A woman prepares to construct a makeshift house in Kikuube district after being evicted from Sebagoro B landing site during the COVID-19 lockdown. The lockdown is being used by some powerful people to abuse the environmental and human rights of communities in Uganda.

In this newsletter:
- Assessing environmental and human rights abuses committed amidst COVID-19 restrictions
- Pictorial and lobbying
- In the media
- Upcoming events
Since President Museveni closed schools, churches, bars and other places that government considered high risk for the spread of COVID-19, Ugandans like other people across the world have endured extreme hardships.

The above-mentioned restrictions, which were instituted on March 18, 2020, were followed by more measures on March 30, 2020. On this date, government declared a total lockdown that affected the whole country.

The lockdown was characterised by forcing everyone, except for individuals who were termed as essential workers, to stay at home. A curfew running from 7pm to 6:30am was imposed, public and private transport was suspended, boda-bodas were banned from carrying passengers, hotel and restaurant services were stopped and over 90% of court business was suspended.

In addition to the above, civil society organisations (CSOs), lawyers and other human rights defenders were declared as none-essential workers and could not move to provide much-needed services. These restrictions were intended to fight against the spread of COVID-19 and its social impacts.

We thank God that despite an increase in the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases which currently stand at 522, our country had not lost any person to COVID-19 by the time this newsletter was shared.

We appreciate the great work done by the doctors, nurses and all those who have worked hard to save lives amidst poor health services. However, as we celebrate the successes made and as the country commences gradual easing of the COVID-19 restrictions, emerging evidence indicates that a number of environmental and human rights abuses have and continue to happen under the cover of the COVID-19 lockdown. These abuses include:

- Over 10,000 people from over 61 landing sites along Lake Albert in the districts of Buliisa, Kikuube and Hoima in the oil region were evicted in violation of their constitutional rights and government directives against evicting people during the COVID-19 lockdown.

- In addition, prior to the lockdown, the Masindi High Court ordered for the withdrawal of Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) and agents of the National Forestry Authority (NFA) from Bugoma forest. UPDF was guarding the forest to prevent it from being destroyed for sugarcane growing among other destructive private interests.

- Further, despite citizens’ objections, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) issued an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) certificate of approval for the Kingfisher oil project’s ESIA report. This is despite the fact that there are no complete and costed mitigation plans in place to avert oil threats and risks on the environment and people.

- In addition, under the lockdown, NEMA was ordered by court to pay a penalty of UGX 182 billion for issuing and illegally cancelling a sand mining permit belonging to DMW (U) Ltd. The company was mining sand in Lwera wetland, a critical water catchment area for Lake Victoria.

- Further, during the lockdown, Total and Tullow announced that Total had agreed to buy Tullow Oil’s entire stake in the Lake Albert oil project in Uganda at a cost of $575 million; government is willing to accept a tax of only $14.6 million from the sale.

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- In addition, the operational space for CSOs and human rights defenders was reduced during the lockdown.

- Further, thousands of people including women that were arrested during the lockdown are being kept in prison beyond 48 hours in violation of the Constitution. Many other environmental, human rights and social abuses were committed during the COVID-19 lockdown.
In our **Word from CEO and Partners**, we show you how government and companies have either failed to enforce laws or connived to make wrong decisions concerning environmental conservation and human rights. Government and the companies were aided by the lack of public scrutiny that was caused due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Away from the above, this month, AFIEGO engaged in a number of activities. For instance, we supported women community clubs, youth champions and community monitors to document community evictions around Lake Albert in the districts of Buliisa, Kikuube and Hoima. Thereafter, we organised online meetings with CSOs to compile and issue a press release which was shared with the media and other stakeholders to demand for an end to the evictions.

We also visited a community in Buwaate where illegal gas storage, refilling and selling activities are taking place. We organised an online meeting of community leaders and together, we compiled letters to the Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Water and Environment, NEMA, Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU), Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA), the Kiira Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and others demanding for an immediate stop of the illegal gas activities.

