



**DORIS ATWIJUKIRE > OIL RESOURCE**

## Ensure local participation in the oil pipeline project

**O**n November 11, Tanzanian President John Magufuli together with President Museveni laid a foundation stone for the construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) in Kabaale, Hoima District. This follows a similar launch of the project in Tanzania in August this year.

We applaud government for this key milestone in the development of our oil and gas sector. The \$3.55 billion venture is a massive infrastructure project of great political and economic importance to regional governments and extractive industry companies – as well as the citizens of Tanzania and Uganda. The resource, if managed well, has the potential to trigger the countries' economic growth, alleviate poverty and address inequality.

According to Uganda's oil and gas commercialisation plan, it requires significant infrastructure developments such as the oil refinery, central processing facilities, feeder pipelines, access roads and the EACOP to ensure the realisation of first oil by 2020. However, these developments will vastly affect the local citizens inhabiting these areas. The above projects require land-take – a process, which if not properly managed, will lead to displacement, escalate insecurity of tenure and undermine the livelihoods of the local people.

With the ongoing oil pipelines developments, there is need to adequately prepare the

host communities to help them recognised the importance of the project. These communities will be directly affected and therefore must be fully informed on the social, economic and environmental impacts of pipeline. Most communities are not aware of their rights and entitlements to participate in development and conservation process in the oil sector.

According to the EACOP project brief, the 1,445km electrically heated pipeline will transport crude oil from Kabaale in Hoima district via Kiboga, Mubende, Ssembabule, Masaka, Kyotera and Rakai districts up to Tanga port in Tanzania. 20 per cent of the pipeline, 296km, will cross 8 districts and 24 sub-counties in Uganda; while 80 per cent of the pipeline, 1149km, will cross eight regions and 24 districts in Tanzania and will be the longest electrically heated pipeline in the world.

The pipeline will need a 30-metre right of way, 10 metre of which will be needed permanently for the pipeline, the other 20 metre will be returned for restoration like agriculture. The pipeline will be 2 metres deep. No trees are to be farmed within the 10 metre wide right of way, and no structures can be built therein, but farming practices can still continue.

The government of Uganda has committed to fast-tracking oil infrastructure development. But based on previous oil land acquisition processes such as the refinery in Kabaale,



**The facts.** Oil as a natural resource is good for economic development. And based on experiences from other oil-rich countries as well as experiences within Uganda so far, citizens can ensure the maximisation of the benefits of oil while mitigating the negative impacts. This, however, can only be achieved with effective consultation and meaningful participation of the project affected people.

Hoima, this still raises serious concerns on meaningful community consultation, adequate compensation and proper resettlement. Land was compulsory acquired in 2012, and it was not until four years later that resettlement was effected, with no social services such as schools and access roads provided. And as of now, out of 96 families, only six households have relocated to Kyakaboga Resettlement Area because of this.

Oil as a natural resource is good for economic development. And based on experiences from other oil-rich countries as well as experiences within Uganda so far, citizens can ensure the maximisation of the benefits of oil while mitigating the negative impacts. This,

however, can only be achieved with effective consultation and meaningful participation of the project affected people.

A new study conducted in Nigeria's Niger Delta has revealed a link between oil spills and child mortality rates. The report led by Roland Hodler, an economics professor from the University of St Gallen in Switzerland, shows that, oil spills occurring within 10km of a mother's place of residence, but also five years before conception doubled neonatal mortality rates and impaired the health of her surviving children.

This poses high risk to the oil pipeline host communities, women and children in particular. Such reports should be our eye opener on how prepared the pipeline communities are. They should appreciate the possible dangers of oil including loss of agricultural land, loss of burial and cultural grounds, disruption of social fabric, oil spills, oil fires, water and soil pollution, among others.

At Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED)'s recent engagements with the officials from Ssembabule, Masaka, Kyotera and Rakai districts, the district officials expressed concern over the limited involvement of the leaders in the pipeline processes and whether locals will be able to benefit from the project.

The officials indicated that they had not had engagements with the government and companies on the EACOP unlike the few that have been facilitated by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). This raises a question of when such key stakeholders will be engaged to fully understand and support the EACOP, opportunities and the likely challenges.

To avoid rising public expectations and uncertainties for the pipeline project, all information related to the project in terms of timelines, associated social and environmental assessments, risks and impacts should be publicly available in a timely, accessible and user-friendly manner not only to the project people but all Ugandans.

**Ms Atwijukire is a civic response on environment and development (CRED). [doratwijukire@gmail.com](mailto:doratwijukire@gmail.com)**