the project site and consider alternative locations (Article 6).

Lastly EACOP further violates China's List of Sensitive Sectors for Overseas Investment which was published in 2018 by China's National Development and Reform Commission by affecting Lake Victoria and likely breeding potential for water use and management related conflicts between Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Democratic Republic of Congo over usage of transboundary water bodies of Victoria and L.Albert.

And it is further important to note that due to the violation of local laws and international norms, any Chinese bank involved in EACOP would likely violate key Chinese bank regulatory policies such as the 2012 Green Credit Guidelines, 2014 Key Performance Indicators on Green Credit and the new 2022 Green Finance Guidelines.The implication of this is that any Chinese bank that is found to be connected to CPP and the EACOP project would also fail to comply with relevant Chinese bank policies.

To address these identified weaknesses, potential solutions include strengthening the enforcement of existing laws and regulations through improved regulatory oversight and enforcement mechanisms. Capacity building initiatives aimed at enhancing the capabilities of regulatory agencies and relevant stakeholders can also improve oversight and management within the sector. Fostering public participation and engagement may promote transparency, accountability more equitable benefits sharing. Lastly, regular review and revision of the current laws and policies can help address existing gaps and ambiguities within the legal framework.

In conclusion, the legal framework in place for Uganda's oil and gas sector is intended to foster sustainable development, ensure environmental protection and generate economic benefits for the nation and its citizens. There are gaps within the system that put their work at hold and need to be addressed to protect both people and the environment.

The Pain of Living with an Oil Curse on the African Continent

By Rajab Bwengye Yusufu (Senior Program Manager-Oil and gas Governance -NAPE and Coordinator-Oil Watch Africa (OWA) in Uganda)

Africa is known as the World's richest in terms of Natural resources. These include forests, wetlands, minerals, wild animals, fertile soils, lakes and rivers plus other magnificent land forms but has remained as one of the poorest continents despite having all these resources. Africa's oil belt lies mainly along its Western coast in the countries abutting the Gulf of Guinea. "One third of the world's new discoveries of oil since 2000 have taken place in Africa," with rich oil deposits in Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Sudan, Chad, Ghana, Cameroon, Libya standing out as African Oil power economies.

Soil and air pollution as a man works at an illegal oil refinery in Bayelsa, Nigeria. PHOTO BY AKINTUNDE AKINLEYE/Reuters

The recent discoveries of huge oil deposits in East African countries of Uganda and Kenya confirm the dominance of Africa as far as endowment of natural resources is concerned. East Africa will in the few years host the world's longest crude Oil pipeline snaking from Hoima district to the Tanzanian coast port of Tanga covering 1443 Sq kms, making record as the ever longest heated oil and gas pipeline ever constructed on earth. From North through Central to South to West and now East, the continent is richly endowed with natural resources. The East African region has been the last frontier. However, the indigenous inhabitants of the land upon which the mineral discoveries are made have witnessed massive disruption, pollution, land grabbing, corruption, human rights abuse and insecurity; these consequences have been felt all over the African continent.

In North Africa, the Arab spring that started in Tunisia, Egypt through Libya and now biting North and South Sudan has exposed the danger that can accompany petrol dollars the creation of deep-seated aristocracies built out of oil wealth. All the above oil rich nations have ended up in civil strife resulting into death of millions of innocent people as the wealthy and political elites scramble for power. Estimates of the death toll in the current Sudan conflict vary but some sources suggest it has reached at least 150,000 people. The conflict which began in April 2023 has also displaced over 11 million people within Sudan and at least 3.5 million across borders. The high death toll is partially attributed to the ongoing fighting between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces as well as the resulting humanitarian crisis. Reports indicate a significant increase in deaths from starvation and disease due to the conflict's impact on food supplies and healthcare access according to a study by the London school of Hygiene and tropical medicine.

In Central Africa, DRC has never known peace despite rich natural resource endowment. Oil, copper and gold constitute the denominator figure in the equation and currently the country is being torn apart by armed conflicts in the mineral rich Eastern Province. Through the ongoing conflicts between the Congolese government and M23 rebels, more than 2000 people have already been killed and the eastern regional cities of Goma, Bukavu devastated leading to a huge refugee crisis in the region according to UN reports.

In West Africa, political instability has been the order of the day mainly due to Oil mining by Royal Shell. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta ("MEND") is one of the largest militant groups claiming to expose exploitation and oppression of the people by Federal Government of Nigeria and Oil corporations involved in the extraction of oil in the Niger Delta led by Royal Dutch energy Giant –Shell.

In East Africa, there are all signs that poor governance of the oil resource is the biggest challenge that is befalling Uganda's oil dollar fortunes in the Albertine rift. East Africans in Kenya and Tanzania should therefore be wary. Lest the trend comes calling.