In addition, we undertook media engagements to sensitise communities in Kasese district on how use of renewable energy would contribute to addressing climate change impacts such as flooding and others that were seen in Kasese and other districts this month.

Further, we supported communities and CSOs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to organise a high-level debate and engage their provincial leaders to raise awareness on oil impacts for the promotion of clean energy. We also disseminated educational materials such as photo story calendars, posters and others that strengthened DRC communities and CSOs’ understanding of oil impacts.

We engaged in other activities and some of the photos from the activities are captured in our **pictorial and lobbying section**. The sections have been merged as due to the Coronavirus lockdown, we minimised physical activities and engaged in online ones that resulted in the production of lobby and advocacy products such as communication strategies, advocacy letters, press statements and sensitisation in addition to advocacy posters among others.

Finally, in **the media section**, you will see some of the newspaper articles written by our staff and partners as part of our public education and lobby efforts. The articles were published by major national and online newspapers in Uganda.

We hope that you will enjoy the newsletter.

**Editorial team:**
Diana Nabiruma
Balach Bakundane
Sandra Atusinguza
This month (May), over 10,000 people living on over 61 landing sites on the Lake Albert shoreline in Buliisa, Kikuube and Hoima districts were invaded by security forces. They were informed that they were being evicted.

Households at some landing sites such as Sebagoro B were given only two hours to collect their life’s belongings and leave.

The people were informed that a meeting of UPDF officers, police, RDCs and others had sat and had ordered that over 61 landing sites along the oil-rich Lake Albert be closed and occupants evicted.

The people protested their eviction, which was not only inhumane but was also against Ministry of Lands’ directives stopping evictions during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, the people’s protestations fell on deaf ears as the people are still being evicted.

Mr. Peter Kyasimire and Mr. Ibrahim Okech, two chairpersons of some of the affected villages, told the story of the eviction to our community observers: “On May 21, 2020, UPDF soldiers from Ntoroko district arrived at Sebagoro B landing site and told the people that our landing site was un gazetted and therefore illegal. They asked the community to leave the village immediately.”

The landing site occupants said that the soldiers beat people so that they could leave. In the chaos, people lost property and a one Mr. Alfred Lenga says that he lost his entire family and he was still looking for some of his family members who had disappeared amidst the eviction chaos. Mr. Lenga had ran away from the village to escape the beating by the soldiers when he lost his family members.

Following their eviction, one of the evictees, a female fisher, Betty, said, “Why does a government that is protecting people from death by COVID-19 turn around to confiscate our land and leave us to die? I am now 74 years and I only know this village as my home. My food is fish from the lake. If they want our land for oil, they should have compensated us in line with Article 26 of the Constitution and we leave.”

Regardless of the communities’ protestations, they were evicted. Todate, most of the evictees are sleeping in the open while others are sleeping in churches, schools and other public places near Sebagoro A village. They have no food, clean water and pit latrines, a situation that has left them desperate and isolated. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, they have no one including the media to rescue them.

The people’s inhumane and unlawful eviction is one of many examples that demonstrate how government has used the inadequate public scrutiny provided by the COVID-19 lockdown to propagate human rights and environmental abuses.

Through this Word from CEO and Partners, AFIEGO and our partners discuss the human rights, environmental and financial abuses that have been perpetuated during the ongoing Coronavirus lockdown and the abuses’ implications. We call on citizens, parliament, development partners and others to demand for a stop of the environmental and human rights abuses committed under the cover of the COVID-19 restrictions.
HUMAN RIGHTS & ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSES

a) Bugoma forest giveaway: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the judiciary made a decision that negatively affects the conservation of Bugoma forest. On March 10, 2020, the Masindi High Court made a ruling through which court ordered that UPDF and NFA guards at Bugoma forest be withdrawn. Court also ruled that NFA and its agents should desist from stopping NZ Holdings from utilising the forest. This decision, which would have been unpopular among communities and conservationists, only got into the main public domain after March 20, 2020. After this date, Uganda had confirmed a Coronavirus case and the public’s attention was on prevention of the disease. As such, the unpopular decision went unchecked.

