

# How prepared is Uganda for oil spills?

By Gerald Tenywa

Oil spills and waste water spillages are usually part of the game in the oil sector. The two can contaminate water bodies and the general environment around them. In the case of Uganda's Albertine region, the major water bodies include Lake Albert, River Nile and probably others connected with the Nile. How is Uganda prepared for this?

Patience Nsereko, NEMA's environment monitoring officer (oil and gas), says oil spills may be inevitable, but the Government has a contingency plan to act fast and mitigate the effects.

"What I can say is that oil spills will be inevitable," she said but explained that usually spills are accidental.

## Readiness

**The oil spills may be inevitable, but the Government has a contingency plan to act fast and mitigate the effects.**

In the Albertine region, the biggest risk of spillages is to Lake Albert itself. But she said studies have revealed that the wind movements indicate that the spills, if they happen, will not drift towards the Democratic Republic of Congo side of the lake.

This, according to Nsereko, would leave the Nile delta also known as the Murchison delta in trouble.

The Nile delta is where River

Nile meets Lake Albert and is among the most ecologically gifted parts of the Albertine with endangered birds and other flora and fauna. It also borders Buligi sector of Murchison Falls National Park where most tourism operations take place.

The contingency plan identifies the potential causes of oil spills at oil and gas facilities which include uncontrollable oil well blowouts, pipeline leaks and ruptures, breaches of containment systems, containment tank overfills, leaks, failures and accident discharges during oil transfer operations.

The preparedness and response system has three tiers namely; local, national and regional. Stakeholders at

the grassroots would notify the national oil authority, which would mobilise funds and personnel for quick response.

However, civil society organisations say the contingency plan does not articulate the trans-boundary response. There is need for mutual agreements with the cross-border players in case of spills and the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) is handy platform.

Dr Callist Tindimugaya, a commissioner in the Ministry of Water and Environment, says the countries sharing the Nile will be notified. "We are supposed to notify the other countries. The oil companies and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development would inform them of the developments in NBI."