GOV’T, CNOOC & TOTAL MUST PROTECT FISHERFOLK’S LIVELIHOODS FROM OIL PROJECT IMPACTS

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Dear reader, welcome to AFIEGO’s February 2024 newsletter. This month and in 2023, AFIEGO and our partners held a number of engagements with fisherfolk operating on Lake Albert in Uganda and the Indian Ocean in Tanzania. Through the engagements, we discussed the impact that the Lake Albert oil project has had on fisherfolk.

The above project consists of the Tilenga, Kingfisher and East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) in Uganda and Tanzania.

Our engagements showed that the fisherfolk, who include fishermen, fishmongers, divers and others involved in the fisheries value chain in Uganda and Tanzania, have suffered various impacts because of the aforementioned oil projects.

Among others, the fisherfolk report that environmental pollution, poor oil waste management, noise and light pollution from drilling rigs, loss of access to fishing grounds, oil-induced population influx and others have had a negative impact on their livelihoods.

They also report that biodiversity such as water ducks that are key to supporting their fish trade have been affected by the Lake Albert oil activities.

The fisherfolk’s stories, which are being shared for the first time through this newsletter, raise an alarm that should awaken Ugandan and Tanzanian policy makers, as well as the oil companies that are operating the Lake Albert oil project.

The above stakeholders should take measures to protect not only fisherfolk’s livelihoods but also the fisheries sector, as it is important to Uganda’s economy.

Employing over 5 million people and contributing 3% to Uganda’s GDP, the fisheries sector is an important one. The Lake Albert fisheries are also important as combined with Lake Victoria, the lakes accounted for 82.9% of Uganda’s fish catch in 2018. These are the latest available statistics on Uganda’s various lakes’ contribution to the country’s fisheries.

Needless to say, the Lake Albert fisheries, and the fisherfolk that operate on the lake, need to be protected.

In our Word from CEO in this newsletter, we share stories by fisherfolk who highlight how the Lake Albert oil project has affected their livelihoods. We make recommendations that the Ugandan government should implement to protect the fishers.

In our pictorial, we share pictorial highlights of our February and January 2024 activities. For instance, we share pictorial highlights from four meetings that we held with oil-affected and Bugoma forest host communities to plan for 2024.

In addition, we share highlights from a radio talkshow and online exchange learning that we organised for fisherfolk to strengthen
them to defend their rights amidst the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP oil projects.

Furthermore, we share pictorial highlights from the hearing of a case that we and our partners filed challenging the EACOP at the East African Court of Justice (EACJ).

We also share highlights from meetings that we held with oil-affected communities that filed court cases in Uganda to strategise on how to fasttrack hearing of their cases in 2024.

In our lobbying section, we bring you some of the lobby and advocacy products that we and our partners disseminated in February and January 2024.

Among others, we supported Tilenga oil project-affected communities to write to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, the Chief Justice, Deputy Chief Justice, Uganda Law Society and others to request for meetings.

The communities filed cases between 2014 and 2023 challenging the human and environmental rights violations committed by the government and oil companies.

The cases are yet to be heard or concluded by the judiciary. However, the same judiciary concluded, in four days, a case filed by the government of Uganda against 42 Tilenga oil project-affected households in December 2023.

The communities want to engage in dialogue with the judiciary and other stakeholders to promote a pro-poor judiciary in Uganda.

Further, we and our partners issued press statements to inform the public about the hearing of our case challenging the EACOP project that we filed at the EACJ.

We also joined our Inclusive Green Economy Network-East Africa (IGEN-EA) partners to issue IEC materials to mark World Wetlands Day.

In the media section, we bring you some of the media stories that were published from our work or were written by our staff and partners in February 2024.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter.

**Editorial team:**
Diana Nabiruma
Jenan Apio
Balach Bakundane
Rachael Amongin
Stephen O., 29, is a fisherman operating on Lake Albert. He has worked on the lake since he was 15 years old.

“I started fishing while I was in school. My father was a fisherman but the money he was getting was not enough to meet the needs of the entire family. I decided to join him so that I could make some money. Every day before I went to school, I would first go and fish and then head to class,” Stephen, who lives in Kikuube district in Western Uganda, says.

He adds, “I became a fisherman because fishing is the only alternative we have in my village. We don’t have gardens. If one needs school fees or capital to start a business, one needs to engage in fishing.”

OIL EXPLOITATION IMPACTS IN UGANDA

Like the other over 15,420 fishers that make a living off Lake Albert in Uganda, Stephen, who lives in China National Offshore Oil Corporation’s (CNOOC) Kingfisher oil project area, says that life was good before oil exploitation activities started on Lake Albert.

