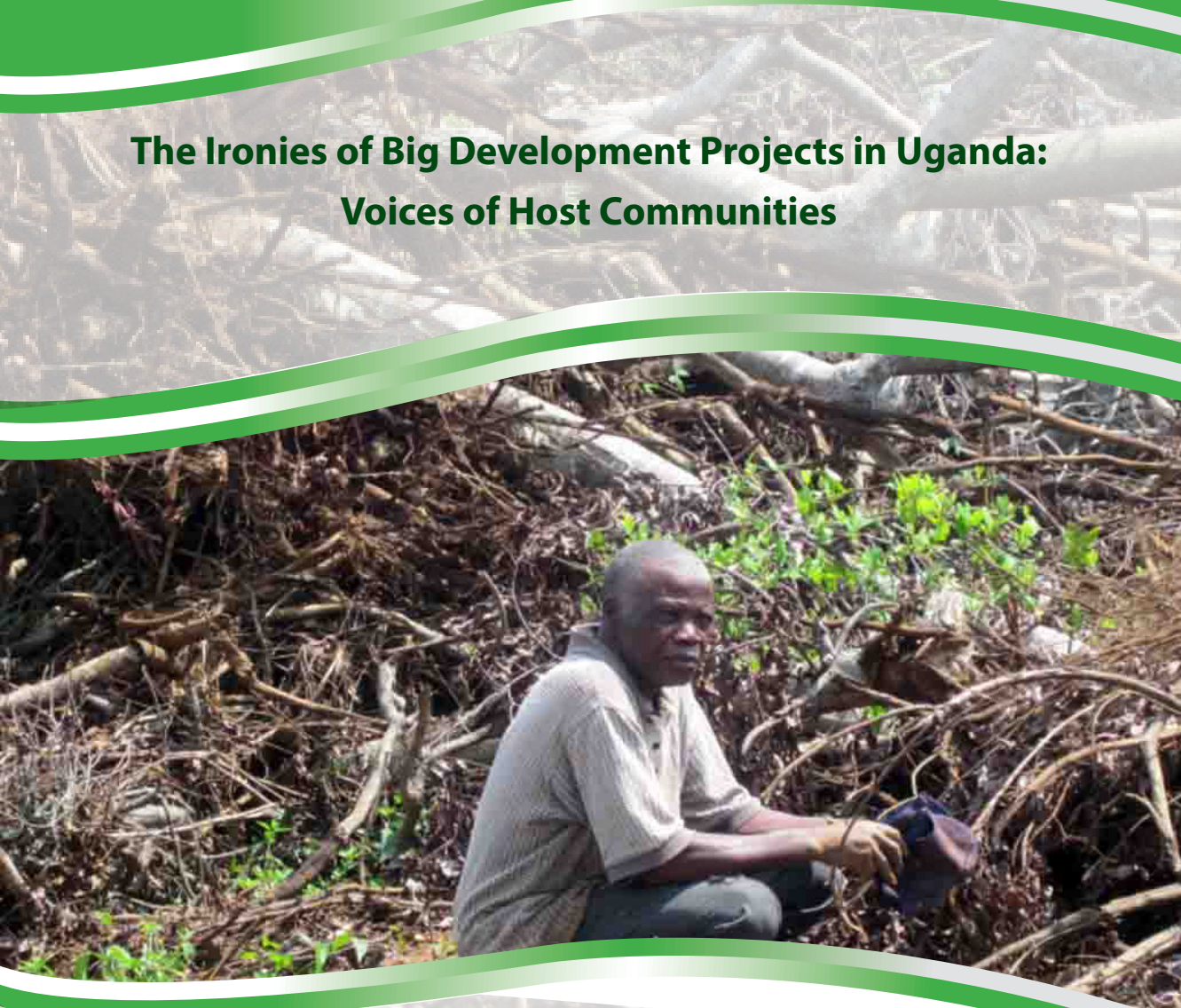


# The Ironies of Big Development Projects in Uganda: Voices of Host Communities



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## **Introduction**

NAPE, under the Sustainability School Programme, set out to document the voices of host communities in areas where large developmental projects have been established by government with support from its international development partners. The Sustainability School Programme of NAPE aims at empowering communities with knowledge and skills to help them hold accountable the government and its development partners for the impacts of their actions on people's livelihoods and national development. This publication, therefore aims at amplifying the voices of the local people being impacted on negatively by these development initiatives.

