

March 2025; Issue 3

UMEME EXIT: IS THE FUTURE OF THE ELECTRICITY SECTOR LESS PRECARIOUS?



UMEME staff fixing a transformer
Photo credit: Business Time Uganda

In this newsletter:

- UMEME's exit alone will not end Uganda's electricity failures
- Pictorial of our activities
- Lobbying
- In the media
- Upcoming events

Dear reader, welcome to AFIEGO's March 2025 newsletter.

In March, the two-decades long concession of UMEME, Uganda's biggest electricity distributor, came to an end. The company was expected to hand over its electricity distributorship roles to the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (UEDCL).

Before the handover, public debate on UMEME's performance, and the huge buyout sums of money that Ugandans had to pay the company raged. The buyout sum was put at USD 118 million (over UGX 428 billion) by the Auditor General. UMEME contested the sum, demanding that they are paid USD 234 million (over UGX 848.97 billion).

While UMEME might have handed over its roles to UEDCL, as Ugandan citizens or residents, we should have one prayer: that in the decades to come, our children and grandchildren will not read that we lived at a time when our country suffered unfair terms given to UMEME and we took no action.

It is never late.

We must ask questions and demand for answers for the future of our children and our country.

Where did UMEME exist before it came to Uganda?

In 2005 when UMEME took over the country's distribution network, both the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) and UEDCL were still in their infancy and perhaps too weak to negotiate and supervise good deals for the country. Did some government people connected to the UMEME deal create UMEME, negotiate with the electricity distributor and sign a concession with themselves while UEDCL and ERA were too weak?

The other questions that Ugandans must ask themselves are: Who negotiated UMEME's concession and signed those unfair terms?

How much did UMEME invest as initial capital under the concession including the leasing of all the distribution assets from UEDCL?

What performance indicators were set for UMEME's operations?

Why did the government ignore the recommendations

of the 2009 Salim Saleh and 2016 Parliament reports plus President Museveni's 2018 directives on UMEME?

As UMEME is exiting, where is the evidence that UEDCL is ready to offer better services to Ugandans?

As we demand for the government to provide answers to the above questions, we must remember that Uganda was the first country in Africa to fully embrace the World Bank-influenced Power Sector Reforms (PSR) of the 1990s.

This commenced with the enactment of the 1999 Electricity Act under which the country's single electricity institution in the name of Uganda Electricity Board (UEB) was unbundled.

As a result, four separate entities were established namely a) the Uganda Electricity Generation Company Limited (UEGCL) for generation, b) the Uganda Electricity Transmission Company Limited (UETCL) for transmission, c) UEDCL for distribution and d) ERA for regulation.

Why did the government rush to commence the PSR where others including close neighbours like Kenya and Tanzania were hesitant?

In our **Word from CEO**, we discuss and ask questions about the UMEME concession. We also discuss other electricity sector failures that could see Ugandans continue to suffer electricity sector challenges despite UMEME's exit.

In this newsletter, we also bring you our **pictorial section** through which we share the activities that AFIEGO and our partners implemented this month (March 2025).

In the **lobbying section**, we share some of the lobby and advocacy products that we produced and disseminated in March 2025.

Finally, in **in the media** section we bring you some of the newspaper articles written by our staff and partners that were published in the leading newspapers in March 2025.

We hope that you will enjoy the newsletter.

Editorial team:

Diana Nabiruma

Rachael Amongin

Jane Apio

UMEME's exit alone will not end Uganda's electricity failures

Between March 23 and 27, 2025, I participated in a workshop on energy democracy held at the University College of London, United Kingdom. At the workshop, several university professors from across the world presented findings from a five years' research project on energy democracy and energy for communities covering 12 countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Lesotho, Mozambique, Bangladesh, South Africa and others.

The main objective of the workshop was to discuss how to make electricity and specifically mini-grids work for people, particularly rural and poor communities amidst efforts to accelerate a just energy transition.

One of the professors, Jon Cloke from UK, presented a paper about the challenge of corruption and how it affects efforts to make electricity work for all.

Quoting from Adam Curtis (2016) and Alexei Yurchak of Russia (1980s), Cloke explained the concept of "hypernormalisation" as the acceptance and normalisation of distorted or simplified versions of reality by individuals and society at large.