“With oil came some problems,” Stephen says. Some of these challenges include the fact that the seismic blasting that was seen during the oil exploration phase hurt fishermen’s access to fish.

“Oil waste also was not managed well during the oil exploration phase in some instances. Some waste was dumped at Kyabasambo village in Kikuube district and some of it run off into lagoons that are connected to Lake Albert. We used to get fish from the Luzira Nsonga lagoon for instance but when it was polluted by oil waste, we can no longer access fish from that lagoon.”

Like Stephen, Seremos K. says that fisherfolk in Buliisa district, where TotalEnergies is operating, have been affected by oil activities covering Lake Albert.

“We have this problem of flood waters that run from Total’s Central Processing Facility Area that is under construction into Lake Albert. The waters pollute the lake and make access to clean water for fisherfolk difficult.

You know a lot of fisherfolk rely on water from Lake Albert to meet their water needs. Without clean water, fisherfolk’s health can be negatively impacted and if a fisherman is not healthy, he cannot work well,” Seremos, who runs an organisation called Uganda Fisheries and Fish Conservation Association (UFFCA) that advocates for fishermen’s wellbeing, says.

He also says that when the communities challenge the oil companies and government to stop the negative impacts of oil on communities, the communities get threatened with arrests and others.
Water contamination is not the only challenge that is affecting fisherfolk due to the oil and gas exploitation activities. Light and noise pollution is as well.

In January 2023, president Yoweri Kaguta Museveni launched oil drilling activities for the Kingfisher oil project that is operated by CNOOC on Lake Albert. Fisherfolk say that the noise and light from the drilling rig have caused them some challenges.

“I am a diver and my work involves arranging the fishing nets beneath water after the fishermen have set them to catch fish. However, I and other divers have issues with the oil rig which vibrates, with the vibrations being felt within Lake Albert. The vibrations affect our ears and when we leave the lake, we feel like our ears are ringing,” Ismail T. says.

The fishers are afraid that they will suffer long term impacts to their hearing due to the vibrations from the drilling rig. The fishers also observe that since the drilling rig in the Kingfisher oil project area began operations, communities suffer from more respiratory diseases.

“That rig releases smoke [emissions]. We suspect that they are the cause of our poor respiratory health,” Imran O., a fisher, says.

**Studies** have shown that populations living near oil and gas sites experience more respiratory and pulmonary health challenges.

Emissions of toxic particulate matter as well as carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, ozone and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) have been implicated in driving the health challenges.

While the fishermen are struggling with water contamination and other forms of pollution, fish mongers, majority of whom are women, are struggling too.

Sifa K. from Buliisa district says, “This oil in Buliisa has been a curse to us. Too many people, especially those with money, came to our district.

They started engaging in fish trade. Because they have money, they are able to buy fish at higher prices than we would be able to. They increased the price of fish and pushed those of us with little money out of the trade.”

Sifa also says that some community members who were traditionally farmers and lost their land to the Tilenga oil project without adequate compensation resorted to fishing, putting pressure on other traders.
EACOP IMPACTS IN TANZANIA

In Tanzania, fisherfolk say that they have also been affected by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project activities.

“We can no longer fish in the areas near the shores where the EACOP construction activities are ongoing. We use small traditional boats, which are propelled by wind, to fish. We therefore prefer to fish near the shores.

Now that we cannot, some fisherfolk have been forced to relocate to other landing sites,” Bausi, a Tanzanian fisherman, says.

Halima*, a Tanzanian fishmonger, says that because fishermen have to fish further away from the shores, access to fish is limited, which pushes up fish prices and affects women’s ability to participate in the fish trade.

IMPORTANCE OF FISHING INDUSTRY

The fishing industry is important to Uganda’s economy. Employing over 5 million people through direct and indirect jobs, the sector earned Uganda over USD 509.7 million (UGX 1.968 trillion) in 2022. The sector also contributes 3% to Uganda’s GDP and 12% to the country’s agricultural GDP.

The Lake Albert fisheries are important to Uganda’s fish sector earnings. In 2018 for instance, the sector contributed 43% of Uganda’s fish catch. It is therefore imperative that the Lake Albert fisheries, and fisherfolk that make a living off the lake, are protected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To protect the Lake Albert fisheries and fisherfolk, the following must be done:

(i) The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF) plus independent groups including representatives of civil society, religious leaders, affected community leaders and others should undertake a comprehensive investigation to determine the existing and potential impact of the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP oil projects on the Lake Albert fisheries to immediately stop the existing injustices and violations on host communities and prevent the potential ones;

(ii) Further, as part of the above investigations, MAAIF should work with the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) plus independent observers to assess the magnitude of the impact that the Kingfisher drilling rig, water runoff and floods from the Tilenga CPF Area, the eviction court orders against oil affected communities and other oil activities are having on Lake Albert and fishers.