Consequently, because of lack of checks and balances, Bugoma forest, which is critical for the provision of food, water, climate regulation, tourism services and others is under threat as without guards and community oversight, the forest could be cleared for sugarcane growing among other destructive private activities. This environmental abuse that was further facilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic needs to be checked.

b) NEMA punished for cancelling sand mining permit: Further, during the COVID-19 lockdown, NEMA, an institution that is empowered by Section 9 of the 2019 National Environment Act to be the overall environmental regulator, was penalised by court for cancelling a sand mining permit that it issued to DMW (U) Ltd in a critical wetland, Lwera. On May 20, 2020, court ruled that NEMA wrongfully cancelled the permit and was ordered to pay UGX 182 billion to DMW (U) Ltd. This judgment raises many questions: What terms and conditions did NEMA include in the permit especially as regards the grounds for termination? Why did court favour the environmental violator? What was the basis of the huge compensation cost of UGX 182 billion?

While the above questions remain, it is clear that if the judgment remains on Uganda’s statute books, it will render NEMA incapable of regulating environmental matters and ensure compliance by actors. Yet NEMA should also be blamed for continuing to issue environmental permits for dangerous activities in critical biodiversity areas including national parks and game reserves, forests, lakes, rivers and others.

c) Government loss of $152.4 million in oil taxes: In addition, oil companies used the Coronavirus lockdown to announce the planned sale of Tullow Oil’s entire assets in the Lake Albert oil project to Total. The sale of Tullow’s entire 33.33% stake in the Lake Albert oil project will be done at a cost of $575 million. During the lockdown, government indicated that it had endorsed the sale and was open to receiving a tax of $14.6 million from the sale. Remember, government had earlier rejected a tax offer of $85 million from Tullow Oil for the sale of 21.57% of its assets. Total and CNOOC had accepted to pay Tullow $900 million under that planned sale that failed due to government’s insistence on being paid a higher tax of $167 million.

How government came to accept the sale of Tullow’s entire assets at $575 million, down from $900 million, and to accept a tax of $14.6 million, down from $167 million that had been assessed by Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), is questionable! Because of the COVID-19 lockdown, there was no timely and effective discussion of the sale and the above matters, even among CSOs. Yet the planned sale and Tilenga project will undermine environmental conservation efforts and the protection of communities’ livelihoods. This is because the project will affect ecosensitive areas such as Murchison Falls National Park, Lake Albert, River Nile, game reserves and others.

Cognizant of the planned sale’s project impacts, a section of Ugandans would have wanted to engage government to influence its decision on the sale. However, government and the oil companies denied Ugandans this opportunity by announcing the planned sale at a time when the public was
under lockdown and more attention was focused on surviving the Coronavirus.

**d) Limiting civic space:** Unfortunately, government also used the lockdown to limit Ugandans’ civic space that would have enabled public scrutiny to prevent bad decisions. For instance, while a number of services such as health, security, journalism, garbage collection and others were listed as essential services that needed to stay operational during the lockdown, critical services or players such as lawyers, CSOs, human rights defenders and others were not listed as essential workers. This gave government the lack of scrutiny it needed to conduct some of the above activities or make decisions that it would be hard-pressed to make if CSOs, the general Ugandan public and others were allowed to play their watchdog role. Moreover, by failing to classify CSO staff, human rights defenders, lawyers and others as essential workers, government set a precedent that could lead to undermining of the above groups’ essential services.

**e) Increased indebtedness:** It is also noteworthy that because of the Coronavirus pandemic, government went on a borrowing spree. The Minister of Finance, Hon. Matia Kasaija, said in March 2020 that due to the slowdown in the economy, Uganda would need $100 million to support this financial year’s budget. Another $90 million will be needed to support next year’s financial budget. The above money will be borrowed and already, a loan of UGX. 1.9 trillion ($491.5 million) for Uganda has been approved by the IMF. Uganda is also seeking to borrow $190 million from the World Bank to cushion the economy from COVID-19 impacts. The increased borrowing amidst lack of public scrutiny means that much-needed funds could be misused, as money in Uganda is often abused.