He said that in the 1980s, everyone from the top to the bottom of the Soviet Union society knew that it wasn't working, knew that it was corrupt, knew that the officials were using the system they created to loot the society, knew that the politicians were selfish and had no alternative vision for the country but no one was ready to confront the evil. This was hypernormalisation in full view.

As Cloke broke down the concept of hypernormalisation, I could not help but notice how this concept reflected the

goings-on in Uganda's electricity sector.

I grappled with a multitude of questions, but none yielded answers. Who is UMEME? How much money did UMEME invest in 2005 to lease UEDCL's electricity distribution assets? How has UMEME survived in Uganda for 20 years without an independent forensic audit? Why did the government refuse to renegotiate UMEME's concession as recommended by the Parliament and Salim Saleh electricity industry inquest reports?

Why is the government bowing to UMEME's threats and rushing to pay USD 118 million (over UGX 428 billion) as a buyout fee on an expired concession and yet the same government has failed to compensate thousands of Ugandans who supplied it services many years ago? Isn't this a 'hypernormalisation' scenario?

There were many things that were wrong with UMEME including the fact that there is no evidence that UMEME existed anywhere in the world before it signed the 20-year concession with the government of Uganda.

Some people allege that UMEME existed in some form before coming to Uganda. Even if this were the case, there is no indication that it paid any money to take over our electricity distribution network including the leasing of the government's assets under UEDCL.

In addition, UMEME has been variously investigated, including by the Salim Saleh Electricity Committee, and Parliament. In 2018, President Museveni also issued a directive against UMEME but recommendations including those requiring renegotiation of the concession, an independent forensic audit, renationalisation of the electricity sector among others were

ignored.

UMEME's performance also remained questionable. While some argue that the number of people connected to the grid increased under UMEME's tenure, Ugandans will also recall that unaffordable connection fees were introduced during UMEME's tenure.

When the World Bank provided over UGX 780 billion (USD 212 million) to connect Ugandans to the national electricity grid for free under the 'Free' Electricity Connections and Electricity Scale-up policies, a lot of money went to UMEME to implement the same.

During implementation of the 'Free' Electricity Connections Policy, the government increased the connection fees from UGX 90,000 and 360,000 to over UGX 730,000 and UGX 2.3 million for those with a pole and those with no pole respectively. UMEME was among those that were connecting customers to the grid.

Why did the government increase the connection fees and yet the reason for the free connection policy and electricity scale-up plan was to help the poor to connect to the grid? How did this increase in connection fees affect access to electricity?

Moreover, why didn't government implement the free connection and electricity scale-up policies through its own entity, UEDCL, as part of its empowerment plan in preparation for its takeover after UMEME?

Ugandans also consistently complained about high electricity tariffs during UMEME's tenure. In 2018, President Museveni

observed that the high return on investment of 20% that was given to UMEME in its concession by corrupt government officials contributed to the high tariff.

UMEME's failings were numerous including failing to stop power outages.

OTHER ELECTRICITY SECTOR CHALLENGES

UMEME remains a clear manifestation of the corruption and mismanagement that has undermined our electricity sector for 20 years. However, its exit will not address the other failures in the sector including:

- **Costly Bujagali dam:** Bujagali dam was initially approved for construction in 1994 but it only commenced in 2007 and was commissioned in 2012. The main aim of building the dam was to increase power generation and lower the power tariffs. But to date, the dam remains one of the most expensive in the world, enjoying endless tax exemptions yet failing to drop tariffs.

- **Commissioning of Isimba dam with defects:** Also built on River Nile following a loan of over USD 600 million from Chinese government-owned banks, Isimba dam was commissioned in 2019 with defects.

To date, the government has never disclosed why UEGCL commissioned a faulty dam. What actions were taken to hold UEGCL officials accountable? What is the implication of a defective dam on electricity tariffs and on efforts to promote affordable and reliable clean energy services countrywide?

- **Delayed Karuma dam:** Karuma dam cost over USD 2 billion, and was funded by a loan from China and others sources. The dam was commissioned in September 2024 nearly 11 years after its construction started

in December 2013.

The dam was opened several years after its planned commissioning in 2018. How much money was lost to the delays in commissioning? What is the implication of the delay on the tariff and the country's efforts to ensure access to affordable and reliable clean energy?

- **Over dependence on Chinese loans to avoid governance queries:** Over the years, President Museveni has accused the West including the World Bank of riding on their grants and loans to interfere in the affairs of his government.