The ministry together with the independent observers should ensure that the findings are used to take action
against all those engaged in oil activities that negatively impact people and critical ecosystems such as Lake Albert.

(iii) In addition, communities report that biodiversity such as water ducks that used to indicate where fish could be found have become scarcer since oil exploitation activities commenced on Lake Albert.

The MWE should form a taskforce with the leaders of fishing communities to investigate these claims and use the findings to stop all oil activities that continue to destroy biodiversity in and around Lake Albert.

(iv) More so, the government should put in place measures to protect fisherfolk and vulnerable groups such as children and women taking into account their special needs such as education, clean water, food for children and mothers, and others.

(v) Further, the government should stop using courts to obtain court orders in four days of filing cases to evict oil-affected people who resist against oil injustices.

The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) should use its powers under the Constitution of Uganda to ensure that the High Court stops issuing eviction orders before giving oil-affected people a right to be heard while the court of appeal should be asked to urgently fix, hear and conclude all the appeals filed by the oil-affected communities including fishing communities. Some appeals were filed in 2021 but remain unheard to date.

(vi) Finally, the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP oil activities should stop until the above-mentioned investigations are completed and action taken to protect fisherfolk and communities against oil injustices.

Dickens Kamugisha
CEO, AFIEGO

Some Ugandan fisherfolk who operate on Lake Albert during some of the engagements that AFIEGO had with fisherfolk in November 2023
On February 20, 2024, AFIEGO and our civil society partners participated in the hearing of an appeal challenging the EACOP project that we filed at the East African Court of Justice (EACJ).

The appeal arose out of a November 2023 ruling in which the First Instance division of the EACJ dismissed a case that we and our partners filed in November 2020. The case is aimed at protecting the human and environmental rights of East Africans as well as fostering climate action among others.

During the hearing, the EACJ ordered AFIEGO, our partners and the governments of Uganda and Tanzania as well as the Secretary General of the East African Community (EAC) to file the submissions that we will use to argue the case. All the submissions should have been filed by May 2024.

On February 15, 2024, AFIEGO and our Tanzanian, Nigerian and South African partners held an online exchange learning for fisherfolk from Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, and South Africa.

The main objective of the exchange learning was to enhance Ugandan and Tanzanian fisherfolk’s capacity to defend their livelihoods amidst the Lake Albert oil project.

This was done through experience sharing and solidarity building. South African and Nigerian fisherfolk shared their experiences and tactics that they use to protect their livelihoods amidst oil activities in their countries.
AFIEGO SUPPORTS OIL-AFFECTED FISHERFOLK TO USE THE MEDIA TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR RIGHTS

In addition, on February 15, 2024, AFIEGO supported fisherfolk from Buliisa and Kikuube district in Uganda to participate in a radio talkshow at Spice FM in Hoima district.

During the radio talkshow, the fisherfolk discussed the impact of the Lake Albert oil project activities on their livelihoods. It is hoped that such discussions will foster dialogue or create pressure to restore the fisherfolk’s livelihoods.

AFIEGO HOLDS MEETINGS WITH OIL-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES TO DISCUSS THEIR COURT CASES

In January 2024, AFIEGO held meetings with oil refinery and Tilenga project-affected communities to discuss strategies that can be used to fasttrack hearing of the cases that the communities filed against the Ugandan government.

The cases were filed in Uganda’s High Court and Court of Appeal in 2014, 2021 and 2023 to stop payment of delayed, inadequate and unfair compensation to communities. The cases are also aimed at stopping the displacement of communities without adequate compensation.

The community members that participated in the meetings agreed on strategies to use to promote justice.

AFIEGO AND PARTNERS TRAIN WOMEN AND YOUTH ON CLEAN ENERGY ALTERNATIVES

In January 2024, AFIEGO held planning meetings with forest and oil host communities in Kikuube and Buliisa districts. During the meetings, the communities set their key priorities for 2024 and strategies that they will use to meet them.
In February 2024, AFIEGO and our partners issued press statements to inform the public about the hearing of our case challenging the EACOP project that we filed at the East African Court of Justice (EACJ). We also supported oil-affected communities in Uganda to write to over five offices of the judiciary. The communities requested for meetings to foster dialogue to promote a pro-poor judiciary.
In the media

This month, AFIEGO staff, research associates and youth champions wrote newspaper articles that were published in the leading newspapers. Some of the published articles are captured below.

