Experts to study impact of oil pipeline

By Gerald Tenywa

Experts from Uganda's environmental bodies and the energy ministry are set for a study tour in western Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania ahead of the construction of the 1,445km pipeline from Hoima to Tanga.

The team includes Dr Tom Okurut, the executive director of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), and Dr Andrew Seguya, the executive director of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA).

"There are risks on the environment which cannot be eliminated but can be reduced," Okurut said. "We have to understand them and the study is going to be the beginning of the process to understand the risks and guide future interventions."

He added: "The oil pipeline is going to cross national parks, forest reserves and gold mining areas but most of them are located in Kenya."

River Kagera

In Uganda, the oil pipeline will cross a corridor across River Kagera and this is one of the critical features along the route of the oil pipeline. The pipeline will also run across the catchment of Lake Victoria, mainly in Tanzania.

He also pointed out that they were going to get lessons concerning the oil pipeline from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Ndorwa in Zambia.

The construction of the oil pipeline is not new in Tanzania and Uganda's technical team on environment is going learn from them.

"We have to get lessons from Tanzania," he said, adding that the study will be important ahead of reviews of the environmental impact assessment studies.

Okurut also said an Environment Impact Assessment Study (EIA) is being undertaken in Uganda and Tanzania.

He said the results will help to form an opinion and improve decision making concerning the pipeline.

"We will consider re-routing of the pipeline in certain areas (where the risk is very high)," Okurut said.

Civil society left out

Asked why they have not engaged civil society, Okurut said they were still undertaking technical reviews and that civil society will be consulted later.

Onesmus Mugyenyi, the deputy executive director of Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment, said he worked with a team from the World Wide Fund for Nature that conducted a study on the oil pipeline.

The report entitled, "Safeguarding people and nature in the East African crude oil Pipeline project" states that the Kagera is the largest river flowing into the lake and the oil pipeline is expected to cross this water body.

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