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OIL ACTIVITIES ARE DAMAGING UGANDA'S WETLANDS, NEW RESEARCH SHOWS

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) has today released a research brief titled, "*Siltation, noisy generators & air pollution: Documenting oil sector damage to Murchison Falls National Park & Uganda's wetlands*."

The brief is based on research conducted by the organisation between March and June 2026 and it documents the impacts that the construction of oil pipelines under Uganda's Tilenga as well as Kingfisher upstream projects has had on selected wetlands in Uganda.

The Tilenga and Kingfisher oil projects are operated by TotalEnergies E&P (U) – TEPU- and China National Offshore Oil Corporation Uganda Ltd (CUL) respectively.

The brief also documents the impacts of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline's (EACOP) construction activities on biodiversity-teeming and fisheries-supporting multi-million wetlands in the country.

The brief is based on data collected from interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with oil host communities and tourism sector stakeholders across five districts. The districts include Buliisa, Hoima, Kikuube, Kakumiro, and Kyotera.

The brief identifies siltation, increased vehicular traffic, population influx, noise and air pollution, as well as increased chimpanzee-human conflicts as some of the construction impacts of selected pipelines.

Wetlands and biodiversity experts warn that the above impacts pose immense and far-reaching risks to biodiversity conservation efforts, climate action as well as Uganda's national development.

BACKGROUND
Uganda has hinged its national development aspirations on the country's wetlands and other natural resources. Indeed, Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP) IV recognises sustainable natural resources management and management of the climate crisis as critical enablers for achieving the country's ten-fold economic growth strategy.

Wetlands, which currently cover approximately 13.9% of Uganda, play indispensable roles in water regulation, biodiversity conservation, and carbon storage. They are estimated to contribute over US$1 billion per year to national income and over 80% of the population directly use wetland resources to meet their household food security needs.

OIL AND WETLANDS
Unfortunately, Uganda's wetlands have increasingly come under pressure due to oil and gas activities associated with the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP projects.

The wetlands are being crossed or affected by several pipelines belonging to the aforementioned projects. Some of these pipelines include the Victoria Nile Pipeline Crossing under the Tilenga project, the Kingfisher feeder pipeline and the EACOP.

The pipelines are crossing or affecting wetlands such as the world-renown and biodiversity-teeming Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar wetland system, partly located in Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP). This wetland is part of the Victoria Nile basin.

They are also crossing the Kibale/Bukoora wetland, one of the most important in the multi-million Sango Bay-Musambwa Island-Kagera (SAMUKA) Ramsar wetland system. This wetland is part of the Lake Victoria basin.

More so, the pipelines are crossing Kafu wetland as well as other wetlands belonging to the Lake Albert basin.

To support conservation of the wetlands and safeguard national development aspirations amidst oil risks, AFIEGO undertook the research that is the subject of this press release.

KEY FINDINGS
The key findings of the research include:

- The Victoria Nile Pipeline Crossing under TEPU's Tilenga oil project increased human activity within the area of influence of the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar Wetland with a workers' camp being set up in the area of influence of the delta;

- Further, the number of heavy vehicles transporting materials for oil sector construction activities increased inside the park, putting biodiversity conservation at risk.

- More so, a generator, running on fossil fuels, was introduced within the area of influence of the delta, further straining biodiversity conservation efforts.

- In relation to the Kingfisher feeder pipeline, communities reported that water was pumped from Rutooha river during construction activities.

- The research notes that the above may have reduced water access for chimpanzees in Wambabya forest, leading to chimpanzees invading residential areas in search of water. Rutooha river is connected to Wambabya wetland and river, which flows through Wambabya forest.

- Furthermore, communities reported that construction activities associated with the EACOP caused siltation and blockage of tributaries connected to wetlands such as Wambabya, Kafu and Kibale/Bukoora in Hoima, Kakumiro and Kyotera districts.

A biodiversity expert observes that the above community-documented impacts can have far-reaching implications.

He notes, "Anthropogenic [human-generated] noise and vibrations can cause stress in wildlife, while affecting communication, movement, and foraging. Fossil fuel-powered generators also release carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide. These compounds can cause respiratory distress which can lead to weakened immunity, and reproductive disruptions in wildlife."

Worth noting is that aquatic species such as fish, birds, amphibians and fungi are some of the most negatively impacted by air pollution.

The Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar wetland, where anthropogenic noise and air pollution were heightened, is home to 78 waterbird species, three of which are globally threatened while another seven are nationally threatened.

The Ramsar site is also home to 25 reptile species as well as over 52 fish and 27 amphibian species. It is also an important breeding ground for the Lake Albert fisheries. Lake Albert was Uganda's largest fishery in 2023, accounting for 51% of the fish caught in Uganda.

Commenting on the research, AFIEGO's Mr. Dickens Kamugisha says, "The research released by AFIEGO today is clear: Uganda's oil activities are negatively impacting important wetlands on which millions depend. Uganda cannot attain sustainable economic transformation by degrading the very ecosystems that support citizens.

To protect citizens, support biodiversity conservation and promote climate action, the Ugandan government should ensure that TEPU and CUL remediate the harm caused to wetlands while rethinking oil production from the country altogether."

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To read the research brief, follow this link.

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