The West always insisted that the government respects human rights and commits to transparency and accountability as conditions for receiving grants and loans.

To avoid the West and their questions, the Museveni shifted to Chinese loans. It appears that the Chinese government provided loans on condition that only Chinese companies would be selected and given contracts, as was the case for the Isimba and Karuma dams.

This perhaps explains why the two Chinese companies were selected without competitive bidding contrary to our national laws and international best practices.

- **Selective bidding:** There is no evidence that the government's decision to select the companies, Sinohydro as well as China Water and Engineering from China to build Karuma and Isimba dams – plus other companies to construct transmission lines – was based on competence of the said companies.

It appears that the decision was based purely on politics and others. In the end, both

companies failed to deliver quality facilities but sadly none was sanctioned.

Other challenges in the electricity sector include weak regulation by ERA as well as corruption.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the above challenges, government should urgently do the following:

- i). **Conduct an independent forensic audit of UMEME's alleged investments** and operations and recover any excess buyout monies paid to UMEME.

- ii). **Set clear and enforce performance standards** for UEGCL, UETCL and UEDCL to ensure efficient service delivery in the electricity sector.

- iii). **Use the parliamentary and Salim Saleh Electricity Committee** reports on UMEME to investigate and prosecute those responsible for signing a parasitic concession agreement with UMEME.

- iv). **Amend the Electricity Act 1999 to provide for punitive penalties** for those who sign unfair electricity agreements, allow selective bidding in electricity projects, delay electricity projects, commission defective dams, fail to provide for regular reviews of electricity agreements including concessions, import counterfeit equipment such as transformers, meters, wires, solar panels, and fail to install chips for tracking vandalism in pylons and others.

The new law should be effectively enforced for compliance.

- vi). **Make all electricity agreements public for transparency;** The failure to open electricity agreements to public scrutiny only benefits the corrupt.

By CEO

Pictorial of our activities

AFIEGO SUPPORTS GREATER MASAKA EACOP-AFFECTED PEOPLE TO MEET BUGANDA KINGDOM OFFICIALS

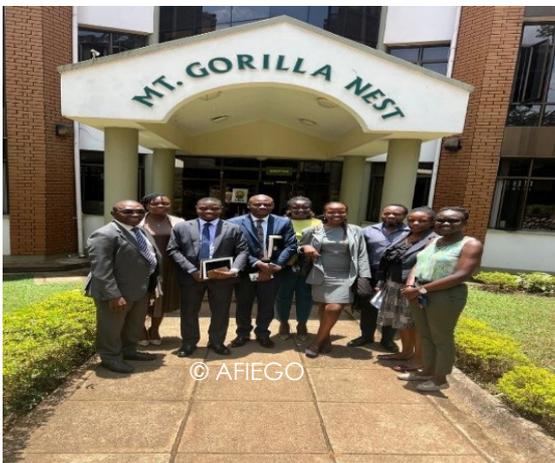


On March 18, 2025, AFIEGO supported EACOP-affected people from Lwengo, Rakai and Kyotera districts to meet the Deputy Katikiiro of Buganda Kingdom and his secretary in Bulange-Mengo in Kampala.

The affected people delivered a petition to the kingdom, highlighting their challenges including undervaluation of their assets like land and crops, as well as delayed and unfair compensation among others.

The people's meeting came after the EACOP Company met the Katikiiro and misinformed him about the project. The Deputy Katikiiro committed to share the affected people's grievances with the Katikiiro and to organise a field visit to the affected areas to assess the situation.

AFIEGO AND ITS LEGAL TEAM MEET UWA OVER ELEPHANT INVASIONS IN BULIISA



On March 13, 2025, AFIEGO and its legal team held a meeting with the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to discuss oil-induced elephant invasions in Buliisa district.

The purpose of the meeting was to ascertain if UWA had received complaints from the communities regarding the invasions and request UWA to address the issue.

UWA agreed to organise a meeting with the communities affected by the invasions and ensure that those with compensation claims receive their compensation.

AFIEGO UPDATES TILenga OIL PROJECT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES ON THEIR COURT CASES



Between March 13 and 15, 2025, AFIEGO met with oil-affected persons in Buliisa district to update them on their court cases.

Furthermore, a workshop was also held with oil-affected youth and women groups.

The groups were formed to help to advocate, document and fight the injustices that the communities are faced with.