The publication targets all the different arms of government, development partners, civil society organisations, the media and the communities. Voices were recorded in three main thematic areas where the Sustainability School is operating namely: forests and large plantations, oil governance and large dams and energy. We believe that sustainable development will only be tenable if communities that depend on natural resources in marginalized and ecologically fragile areas are empowered to seek and secure greater control over those resources and benefit from them as collectively owned commons.

## **Background**

The government of Uganda in a bid to transform the country's socio-economic development, has since the 1990s adopted mainly the international monetary fund (IMF) driven-policies. These policies include liberalization, privatization and capitalization of the economy. With less or limited people's participation in formulation and implementation of these policies, two socio-economic classes have emerged namely; the very rich and the very poor. The very poor are the majority citizens who have been virtually left out of decision making processes.

It has been realized that oftentimes policy-makers do not have adequate and timely information concerning the impacts of national, private development actions and human rights abuses. At the same time, the members of the public are not given opportunity to express their views about the issues regarding proper governance, development, the law and justice, natural resources, human rights and obligations to the legislators in a free and fair atmosphere.

The people are not aware and do not have knowledge on these issues. Moreover, these decisions are always discussed and passed by experts, technocrats and legislators in government boardrooms and parliament while the public is left at the receiving end of the effects of those decisions. As a result, many policies and programmes fail to yield the expected results. Even though the natural resources around rural communities are typically their most important economic asset, they often have limited rights to use them. Powerful interests—government, mining, petroleum, logging, agribusiness, ranching, tourism—often claim exclusive access rights to these resources; corruption and mismanagement are additional problems.

This document, therefore, carries voices of people in communities that have been engulfed in conflicts as a result of large developmental projects being established in their areas. These conflicts revolve mainly around land use, compensation and respect for human rights.

## **Acknowledgement**

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Frank Muramuzi

**Executive Director, NAPE**

## Cries of the oil people

Huge deposits of over 3.5 billion barrels of oil have been confirmed in the Albertine rift of Bunyoro region of Western Uganda. The oil in Uganda has excited investors and business people locally and internationally. Many citizens think that the oil will help in uplifting the country from biting poverty. Ironically, the people of Bunyoro who host the oil wells are filled with anxiety and fear over the effects of the discovery of this resource in their area. They are the only ones that celebrate oil discovery with a lot of caution. Below are some of their voices.



“I am 45 years old and I am physically disabled . My wife and I were still sleeping in our house very early in the morning when a bulldozer arrived. The machine operator had few words, he said that our house lay in the way where the road to connect to the oil wells would pass. He gave us just few minutes to remove what we could manage from the house and then he razed it to the ground . I had to stay with relatives for some time and my wife left me. I am still single up to now and I have never been compensated by the government or anybody for the loss”, says Manyireki (**in the photo on the left**) a resident of Kyehoro fish landing village on the shores of Lake Albert. (We have since learnt that Manyire’s house was destroyed by Hardman Resources which later sold off to Tullow Oil in 2006). ●●●●●



“In order to protect our community land in Kyehoro village, we decided to register it in the name of the community so that land grabbers can keep off. We gave the papers and our signatures to one of our sons, who is educated, to help us register with the Land Board in Hoima. To our shock, that very son of ours later returned with some district officials to survey the land claiming that it was his as an individual. We later learnt that he connived with some people in the lands office and altered the documents we gave him to indicate that the land was his. We also learnt he was later given a title and mark stones were put all over our land. We hear that he has now written to Tullow demanding for compensation of sh. 600 million for Ngasa 1 oil well, which is located on the land. Sometime back I was walking in that same land when some men arrested me. They took me to police and charged me with trespassing on somebody’s private property. The





## **Bunyoro Kingdom wants a share of the oil money**

The confirmation of oil in Uganda has brought about hitherto unknown conflicts between



*Omukama Iguru Gafabusa*

Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom and the central government. In May 2012, the Omukama of Bunyoro- Kitara Kingdom, Solomon Gafabusa Iguru, stormed Parliament demanding a share of 12.5% of all oil revenue accruing from the respective petroleum wells as royalties payable to the Kingdom. Speaking before the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources, Omukama Gafabusa Iguru said being the valid trustee of the Bunyoro customary lands and natural resources, he needed a fair share for the kingdom and his subjects to boost development. The King storming of Parliament over oil did not please the President and his Cabinet. They have since warned the King against making another such attempt. They have advised the Banyoro to instead concentrate on farming and go slow on oil. But the kingdom officials are saying that they can never give up the fight to have their rightful share of the oil revenue. The Principal Private Secretary of the King, Mr. Yoram Nsamba, had this to say:

“We are not going to give up voicing our demands for a fair share of the oil revenue! Oil has been discovered in our land and some of the oil wells have been installed on important cultural sites of the Banyoro. As important trustees of this resource we are legally entitled to 12.5% of the oil revenues and we are not going to allow anyone to hoodwink us. It is a standard practice everywhere in the world”.

