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KAMPALA. Increased mineral extraction and oil-related activities in Kasese and Hoima districts have accelerated environmental damage, posing existential threat to the population, according to a new study.

The Advocates for Natural Resources and Development, a civil society organisation, says the legal rights granted to developers to carry out invasive activities have exposed the poor with least means to cope with life-threatening hazards.

"Oil burning, for example, produces carbon which affects the atmosphere hindering rainfall formation. Mining has opened the earth's surface which affects soils impacting food production and future generation economy," Mr Frank Tumusiime, the coordinator of the organisation, said.

The new report titled: "Promoting earth jurisprudence in Uganda towards rights and integrity of mother earth", was released last Sunday and based on an audit of existing environmental reports and experts' analysis.

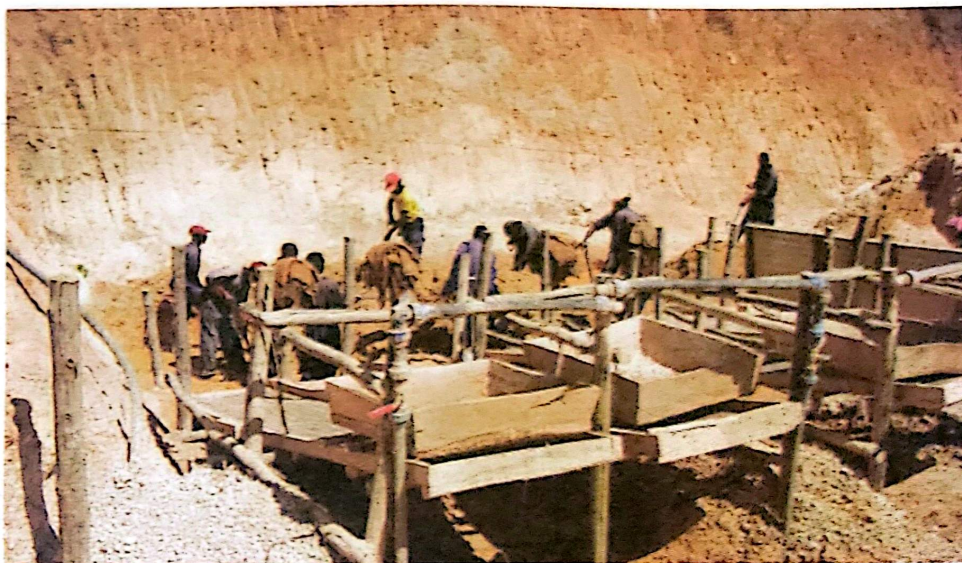
It warns that the attraction of unrestrained exploitation of natural resources has prompted investors and individuals to press the self-destruct button for the environment and the country.

"We have known more about the earth than we had ever known and yet we no longer commune with the earth in its original integrity. Our scientific understanding has not prevented us from devastating the forests from polluting the air, water and land," the report states.

Uganda has been at the crossroads in implementing a plethora of laws and policies on environmental protection, and the country's dive into oil exploration and expected production has made the problem acute.

Although the government has

Oil, mining activities threat to the poor, says environment report



Mining. Artisanal miners search for gold in Katenga mining site in Engaju Sub-county in Buhweju District recently. PHOTO BY FELIX AINEBYOONA

strict guidelines in mining and oil-rich areas to protect fragile ecosystems, enforcement remains a challenge.

The report states that the perception that personal and collective survival depends on ability to exercise ownership over the earth, instead of living in unity with nature, so the root cause of a disaster in the making.

The report proposes a reversion to pre-existing traditional systems and customary laws as necessary to protect the earth.

"The National Environment Act stipulates principles of

environmental management which best remain a paper tiger and their implementation a far cry," the

RISKY TRADE

The new report also cites lumbering, a lucrative business in Bunyoro sub-region, for depleting the forest cover and rendering the land bare and susceptible to erosion, which affects agricultural productivity.

report states.

We were unable to get a comment from National Environment Management Authority by press time.

According to Mr Tumusiime, more than half of Uganda's natural resources have been destroyed by technology and development since 1990. He did not provide evidence to back up the claims.

"We want the rights of the environment to be clearly spelt in our laws. In this way, we can be able to enforce them and have benefits allocated for restoration of environment damaged," he said.

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