AFIEGO SUPPORTS YOUTH ACTIVISTS TO PROSECUTE COURT CASES AGAINST POLICE OFFICERS



On March 17, 2025, AFIEGO supported youth activists who filed a court case against government and individual police officers in 2024 to attend their court case hearing.

The youth filed the case because they were arrested on December 15, 2023 while on their way to parliament to deliver a petition against the EACOP project to the Speaker. They were remanded in prison for 20 days.

The youth argue that the arrest and detention violated their constitutional right to freedom of assembly.

AFIEGO SUPPORTS A MEETING BETWEEN OIL AFFECTED PERSONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS LAW CENTRE



Between March 18 and 19, 2025, AFIEGO supported a team from Environmental Defenders Law Centre (EDLC) to hold meetings with oil-affected persons from Bunyoro sub-region.

The affected people shared the challenges they with the Ugandan judicial system, which has failed to protect their rights and environment amidst oil activities.

AFIEGO PARTICIPATES IN PARTNERS' REFLECTION AND REVIEW MEETING



From March 5 to 6, 2025, AFIEGO participated in a reflection and review meeting with our Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) 2.0 implementing partners.

The objective of the meeting was to review the GLA 2 project's achievements in 2024 and the challenges faced during the project implementation to inform 2025 interventions.

AFIEGO CALLS FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND PROTECTION OF COMMUNITY RIGHTS AT OECD MEETING IN PARIS



On March 12, 2025, AFIEGO joined a meeting at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

During the meeting that was participated in by government officials from OECD countries and civil society organisations (CSOs), AFIEGO advocated for inclusive policies that protect frontline communities, uphold free, prior, and informed consent, and ensure that financing aligns with climate action in the global south.

Lobbying

In March 2025, AFIEGO partnered with the Inclusive Green Economy Network-East Africa (IGEN-EA) to write to the Deputy Speaker of Parliament. We requested that the Deputy Speaker engages the executive to table the 2023 Consumer Protection and Management Bill before Parliament for debate and enactment.

Further, with our Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC) partners, we engaged the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and requested for the approved copy of the Bugoma forest restoration plan.

We also wrote to the Ministry of Water and requested for the progress of implementation of the EU-Uganda forest partnership.

With our IGEN-EA partners, we also launched a research brief on the tourism potential of Greater Masaka vis-à-vis EACOP project risks.



March 12, 2025

Ambassador Jan Sadek,
Head of the European Union Delegation, Uganda,
Plot 17/23 Hannington Road, Kampala, Uganda

Dear Sir,

RE: PETITION CALLING ON THE EUROPEAN UNION TO SAVE BULISIA COMMUNITIES FROM HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CAUSED BY OIL AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

Greetings from the Kamu Advocates and Solicitors, Bulisya Patience Alliance Group (BUPAG), Bulisya Natural Climate Conservation Advocacy (BUNCCA), Oil and Gas Region Human Rights Defenders (ORGH), Bulisya women and youth groups, Project Affected Persons (PAPs) who were sued in the Masindi and Hoima High Courts in 2020 and 2023 respectively by the Attorney General, oil affected families and others as represented by the undersigned organizations and individuals.

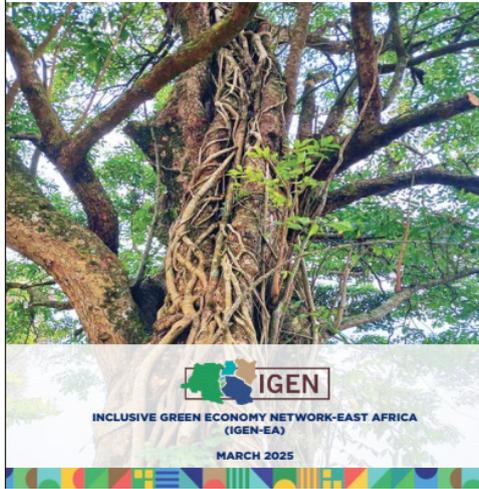
As Bulisya communities, we take this opportunity to thank the European Union and all the European Embassies in Uganda for the good work you have continued to do for many decades to date. We appreciate your huge efforts in promoting human and environmental rights, efforts to combat climate change crisis in particular the signing of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, efforts to strengthen and ensure effective access to justice for all through the Justice, Law and Order Sector (LLOS), your supports for clean water, funding for education and health services, support for roads and electricity access, efforts to support the refugees in Uganda, support for opportunities for youth and women and many others.