## **Tears of the Bujagali dam affected communities**

The Bujagali power project was recently commissioned and has already started generating electricity. The whole process took close to 10 years to complete and during that time the local communities were affected in different ways, mostly negatively. Some were displaced while others who got jobs in the project and were injured have never been compensated. Some families were resettled and promised many things, including good houses, electricity, water, and alternative sources of livelihoods, especially for those who previously depended on fishing on River Nile. Fulfilling those promises has been a tag of war. During the construction works, some people’s houses were cracked by the blasting and their pleas for compensation have fallen on deaf ears. The site that was a source of stones used in the construction of Bujagali power dam also affected people in areas of Malindi, Naminya, Bulooba, Kikubamutwe in Buikwe district and Kyabilwa, Budoondo, Namizi, Buyala, Kivubuka, Katabawala and

Bujagali in Jinja district. Today the government has not fulfilled some of the promises it made to the people before work on the dam commenced. Below are some of the voices of the people affected by the Bujagali hydro power project.



“All the plaster on my ceiling is falling off. My house has serious cracks and the floor is peeling off all because of the blasting done during the construction of the Bujagali Dam. I am not the only one facing this problem. We are many. We have talked and we have generally been ignored. We fear some of the houses are going to collapse”, Ms Sarah Namatovu (*in the photo on the left*) a resident of Malindi in Buikwe District said “Even the just constructed structures like those in Malindi market also developed cracks as a result of the blasts.

“Most of our husbands were affected by blasts and stone quarrying and have now become very weak in bed. Things are no longer the way they

used to be and in fact some women have run away from their homes to go and look for other men elsewhere and this is affecting the set up of our families,” Ms Namatovu adds.

Mr. George Kirimungo a resident of the same area also corroborates Namatovu’s story thus: “I was customarily married and had two wives and we had several children. After the blasts started, I became weaker and weaker and the younger wife later ran away. I have tried to convince her to come back but she has refused. Somehow I sympathise with her because I can no longer fulfill my marital obligations. The older wife has stayed mostly to look after the children. I feel bad about the whole situation”.

Dr B. Ayeko, a gynecologist in Entebbe, however, said that blasts can cause impotence only if the victim is very close to the place where the blasting takes place.



“I fell and broke my back while working with the Bujagali power company. I was taken to Hospital and even before I recovered, I was told that I had lost my job. My back is now filled with metals. I was not given any compensation and I still have to undergo further treatment. For over two years now, I have been grounded at home and depending only on handouts from well wishers. I need help to get proper treatment so that I can be able to work again and provide for my family”, says Mr. Sulaiman Lukoya (*in the photo on the left*), a resident of Buikwe District ● ● ● ●

## Uncertainties among the host communities of the proposed Karuma hydro power project



*UPDF soldier guarding the team carrying out feasibility study on Karuma Hydro-power dam in peoples' garden in Awoo village, Kiryadongo district.*

Karuma area in Kiryandongo District is one area where the government is in the process of establishing a hydropower plant. Feasibility studies have been carried out and the construction works are set to commence soon. However, the power project has caused a lot of anxiety and uncertainties among the host communities. Some have already lost their crops in the feasibility studies.

“The surveyors who were carrying out feasibility studies erected a very big machine in my cassava garden. I protested as I had not given them permission but they told me that it was a



government developmental project and that I couldn't do anything. I couldn't force them out of the garden because they were guarded by army men. Army trucks also made paths in my gardens and those of my neighbours. We have lost a lot of crops. The Government officials who came here said they would give us compensation but up to now we have received nothing", said one Beatrice, a resident of Awoo village in Karuma. ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