In Kenya, oil in 2007 was discovered in Sibiloi National Park the South Island and the Central Island National Parks located in the Lake Turkana Basin-North Kenya. The area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997 due to being inhabited by diverse fauna. Mining this oil means violation of the world heritage convention adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

In Tanzania, there is offshore mapping of oil and gas deposits in the deeper continental shelf – The Indian Ocean Coast by The Norwegian Company Statoil Hydro which signed a PSA in April 2007 on Block II offshore and now the East African crude pipeline (EACOP) project will in Tanzania alone traverse 8 regions and twenty-three (23) Districts namely Missenyi, Bukoba, Muleba, Biharamulo, Chato, Geita, Mbogwe, Bukombe, Kahama, Nzega, Igunga, Iramba, Mkalama, Singida, Kondoa, Chemba, Hanang, Kiteto, Kilindi, Handeni, Korogwe, Muheza and Tanga covering a distance of one thousand one hundred forty-seven (1,147) kilometres. The thirty (30) metre-wide corridors running for the EACOP coverage in Tanzania plus the land-take of the four (4) pump stations, two (2) pressure reduction stations, the marine storage terminal, the twelve (12) camps and the thermal insulation facility will take up ten thousand eighty-one (10,081) acres. This will affect a total of nine thousand five hundred thirteen (9,513) people. More importantly, the Tanzanian coastline that will also be partly affected is covered by rich mangrove forests that are breeding places of many wild animals and bird species.

In Uganda/Democratic Republic of Congo, there is Oil exploration in Virunga National Park a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to some of the world's critically endangered mountain gorillas and across in Uganda, the building of 2 Central Processing Facilities (CPFs both in Tilenga and Kingfisher Oil fields drilling of over 426 wells (200 water injector wells,196 oil producer wells, 2 polymer pilot wells and 28 reference wells), a green oil refinery plant seated on 28 Sq km land in Kabaale-Hoima District and a 1443 km long heated oil and gas pipeline traversing the East African region from Uganda (Hoima) to the Indian coast port of Tanga in Tanzania all violate national, regional and international laws, guidelines and frameworks for biodiversity protection.

Accordingly, all the above injustices justify why there's dirty energy fossil promotion in East Africa, in Africa and anywhere in the world. This should be fought at all cost.

East African crude Oil Pipeline EACOP snaking through Nyakabingo village, kabaale parish, Buseruka Sub county –Hoima District as of June 13th 2025.-NAPE file Photo.

Uganda's Long Road to Oil Production. How Far Have we come?

By David Kureeba (Forest and Biodiversity Officer-NAPE)

Uganda's oil history in the Albertine Graben dates back in the 1920s but commercial oil discovery started in 2006. It raised hopes of economic transformation, infrastructure development and increased government revenue. However, the journey from discovery to production has been ruined by delays, shifting timelines and growing public frustration.

The government had ambitious goals of producing oil over the years. However, these timelines have been revised repeatedly. Most recently in 2023, the government announced that the "first oil flow" would be expected by June 2025. But that too has changed, the new target for first oil has been pushed to June 2026. According to the ministry's current assessments, Uganda is "over 60 percent ready," with significant progress made on the Kingfisher and Tilenga oil projects.

Are We Really 60% Ready?

Given that, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project is ongoing with lots of uncertianities, where do we currently stand in terms of oil production progress, what is the realistic timeline and roadmap for when oil is expected to start flowing and based on the current situation on the ground, when is the first oil flow likely to happen?"

Following a recent interview with **Mr. Rajabu Bwengye Yusufu, Senior Programme Officer incharge of oil and gas governance at NAPE,** He stated that *"The East African crude oil pipeline is now at implementation phase since the final investment decisions were made in February 2022 by the two cooperating countries of Uganda and Tanzania. This kick started the construction of the feeder crude oil pipelines connecting the Kingfisher oil and gas field and the Tilenga oil and gas discovery to the central Green oil refinery facility that is to be grounded on a 29 sq km land in Kibaale Parish, Buseruka Sub County -Hoima district. Due to financing difficulties mainly created by close to 50 European, Asian and American banks and insurance companies pulling out from financing EACOP on grounds of being a high risk project and failure to address a series of EU resolutions. The first oil has been postponed from the close of 2024 to the last quarter of 2026 and first half of 2027 but realistically, we are likely not to see oil flowing even at the end of 2027 due to financing difficulties. Already we are about to enter 2026 and yet nothing as we talk now has even been put on ground with regard to the oil refinery complex, the processing facilities in Buliisa and Kikuube are all still work in progress, the EACOP line hasn't even been finalized either in Uganda or even Tanzania, none of the total 37 heating stations have been put in place and neither has any pipeline lay out exceeded just Mubende district. All these factors won't allow Ugandans see the oil soon. Perhaps around 2028."*

Many Ugandans have expressed concern over the persistent delays, expectations of jobs, infrastructure development and regional growth remain unmet. As the country is looking forward to its new target of first oil in June 2026 as promised, the pressure is mounting to deliver results and avoid further disappointments.

Uganda's oil potential would be significant if well managed, it could catalyze economic growth. However, delivering on this promise requires more than new timelines. It demands transparent governance, community involvement, timely execution and a clear plan for environmental and social safeguards.

Pictorial

NAPE in solidarity with Grassroot Women's Movement to collectively speak up against the challenges brought by EACOP that infringes on their rights. photo by NAPE.

Robert Lule from Greater Masaka Area, Uganda said that TotalEnergies has disturbed and disrespected the graves of their families and ancestors at numerous sites. Image © Thomas Bart.

The endangered ashy red colobus monkey is one of several threatened wildlife species found along EA-COP's route. Image by Valerie Hukalo.

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