Let's care for our wetlands

World Wetlands Day is celebrated each year on February 2. The celebration raises awareness and increases people’s understanding of the critical importance of wetlands.

This year the world wetlands day will be celebrated under the theme “Wetlands and Human Wellbeing” as human beings have depended on wetlands for centuries, drawing sustenance, livelihood and resilience from these important ecosystems.

Many wetlands, particularly those near cities, have been polluted by human activities. For example, River Nile in Mwanza, Tanzania, has been choked by plastics and this has led to severe flooding. In addition, according to research, an estimated 35% of the world’s wetlands have been lost since 1970.

Around 82% of global wetland loss occurred in the 90s. Since then, the rate of loss decreased. However, wetlands are disappearing faster than forests.

Human activities like agriculture, dams, construction, industrialisation and settlement purposes, among others, have led to increased population characterised by land shortage and water pollution. As a result, communities continue to pollute the natural water bodies while affecting the environment.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it is noted that around 35% of the world’s wetlands, which include lakes, rivers, marshes, and peatlands, as well as coastal and marine areas like lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs, have been lost since 1970 and around 87% percent of global wetland loss occurred in the 1990s and the rate of loss continues. Uganda had approximately 30,000km² of wetlands by 2000 but this has since reduced to around 22,500km², implying a 25% loss since the past two decades and this trend is set to continue due to human activities.

Wetlands are full of biodiversity serving as home to plant and animal species including many that are endangered such as birds, amphibians, fish and all sorts of mammals and insects that rely upon wetlands for survival and it is not ed that a quarter of these animals and plants that live wetlands as a home are at risk of becoming extinct, which is unfortunate.

Therefore, it is a sure need to take more or less serious rules and put in place more efforts to safeguard our planet and protect our wetlands in order not to turn ourselves into an aquatic disaster.

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For example, the Nakivubo wetland which is a vital component of Kampala’s drainage has been highly affected by plastic pollution.

Therefore, this year’s celebration should be extended to communities because communities can lead efforts to check how wetlands are used in their local areas and participate in cleaning the rubbish that is often dumped there as well as blocking the streams from which the water passes.

Last but not least, as we celebrate this day, it calls upon the government to put the following under consideration: the government should intervene and designate wetlands as protected areas, restore degraded wetlands, partner with

Protect wetlands from human activities

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Hold financial institution accountable for financing fossil fuels

On February 3, the Daily Nation reports that a total of 525 million has been allocated for the reopening of 1800 projects following pressure from climate activists who argue that the project poses significant pollution and environmental risks.

The insurance firms include Dangote, Stanbic, and others. However, it is noted that some insurers have failed to provide such insurance for the projects. In addition, it is noted that the project poses significant risk to the environment and is also perceived as environmentally and socially irresponsible.

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About Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)

AFIEGO is a non-profit company limited by guarantee that was incorporated under Uganda’s Companies Act. AFIEGO undertakes public policy research and advocacy to influence energy policies to benefit the poor and vulnerable. Based in Kampala-Uganda, the non-profit company was born out of the need to contribute to efforts to turn Africa’s clean energy potential into reality and to ensure that the common man and woman benefits from this energy boom. Through lobbying, research and community education, AFIEGO works with communities and leaders to ensure that clean energy resources are utilised in a way that promotes equitable development, environmental conservation and respect for human rights.

Our Vision
A society that equitably uses clean energy resources for socio-economic development

Our Mission
To promote energy policies that benefit poor and vulnerable communities

Upcoming events

March 1, 2024; Bunyoro, Greater Masaka and Kampala: Support oil project-affected communities and youth to engage insurers on oil project impacts and risks

March 4, 2024; Kampala: Organise a multi-stakeholder meeting to plan for a community visioning exercise on the energy that communities want

March 11-30, 2024; Greater Masaka: Support research on the tourism opportunities in Greater Masaka

March 15, 2024; Kampala: Commission research on the impact of oil activities on forest landscapes such as Murchison Falls National Park

March 20, 2024; Hoima: Organise community sensitisation meetings on Uganda’s Energy Transition Plan

March 27, 2024; Kampala: Support fisherfolk to petition oil companies to address the impacts of oil activities on their livelihoods

March 29, 2024; Kampala: Support community petitions to NEMA to take action on her directive to Hoima sugar Ltd on restoration of Bugoma forest

March 30, 2024; Buliisa: Conduct a meeting with oil affected communities to discuss impacts of court eviction orders