"The process of valuating property for the people to be compensated here in Karuma is not transparent at all. Some officials come with forms at night and ask residents to fill them in pencil. Many people here don't know how to read and write and the forms have not been explained to us. We wonder why this whole process cannot be done in a transparent manner. I have been talking to my villagemates to ensure that we get fair treatment in the whole of this process and now I hear that some government officials have blacklisted me as a person trying to sabotage the project. That is unfortunate", said Mr. William Ogik, a resident of Karuma. "The compensation rates that have been promised to us are very low. They consider only crops that have matured and don't consider other trees that we have planted and which have monetary value. The whole of this process needs to be reversed," he adds. ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

"We are here filled with a lot of anxiety and uncertainty. We have had rumours that all over us will soon be displaced from here. We don't know what to do and some people have stopped digging. We fear we may soon experience a problem of hunger. The authorities need to tell exactly what plan they have for us", Mr. LG Okello, a resident of Awoo village in Karuma. ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

### Voices of distress from the oil palm producing islands of Kalangala



Community sensitisation through drama in Kalangala.

In Sese Islands in Kalangala District, the government gave away 10000 hectares of land to BIDCO a Malaysian company to grow oil palm and produce vegetable cooking oil. The government said this project was aimed at giving employment to the local population, develop the local infrastructure, boost trade on the Islands and promote the manufacturing industry in Uganda. Despite this optimistic plan of the government, some community members have gotten a raw

deal. The project was implemented contrary to the objectives for which it was set to achieve which included improved livelihoods for the project affected communities. As consequence, people lost land, cattle, and wetlands forests among others. As the oil palm plantation affected people are still struggling to survive, the project needs more land for expansion and this land can only be got from the local communities or the government owned forest reserves. This scenario will result further into

more deforestation land grabbing and other forms of violation of human rights. Below are the voices of the affected communities.

“They are encouraging all of us to grow oil palms. They are advising some of us who are not interested in palm oil to sell our land and leave. But I have refused. My ancestors were buried here and I have never lived in any other place ever since I was born. I will not sell my land and I will not grow oil palm because my children can’t feed on it. The other day a man dressed in a suit came to my house and threatened me that if I don’t sell my land it will be taken away from me for free,” says J.Musisi ●●●



“The roofs of our houses are being blown off now and then by strong winds because the trees which used to act as wind breakers have all been cleared. We used to go to the forests for dead wood to use for fire wood but now that they all are cleared, we don’t know what to do. We are worried” Said Nalongo Kisomomoka **(in the photo on the left)**, a resident of Kalangala ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●



“For many years I have been a coffee farmer. Recently I saw people inspecting my land. They told me that they were surveyors and that my land had been sold. They didn’t even ask for permission to survey my land. I was very much disturbed. Later I received sh. 500,000 (\$ 200) that it was compensation for my eight acres of land which were taken. They brought bull dozers and razed everything. I am still in shock and I don’t know where to go because the money they gave me can’t buy land anywhere”, said Bonny Sentamu **(in the photo on the left)**, a resident of Kalangala ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●



“When they came to my land, they said that they only wanted to survey it for future planning. They didn’t give me a choice to say yes or no instead they went ahead with their work. Later they called me together with others who were also affected at the district headquarters for a meeting where they told us that our land had been bought and offered us some little money, which I refused. Within a few days, they brought bulldozers and cleared my cassava gardens and coffee plantation. It was a

bad experience and I decided to report them to the authorities. Others were intimidated and accepted peanuts in exchange for their land. For me I refused to take peanuts and up to now, I have not received any positive response to my complaint and lam stranded” ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

## Conclusion and recommendations



*A community dialogue on oil in Buliisa.*

The voices captured in this document represent only a few voices of the people in the affected areas. Our view is that if an area is identified for development in any given community there should be people praising the development but not shedding tears because of its presence. Corruption of some government officials who promise the companies protection from

demands of host communities further complicates the development processes. The developers get false hopes of protection and ignore community concerns from the onset. We recommend to all stakeholders, especially Government, to always involve local people in planning for these projects. Talking to the locals and genuinely explaining to them the benefits, risks and costs of the projects for their livelihoods, agreeing with them the compensation rates and giving them priority in the employment schemes may save everybody a lot of friction. Money usually spent on avoidable litigation processes and reconciliation meetings will be saved.

Under the United Nations "Protect, respect, remedy" framework for business and human rights all companies have the responsibility to respect human rights. Business interests should not infringe upon the rights of others and should undertake due diligence before and during any business activity to ensure that its actions are consistent with its responsibility to respect human rights. Companies must adhere and meet their obligations and it is the duty of the relevant and concerned arms of Government to ensure that this is enforced.



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