

**COALITION OF WOMEN AND YOUTH CLEAN ENERGY CLUBS/CSOs, GREATER  
VIRUNGA LANDSCAPE**

**June 30, 2021**

The Executive Directors,

- Total E&P Petroliers Ltd
- CNOOC (U) Ltd
- DGR Global Ltd
- PetroAfrik Resources Ltd
- Niger Petroleum Resources Ltd
- Uganda National Oil Company

Dear Sir/Madame,

**Open letter calling on oil companies not to submit bids for Ngaji oil block**

**1. Introduction**

We, community members including women and youth, who live around Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) and Lake Edward salute you.

We come from the districts of Rukungiri, Rubirizi, Kasese, Kanungu and Kamwenge in Uganda as well as from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

We write this letter to you today in the hopes that you will listen to us. As companies that are participating in Uganda's second competitive oil exploration licensing round, you must be well aware that your bidding documents must have been submitted to Uganda's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development by June 30, 2021.

You also must be aware that of the five oil blocks that are up for licensing, one is the contentious Ngaji block, which is located in QENP and Lake Edward. These two natural resources are part of the Greater Virunga landscape, on which we community members in Uganda and the DRC are dependent for our livelihoods.

Since 2015 therefore when Uganda first put up Ngaji oil block for oil exploration licensing, we have vigorously campaigned against licensing of the oil block. This campaign alongside that of national civil society organisations (CSOs) and international groups scared away companies, who did not bid for the oil block during the 2015-2017 oil exploration licensing round.

We do not understand why the Ugandan government reopened the oil block for licensing when Uganda's second oil exploration licensing round was opened in May 2019. We, the most key stakeholders who depend on QENP and Lake Edward, have always and continue to maintain that no oil exploration activities should be allowed in our lake and national park.

**Through this letter therefore, we are calling on you, oil companies, not to submit bids for Ngaji oil block.** We explain why below.

## 2. Concerns

**(a) Land loss:** Land is our main factor of production. We use land to grow food and eke a living to support our families. Through exchange learning visits to the oil region in Bunyoro, we learnt that oil exploitation activities negatively affect communities' access to land. Through the visits, we interacted with communities from Hoima and Buliisa districts that lost their land to oil companies and land grabbers. We also listen to news and have heard the land problems that communities in the Greater Masaka region are suffering because of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project. In Greater Masaka and Bunyoro for instance, communities' land was identified for acquisition in 2019 for the EACOP. Since then, the communities were stopped from using their land to grow perennial crops and set up new developments. We do not want to suffer the land challenges brought by oil. Moreover, we have been sensitised by Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO), a CSO that conducted research on the impacts of the oil refinery land acquisition on the affected people. AFIEGO's research showed that 13.43% of the affected people that owned land before the compulsory land acquisition no longer own land.

**(b) Tourism destabilisation:** Tourism is important to Uganda. The sector has earned Uganda as much as \$1.6 billion annually. Earnings are also expected to increase to approximately \$3 billion by 2025, according to Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP) III. We dare say that tourism is even more important to us community members who live around Lake Edward and QENP because we are among the among the over 160,000 people employed by the sector in Uganda. Our national park, QENP, is one of Uganda's most visited because of its diverse nature that includes [612 bird species](#), [95 animal species](#) and 57 plant species in addition to its unique animals such as the Isasha climbing lions, toppi and others. Moreover, we as community members benefit from the 20% gate collections that the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) gives back to districts around national parks. We have been supported by AFIEGO in Uganda and DYCOPERA in the DRC to watch films that highlight how oil sector activities negatively affect tourism through habitat loss, destruction of breeding grounds, disruption of animal migrations, pollution and others. We were alarmed when we watched the films and do not want the tourism sector on which we depend to be killed by oil exploration ventures.

**(c) Agricultural and fishing impacts:** In addition, we are afraid that allowing oil exploitation activities in our area will negatively impact our agricultural and fishing activities. Recently, we heard about a study that was conducted by Abraham R. Mwesigye, a Makerere university researcher at the college of Agricultural and Environmental Science. The study, which was titled *Impacts of oil exploration and waste disposal on the environment and livelihoods in the Albertine Graben*, indicated that oil exploitation activities in the Albertine Graben led to land loss, loss of access to fishing grounds on Lake Albert as well as water and soil pollution. These impacts negatively affected agriculture and fishing.

