

UGANDA TOURISM SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

1st/September/2025

COMMUNIQUE: AVOID EAT ONCE, STARVE ONCE SYNDROME **Prioritize Tourism Over Destructive Sugarcane, Oil Activities in Uganda**

A. INTRODUCTION

1. We, tourism sector stakeholders including district leaders, tour and travel operators, guides, hotel owners, youth as well as food and beverage service providers, participated in a meeting organized by Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)¹ in collaboration with the Inclusive Green Economy Network-East Africa (IGEN-EA) in Kampala on 22nd/August/2025.
2. The objective of the meeting, which attracted over 43 participants, was to discuss the tourism opportunities and potential of the Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR) as well as of the Greater Masaka sub-region.
3. The meeting also discussed the risks that oil and gas activities in Uganda present to the tourism sector.

B. OBSERVATIONS -TOURISM IN BUGOMA FOREST

4. During the meeting, IGEN-EA, which conducted research in 2022² to assess the tourism potential of Bugoma forest, informed us that Bugoma CFR possesses immense tourism potential with the forest being able to support activities such as chimpanzee trekking, Uganda mangabey trekking, bird watching and forest walks among others.
5. IGEN-EA, which is a network that brings together over 36 civil society and private sector players to promote green economic activities for thriving livelihoods, environmental conservation and climate action, informed us that Uganda could earn USD 547,500 annually if the above tourism opportunities were promoted in Bugoma forest.
6. Further, IGEN-EA informed us that the network and others had been engaging government since 2022 to promote the aforementioned tourism activities in Bugoma CFR.

¹ AFIEGO is a Ugandan organization that promotes human rights, environmental conservation and climate action through promoting clean energy and other green economic alternatives.

²Tourism potential of Bugoma: <https://www.afiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Research-Brief-Tourism-potential-of-Bugoma-forest.pdf>

7. We were happy to note that government had launched chimpanzee trekking in Bugoma CFR in September 2024³. Some of the tour operators that were at the meeting had taken visitors to the forest, and they observed that the chimpanzee trekking experience in Bugoma CFR is enjoyable.
8. The above is likely to attract more tourists to the forest. However, as tourism sector stakeholders, we remain worried over the fact that parts of Bugoma CFR are still being destroyed for sugarcane growing, charcoal burning and small-scale agriculture. Entities such as Hoima Sugar Ltd and some community members are engaged in the destruction.
9. We ask you to see the recommendations that we are making to address the above challenges by reading section D of this communique.
10. In relation to the tourism potential of Greater Masaka⁴, participants heard that the region, which is comprised of nine districts, is home to at least 32 tourism sites that can be harnessed to promote eco-, religious, dark and cultural tourism. These range from Musambwa Island in Kyotera district to Bigo bya Mugenyi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Sembabule district to the St. Charles/ Karoli Lwanga site in Masaka.
11. The tourism sites in the Greater Masaka sub-region could earn Uganda USD 1,022,000 annually, we were informed at the workshop.

C. CONCERNS OVER OIL ACTIVITIES IN MURCHISON FALLS NP

12. The meeting also discussed the oil exploitation activities that are ongoing in Murchison Falls National Park, and the impact these are having or could have on tourism.
13. The meeting observed that Murchison Falls National Park, which received the highest visitor numbers of all Uganda's national parks between 2020 and 2024, is a key contributor to tourism revenues. Yet the park is inundated with oil sector activities, some of which could negatively impact tourism.

³ New Vision: https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/travel/bugoma-forest-opened-for-chimpanzee-tours-NV_195375

⁴ IGEN: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60808c71eb37321661f7b1d1/t/67e24e7f8d616a0bf2aee30c/1742884489327/Research+brief+-Tourism+potential+of+Greater+Masaka+-March+2025.pdf>

14. Indeed, the tourism sector stakeholders at the meeting observed that some oil impacts to tourism had been registered. For instance, some tracks that were previously used by tour guides to show visitors the flora and fauna of Murchison Falls National Park are closed due to the ongoing oil and gas activities in the park. The closure of the tracks could harm tourists' experiences.
15. The stakeholders at the meeting observed that new tracks had indeed been provided, with TotalEnergies observing that it was engaged in an upgrade of tourism tracks⁵ in the park. However, some of the new tracks are slippery and perilous, especially in rainy weather. This makes it difficult to take visitors through those tracks during rainy weather.
16. Furthermore, the tourism stakeholders at the meeting observed that due to restrictions instituted in the park to stop access to oil and gas facilities in the park, areas such as the Pakuba corridor where visitors could see elephants were no longer accessible. There are also worries that balloon safaris, which enable visitors to view the park from above, could be restricted due to oil and gas activities in the park.
17. Moreover, the tourism sector stakeholders at the meeting observed that there was misbehavior by some park users, who drive beyond the park's speed limit and endanger wildlife. They observed that these days, guides are informed that if they want visitors to see lions in the park, the guides can take visitors to the paved roads in the park where lions sometimes gather to eat roadkill. What a terrible state of affairs, the tourism sector stakeholders at the meeting noted.
18. The youth at the meeting were also quite worried, asking what effect oil infrastructure with its light and noise pollution could have on wildlife. The youth observed that some wildlife does not reproduce when stressed yet the wildlife in Murchison Falls National Park was being subjected to stressors in the form of increased vehicular traffic, increased human population, light pollution and noise pollution. The youth questioned whether the wildlife population in Murchison Falls National Park would remain the same with invasive oil activities in the park.

⁵ Daily Monitor: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/utb-totalenergies-team-up-to-market-uganda-4797844>

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

19. In light of the above, the tourism stakeholders that participated in the meeting make the following recommendations:
20. The stakeholders strongly call on government to stop Hoima Sugar Limited's activities in Bugoma CFR to promote conservation of the forest for tourism and community livelihoods.
21. Furthermore, they call on government, development partners and others with means to support beekeeping and other economic activities for Bugoma forest host communities. This will provide alternative livelihoods to stop communities from destroying the forest.
22. In addition, government should turn Bugoma CFR into a national park, and initiate other tourism activities such as Uganda Mangabey trekking and forest walks in the forest to increase earnings from the forest.
23. The Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), which is the marketing body for tourism in Uganda, should market chimpanzee trekking in Bugoma CFR and participate in efforts aimed at protecting the forest from oil, sugarcane growing and land grabbing threats.
24. Furthermore, government should work alongside communities, district leaders and cultural as well as religious leaders, to develop the tourism potential of the Greater Masaka sub-region.
25. In relation to Murchison Falls National Park, some of the stakeholders that participated in the workshop and some that participated in research by AFIEGO on tourism stakeholders' views of Uganda's oil sector⁶ call on government to stop oil activities in the park. Government should avoid the 'Eat once, starve once' syndrome by ensuring that no oil activities are allowed within any protected area in the country. This will promote sustainability as the country will continually earn from its tourism sector.
26. Finally, at the meeting, tourism sector stakeholders were informed that the European Union (EU) had put in place the EU Deforestation Free Regulation to curb deforestation rates worldwide. Through the regulation, the EU is set to bar the importation of seven goods if they are linked to

⁶ AFIEGO: <https://www.afiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Research-brief-Tourism-and-oil-compressed.pdf>

deforestation. The oil and gas sector is a major risk for deforestation in Uganda, and drives deforestation worldwide. The EU should therefore add oil and gas to the EUDR, the stakeholders at the workshop observed.

Signed



Grace Ayenyo
Food and beverage service provider



Charles Mulenga Basaliza
Hotel owner

On behalf of the tourism stakeholders that participated in the workshop