**f) Maternal mortality and torture of citizens:** Amidst the above, women in labour died because the COVID-19 lockdown denied them transport needed to get to hospitals. Women, children and men also suffered from hunger as their right to make a livelihood was taken away. Further, MPs such as Hon. Francis Zzake and members of the public were imprisoned, tortured and denied their constitutional right to be presented to court within 48 hours.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

What should be done in the face of the above? Through this newsletter, we are calling on Ugandans, parliamentarians, government, development partners and others to do the following:

(i) Parliament should use its oversight powers to order government to stop the illegal evictions of local communities in the oil region and other parts of the country.

(ii) Communities, environmentalists, CSOs and development partners should join hands to stop the ongoing threats to Bugoma forest.

(iii) Court officials and other stakeholders who make decisions that negatively affect conservation should be sensitised more to appreciate the consequences of destroying forests such as Bugoma and others.

(iv) Parliament should investigate the officials of the lands registry and Ministry of Lands with a view to sanction those behind the give-away of parts of Bugoma forest.

(v) Furthermore, NEMA should work with police to stop the ongoing illegal gas refilling activities in Buwaate and should ensure that the persons responsible for the illegal activities are punished.

(vi) Government should not endorse the Total-Tullow sale.

(vii) The COVID-19 restrictions should not be used as an excuse to violate the civic space of CSOs and other human rights defenders.

(viii) Finally, the international organisations that are lending money or extending support to government should tie it to transparent and accountable expenditure to ensure that the money is not lost to corruption.

By the CEO and Partners
Pictorial and Lobbying

This month, AFIEGO and our partners undertook a number of activities including supporting community monitors to engage communities that were evicted from over 61 landing sites on the Lake Albert shoreline. After gathering the facts of the eviction, we worked with the monitors and CSOs to issue a press statement for re-instatement of the people to their land. Our demands were captured by various national and local media outlets.

In addition, we organised an online community meeting through which communities discussed the illegal gas filling activities that are ongoing in Buwaate. Thereafter, we supported the communities to write letters to the Ministry of Energy, NEMA, ERA, PAU, UNBS, the RDC of Kiira and others to end the activities.

Furthermore, we supported CSOs from the DRC Ituri province to engage their provincial leaders to engage the central government for the promotion of clean energy in the Albertine Rift.

In addition, we supported the DRC CSOs and produced educative materials to raise awareness on oil impacts.

We also produced a Communication Strategy for use by the Ministry of Energy, solar energy companies, CSOs and others for the promotion of clean energy in Uganda.

Further, we supported AFIEGO staff to participate in a meeting on safeguarding civic space amidst the COVID-19 lockdown. Other activities that we implemented are captured in the Editorial.

Some of the photos and products from the above and other activities are captured below.
CSOS PROTEST EVICTION OF 5 FISHING COMMUNITIES ON LAKE ALBERT

May 20, 2020 Written by Earle Faida
Published in Environment 0 comments

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) is leading 21 other civil society organizations protesting the impending eviction of 1,000 occupants of several fishing sites on Lake Albert in Hoima and Kasese districts.

The CSOs, in a press release shared Thursday, revealed that the eviction is reportedly prompted by the need for President Yoweri Museveni to use the area toanswers through the construction of a fish processing factory.

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The CSOs, in a press release shared Thursday, revealed that the eviction is reportedly prompted by the need for President Yoweri Museveni to use the area for fish processing. The press release added that the eviction is expected to lead to the loss of livelihoods for the affected communities.

To: Resident District Commissioner,
Kibaale Municipal Council - Western

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: ILLEGAL AND LIFE THREATENING GAS REFILLING AND STORAGE ACTIVITIES IN BUJUWA

First, allow me to thank you and your team for the commitment to ensure security of people and property in our area. We appreciate all your efforts.