The above findings were alarming as hundreds of thousands of fishers from Uganda and the DRC rely on Lake Edward to make a living. These fishers do not want to lose this source of livelihoods. It is also worth noting that in July and August 2019, the Uganda National Fisheries Resources Research Institute (NaFIRRI) conducted research that indicated that the estimated total fish catch from Lake Edward during the months under study was over 32,092 tonnes. Of this, 91.4% was from the DRC while over 2,744 tonnes (8.6%) was from Uganda, leading to annual gross revenue

of \$5.4 million for the country. This shows the importance of Lake Edward to Uganda and the DRC. The lake must be conserved and protected from oil activities.

**(d) Environmental degradation:** Further, we are worried about the environmental destruction that follows oil exploitation activities especially in Africa. We have watched films and listened to news about the immense oil pollution and environmental destruction in the Niger Delta in Nigeria. This has resulted in job losses for fishermen and farmers, poor health amongst communities and others. In Uganda, we have seen environmental resources in Bunyoro such as Bugoma forest coming under immense pressure. Oil activities in the region have increased land pressures so much so that forests are being grabbed and destroyed. The destruction has led to human-wildlife conflicts with chimpanzees attacking and kidnapping children. In Nwoya district where the Tilenga oil activities are ongoing, communities reported increased attacks by elephants following the start of oil exploration activities in Murchison Falls National Park. We community members from Uganda and the DRC in the Greater Virunga landscape have suffered from elephant and other attacks through which community members have been killed and gardens destroyed. We want to live in harmony with wildlife and call on you to avoid bidding for Ngaji oil block.

**(e) Climate change concerns:** Uganda and the DRC are already experiencing the impacts of climate change such as flooding, landslides, unpredictable weather conditions and others. In Kasese district in Uganda, we have particularly suffered climate change impacts such as flooding. Our schools, hospitals and roads have been washed away due to floods. Lives have also been lost. We know that the burning of oil and other fossil fuels is largely responsible for climate change. As a community that has suffered climate change impacts, we do not want our problems worsened by oil exploitation in QENP and Lake Edward.

### **3. Recommendations**

In view of the above concerns, we recommend the following:

**(i). Do not submit oil exploration bids for Ngaji block.** QENP is a UNESCO-designated World Biosphere Reserve for Humanity. The park plays important conservation and livelihood roles as has been indicated above. So does Lake Edward. Oil companies should commit to ensuring that the park and lake are conserved by not submitting bids for Ngaji oil block.

**(ii) Should any oil company irresponsibly submit a bid for Ngaji oil block,** Uganda's Ministry of Energy should exercise responsibility and should not award any oil exploration license for the oil block. Communities' lives matter and the Ugandan government should not put money over people by sanctioning the destruction of QENP and Lake Edward.

**(iii) Furthermore, UNESCO and other well-meaning partners should engage the Ugandan government and oil companies to avoid oil exploration in QENP and Lake Edward so that the important ecosystems are conserved.**

**(iv). Finally, oil companies should invest in clean energy** as opposed to dirty fuels that lead to environmental destruction and climate change.

We look forward to your co-operation.

**SIGNATORIES:**

1. Coalition of Kasese women and youth clean energy clubs (**11 clean energy clubs**)
2. Kasese CSO Coalition to Safeguard Biodiversity (**7 CSO members**)
3. Katwe Sanitation and Clean Energy Women's Club
4. Kanungu youth for clean energy (**230 members**)
5. DYCOPERA (**Coalition of 23 DRC CSOs and Community Based Organisations - CBOs**)
6. Synergie de Ecologistes pour la Paix et le Developpement (**Coalition of 22 DRC CBOs**)

**CC**

- The Presidents, Republic of Uganda and the DRC
- The Speaker of Parliament, Republic of Uganda
- The Minister of Energy and Mineral Development
- The Chairperson, Natural Resources Committee of the Uganda Parliament
- The Governor, North Kivu Province-DRC
- The district chairpersons of Kasese, Kanungu, Rukungiri, Rubirizi and Kamwenge districts
- The Country Manager, Total E&P (U) B.V.
- The head of Delegation, Uganda National Commission for UNESCO