It's in view of the work you do for our country that we reach out and appeal to you to engage our government and international companies in Uganda to stop the untold suffering to Bulisya communities and all Ugandans. We believe that the European Union and its various institutions, have the experience, skills and strategic space to engage our government and oil companies, especially companies from Europe such as TotalEnergies to stop dangerous activities in our communities including national parks, forests, wetlands and others.

Our concerns
Since 2012 when TotalEnergies and other oil companies came to Uganda to engage in oil activities, the Albertine Graben through the main four oil projects namely; the Tilenga, Kingfisher, the EACOP and the planned refinery, many oil activities are being forced in our areas. These activities include efforts to compulsorily acquire land for the construction of oil infrastructure such as roads, airport, oil camps, Central Processing facilities, oil wells, feeder pipelines, EACOP pipeline among others causing us many social, environmental and economic problems.

RESEARCH BRIEF

TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL OF GREATER MASAKA VIS-À-VIS EACOP PROJECT RISKS



The Family of Ms. Tereza Nakintu
Ndagwe Village, Naanywa Sub-County, Lwero District
0708844281

March 18, 2025

Mr. Martin Tiffen
The General Manager,
East African Crude Oil Pipeline Co. Ltd,
Kampala, Uganda

Dear Sir,

RE: REQUEST TO RELOCATE MS. TERESA NAKINTU FROM THE EACOP RIGHT OF WAY

My name is Katoogo Kassimu and I am writing this letter on behalf of my mother, Tereza Nakintu. She is an 85-year-old widow living in Ndagwe Village, Naanywa Sub-County, Lwero District. First, I want to thank you and your team for the efforts you are making to address the concerns of people affected by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project.

In 2018, my mother's land was taken under compulsory acquisition for the EACOP project. She was compensated for the land, but her house, which is only three meters from the pipeline, was left out. This has caused her great worry because living so close to the pipeline is dangerous, especially in case of oil spills.

Since work on the pipeline started in Bunyoro and Greater Masaka, my mother has been living in fear. She hardly sleeps, and she is always distressed about the safety of her home. She is a widow and takes care of a family of six, including her grandchildren, all under the age of ten. The constant movement of heavy trucks near her house also puts the children at risk of accidents.

On July 25, 2023, and again on November 6, 2023, my mother wrote to your office asking for full compensation, including her house, or for her to be relocated. Up to now, she has not received any response.

Last month, a team from China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Ltd (CPP) visited her at home. On seeing how close her house is to the pipeline, they advised her to write to your office again and request resettlement.

As such, I am now writing to you, asking you to relocate my mother and her family before she suffers the effects of being so close to the EACOP project. Please help her find a safer place to live. We hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you,
Katoogo Kassimu
(On behalf of Tereza Nakintu)
0708844281



March 20, 2025

The Honourable Minister,
Mr. Sam Cheptoris,
Minister of Water and Environment,
Kampala- Uganda,



Dear Sir,

RE: REQUISITION FOR INFORMATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS OF THE EU-UGANDA FOREST PARTNERSHIP (MOU)

The above refers

Greetings from the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC) and other undersigned signatories. The undersigned signatories are local people and their leaders from over 30 Bugoma forest host villages from the districts of Kikuube and Hoima.

On behalf of the undersigned signatories and on my own behalf as the chairperson of the SBFC and the Bugoma CFR host communities, allow me to thank you for the leadership to continue strengthening the policy governance forests in Uganda. We appeal to you to continue those efforts to stop the degradation of forests in Uganda for environmental, social and economic benefits for all Ugandans, present and future generations.

We recognize and appreciate that on November 8, 2022, the European Union (EU) and the Government of Uganda signed the EU-Uganda Forest Partnership or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the main objective of increasing the area of protected, restored or sustainably managed forests; increasing the number of forest-related decent jobs; reducing the annual rate of deforestation of natural forests; and looking for ways to facilitate trade in legal and sustainable wood products.

Under the partnership, the Government of Uganda made several commitments including efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 22% by 2030; increase forest coverage up to 21% by 2030; enhance biodiversity conservation and management and, sustainable utilisation of forests; scale up restoration; and value addition.

ASSOCIATION OF GREATER MASAKA EACOP PAPs PETITIONERS (AGMEPPS)

March 6, 2025

The Katikiro,
Charles Peter Mayiga,
Buganda Kingdom.