Second, the objective of this letter is to bring to your attention and inform you about illegal gas refilling and storage activities in our residential area in Bujuwava. In addition to being environmentally and human rights threatening activities, they are in the border line of the 220kV, heavy, Bujuwava-Kawanda power line. We sincerely request you to stop these activities immediately.

The following are the details of the above gas activities:

1. The gas refilling and storage activities are in violation of the provisions of the National Environmental Act (NEA) 2019 specifically sections 113, 126, 176 and 177 as well as schedule 5 of the Act. It should be noted that section 113 of the 1991 Environmental Protection and Storage and Storage of Hazardous Wastes Act require any developer and operator of hazardous waste storage facilities to ensure that the activities are in compliance with the relevant legislation.

2. The gas refilling and storage activities are in violation of the provisions of the National Environmental Act (NEA) 2019 specifically sections 113, 126, 176 and 177 as well as schedule 5 of the Act. It should be noted that schedule 5 of the 1991 Environmental Protection and Storage and Storage of Hazardous Wastes Act require any developer and operator of hazardous waste storage facilities to ensure that the activities are in compliance with the relevant legislation.

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7. The gas refilling and storage activities are in violation of the provisions of the National Environmental Act (NEA) 2019 specifically sections 113, 126, 176 and 177 as well as schedule 5 of the Act. It should be noted that schedule 5 of the 1991 Environmental Protection and Storage and Storage of Hazardous Wastes Act require any developer and operator of hazardous waste storage facilities to ensure that the activities are in compliance with the relevant legislation.

8. The gas refilling and storage activities are in violation of the provisions of the National Environmental Act (NEA) 2019 specifically sections 113, 126, 176 and 177 as well as schedule 5 of the Act. It should be noted that schedule 5 of the 1991 Environmental Protection and Storage and Storage of Hazardous Wastes Act require any developer and operator of hazardous waste storage facilities to ensure that the activities are in compliance with the relevant legislation.

9. The gas refilling and storage activities are in violation of the provisions of the National Environmental Act (NEA) 2019 specifically sections 113, 126, 176 and 177 as well as schedule 5 of the Act. It should be noted that schedule 5 of the 1991 Environmental Protection and Storage and Storage of Hazardous Wastes Act require any developer and operator of hazardous waste storage facilities to ensure that the activities are in compliance with the relevant legislation.

10. The gas refilling and storage activities are in violation of the provisions of the National Environmental Act (NEA) 2019 specifically sections 113, 126, 176 and 177 as well as schedule 5 of the Act. It should be noted that schedule 5 of the 1991 Environmental Protection and Storage and Storage of Hazardous Wastes Act require any developer and operator of hazardous waste storage facilities to ensure that the activities are in compliance with the relevant legislation.
In the media

This month, staff and research associates wrote newspaper articles which were published in the leading newspapers including the New Vision, Daily Monitor and The Observer. Newspaper and online media articles were also published from our lobbying products such as advocacy letters, press statements and others.

Some of the published articles are captured below.
Upcoming events

June 1, 2020; Hoima, Buliisa, Kikuube: Radio talkshow on land rights amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

June 5, 2020; Kampala: Hearing of the refinery-affected people’s court case

June 8, 2020; Kampala: Petitioning Ministry of Water and Environment and NEMA to complete and operationalize the draft ESIA regulations

June 12, 2020; Kampala: Media engagements to challenge unfair court award of UGX 182 billion to DMW (U) Ltd over cancelled sand mining licence

June 19, 2020; Kampala: Hearing of the refinery-affected people’s court case

June 22-26, 2020; Hoima and Kasese: Radio drama on benefits of promoting clean energy

June 30, 2020; Kampala: Petitioning NEMA to compel Total E&P to complete and put in place mitigation plans for the Tilenga oil project

About Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) is a public policy research and advocacy NGO dedicated to influencing energy policies to benefit the poor and vulnerable. Based in Kampala, Uganda, the organisation was born out of the need to contribute to efforts to turn Africa’s 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 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 energy resources for socio-economic development

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