0414274738/9

Dear Sir,

RE: REQUEST FOR A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE GRIEVANCES OF EACOP AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN GREATER MASAKA REGION

Greetings from the Association of Greater Masaka EACOP PAPs Petitioners (AGMEPPS). We take this opportunity to thank you for the work that you are doing in promoting spiritual and economic growth for Ugandans, especially the poor and vulnerable groups in Buganda region and the country as a whole.

AGMEPPS is a group of aggrieved communities affected by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project in Greater Masaka region. Our group was formed in 2024 to enable us to use collective efforts to defend our rights to stop violations of our land, economic, cultural and other rights due to the EACOP project.

Honorable Prime Minister, as you may be aware, in 2018 the government of Uganda together with oil companies commenced the process of land acquisition for the EACOP project. We were informed that the EACOP would pass through our lands, which we accepted because we were promised to be paid fair and adequate compensation.

However, the oil project has caused untold sufferings on our livelihoods and human rights due to the failure of the government and oil companies to pay us fair, adequate and prompt compensation of our land.

Therefore, the main objective of this letter is to request a meeting with you to enable us to present our petition highlighting all the misery that we are facing including threats of eviction, food insecurity, human rights violations and loss of our land among others.

It is our humble request to meet you on **Wednesday, March 19, 2025, at 11 am** or any other time when you are available at your office or another date that is convenient for you. With your

In March 2025, 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

On this International Forest Day, women that live around Bugoma forest would like to draw public attention to the following challenges they are facing due to destruction of Bugoma forest:

- Inaccessibility of the forest from which they used to get herbs, food like mushrooms, and honey.
- The forest used to act as an educational centre that allowed children to learn about nature. This benefit is no longer available as communities cannot access the forest.
- The forest helped in rainfall formation, which supported agriculture. This function was destabilized due to the ongoing destruction of the forest.
- Women used to get weaving materials to support their livelihood, which no longer happens.
- The forest was a habitat for chimpanzees but with its destruction, chimpanzees increasingly move into communities, compromising safety and destroying people's crops.

The women are calling for the following:

- Ensure that the forest boundary opening report is publicly shared to stop trespassers.
- Restore the destroyed sections of the forest with indigenous tree species.
- Stop any further encroachment on the forest.
- Support women in their tree planting project as they have developed a system of planting trees around their homes and gardens. However, they lack enough knowledge and tree seedlings.

DAILY MONITOR | MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2025
www.monitor.co.ug

LETTER OF THE DAY

Elephant attacks: Protect communities, human lives

Ever since the commencement of oil activities around the Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) that involve the use of loud machinery, the habitat and source of livelihood of people and wildlife most, especially elephants have been tampered with.

For instance, because of the noise, elephants are moving out of their natural habitat into people's homes and gardens causing human-elephant conflict.

As a result of the disruption of the ecosystem in MFNP and Bugoma Wildlife Reserve by oil projects, elephants have since become hostile and attacked homesteads in the villages of Waiga, Katoleba, Kichoke and Kabolwa in the parishes of Bugoma and Kigeza in Bulisa District, causing grave injuries and death.

Last week, the media reported that Bulisa residents live in fear of elephants attacking them.

Some people have been killed while others sustained injuries after being attacked by the elephants which escapes from the park due to the vibrations caused by the oil activities that include the drilling of oil wells.

Elephants are very sensitive and can feel vibrations as far as 10km away, which force them to move from the national park to communities, hence attacking people, causing injuries and loss of lives where about eight community members have so far lost their lives to elephant attacks.

It is reported that the escalating conflict between humans and elephants is reaching a critical level and the safety of the community members in Bulisa is being seriously compromised.

In 2024 alone, elephants attacked and killed Bridget Katirinda (23), Joyce Akuma (40), Onyeri Mungo (27), Benon Amumpaire (29), and on February 9, 2025 a herd of elephants attacked and killed Eunice Kyaseka Kyabachi Nyajungu (21) and injured her four-year-old daughter who remains hospitalised.

Consequently, some families within the said villages have since been forced to abandon their homes, rendering them homeless and exposing them to other vagaries of life.

And among these affected families, some have not been compensated.

Recommendations

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) together with relevant stakeholders, conservationists and experts need to devise and implement long-term sustainable strategies that ensure the protection of elephants while safeguarding human lives and their livelihoods.

The oil companies must also stop the oil activities in the national park because these activities pose a significant threat to both human lives, elephants and the broader ecosystem.

By destroying critical habitats, we risk the extinction of these incredible creatures and the collapse of biodiversity.

Additionally, the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), whose officials have indicated measures they will employ to curb the attacks and resolve other human-wildlife conflicts, must as well ensure the affected families are fairly compensated.

Olive Atuhare, environmentalist
atuhareolive72.a@gmail.com

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Letters

LETTERS

Our forests, our future

The International Forests Day is celebrated every year on March 21, to raise awareness on the importance of all types of forests where countries are encouraged to undertake local national and international efforts to organise activities such as tree planting campaigns.

This year's theme is "forests and foods" for the day, celebrating the crucial roles of forests in food security, nutrition and livelihoods. In addition to providing food, fuel, income and employment, forests support soil fertility, protect water resources and offer habitats for biodiversity including vital pollinators. They are essential for the survival of forest-dependent communities, particularly indigenous people and contribute to climate change mitigation by storing carbon.

Forests are a vital source of energy, providing wood for cooking, playing a key role in agriculture by hosting pollinators and acting in soil enrichment, climate stabilisation and biodiversity conservation, cultural or recreational roles, among others. In addition, forested watersheds supply freshwater to more than 85 percent of the world's major cities and in crisis situations, forests become an economic and food lifeline, providing up to 20 percent of family income in rural areas, guaranteeing healthy diets.

However, much as forests are of importance in many ways most especially in mitigating climate change and providing food, they continue to be destroyed due human activities such as charcoal production and timber loggings, among others, and this is brought by the increased population growth which drives deforestation by increasing demand for farmland, housing and infrastructure leading to forest clearance.

In 2024, President Museveni issued a directive banning commercial charcoal burning in northern Uganda, a move which aimed at protecting the region's dwindling forests. The directive was a response to increasing reports of large-scale deforestation driven by the charcoal trade, which is fuelled by urban demand for cooking energy. The report states that while the census highlights the scale of wood reliance, the presidential directive underscores the urgency of transitioning to sustainable energy solutions. Despite the president's efforts, access to cleaner alternatives remains limited where the census report reveals that only 3 percent of Ugandan households use clean cooking fuels and technologies, far below international targets for clean energy adoption, with only 53.4 percent of households connected to the grid or relying on solar power.

According to National Population and Housing Census, 64.5 percent of Ugandans still rely on unsustainable fuel wood for cooking. With electricity being prohibitively expensive, the vast majority of Ugandans rely on charcoal and firewood that has been harvested from national forests or the private lands of impoverished farmers and this has increase more pressure on the destruction of forest cover.

Notably, Uganda has been in a number of partnerships to promote the protection, restoration and sustainable management and use of forests, where from 2017 to 2021 Uganda received forest carbon funding partnership - additional funding amounting to \$3.75m for investing in forests and protected areas for climate smart development project activities.

Despite all the number of partnerships Uganda has been in, committing to restore forests, as well as calling for action to reduce deforestation, then the President's directives, the forest cover continue to reduce at high rate, for example Mabira and Bugoma forests which are under a threat of human activities such as timber cutting, among others. Destruction of forests is worsening climate change every day by increasing the global temperatures, which defacts Uganda's target of 1.5 degrees.

I call upon the government to work hand-in-hand with Nema to restore all the degraded forest reserves by stop-

Upcoming events

April 2, 2025; Buliisa: Organise a community meeting with Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to discuss increased human-wildlife conflicts

April 10-11, 2025; Kampala: Organise a lawyers' retreat to review ongoing cases and strategise for upcoming legal proceedings

April 10, 2025; Kampala: Support IGEN-EA to analyse FY 2025/26 Ministerial Policy statements

April 16, 2025; Kampala: Organise a green jobs fair to provide students with career guidance on green economic opportunities

April 16, 2025; Kampala: Organise a workshop for youth activists to strengthen their advocacy

April 17, 2025; Kampala: Disseminate a simplified version of Uganda's Energy Transition Plan

April 18, 2025; Fort portal: Organise a radio talk show to sensitise communities on the benefits of clean energy

April 25, 2025; Kikuube: Organise a community meeting on community-led conservation and sustainability of Bugoma forest

April 30, 2025; Nationwide: Support research processes on the political-economic landscape of Uganda's tourism industry

About AFIEGO

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (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