

The Sustainability School empowers communities in Uganda



Oil deposits discovered in western Uganda are presented as a new lease on life for impoverished local communities. In reality, however, the budding oil industry disrupts their livelihoods. Both ENDS' partner organisations in Uganda use an innovative approach to raise awareness and empower communities to advocate for their rights to fair compensation.

THE CHALLENGE: OIL DISCOVERY AFFECTS LOCAL LIVELIHOODS

In 2006 commercially viable oil reserves were discovered on the shores of Lake Albert in the Bunyoro region of Western Uganda. The discovery has attracted investors in the oil business, both national and international, as well as land speculators. Many Ugandan citizens are hopeful that the oil deposits will help lift the country out of poverty. However, local communities in Bunyoro, who depend on fishery and on agricultural and pastoral land for their survival, are deeply concerned about the effects that the budding oil business will have on their livelihoods. They fear the loss of land, the loss of clean drinking water, the pollution of rivers and lakes, and a relapse in fisheries. Land speculators are already offering such tempting prices to poor families to sell their land that many find it very hard to resist. However, these families have no clear investment plans and no alternative livelihood skills, and are thus bound to end up in even worse poverty as soon as the money is spent. For the local communities in Bunyoro, a long-time marginalized area of Uganda, voicing their concerns about the oil developments and demanding fair compensation is a complex matter.



THE APPROACH: THE SUSTAINABILITY SCHOOL

In 2010, Both ENDS' partner organisation the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE, <http://nape.or.ug/>) started activities in Bunyoro region through the Sustainability School. This is not a physical school with classrooms and staff working on a structured curriculum, but a learning methodology based on popular education that seeks to empower communities. The methodology encourages learning, sharing, dialogue and action and teaches people how they can effectively participate in social, economic and political change processes. The issues addressed, from land use and food security to oil governance and climate change, all revolve around the sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of all. The Sustainability School offers training courses to community-based activists, called educators, who in turn sensitise and mobilise their communities at grassroots level. The educators, who all work on a voluntary basis, support the communities in tackling their specific problems, including the unintended negative effects of development projects as seen in Bunyoro. In the past four years, over 70 community educators were trained in 24 Sustainability Villages established in the districts of Buikwe, Kalangala, Kiryandongo, Kamwenge, Kasese, Hoima and Buliisa.

THE RESULT: FAIR COMPENSATION AFTER ALL

Facilitators and educators of NAPE's Sustainability School have successfully supported communities in Hoima district, where the government is planning to build Uganda's first oil refinery, to receive fair compensation. The 7,000 people who lived in the designated refinery site of 29 km² were forced to leave their homes. Most villagers accepted the financial compensation offered by the government. However, the money was generally not enough for people to start their farms again on new land, which often was of much poorer quality than the lands they had left behind. 93 families therefore refused to accept the financial compensation and even took the government to court. They argued that the government violated their rights provided for under the Ugandan Constitution by attempting to take over their properties without paying them fair, timely and adequate compensation. The case was deliberately postponed for more than a year. NAPE and the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO, <http://www.afiego.org/>) stepped in to support the community in their dealings with the court. Community activists were trained on the relevance of the new national oil laws of 2013 – and the lack of implementation thereof -, on oil refinery procurement and revenue transparency, and on community and property rights. They were also trained on the legislative powers of Parliament and District Local Councils and how these can be influenced to enforce the laws. After persistent advocacy, the community of Kyapaloni reached a breakthrough and persuaded the government to buy new land for the 93 families that had refused to move. Every family receives a plot equivalent to that they left behind as well as a new-built house. It is not yet

known whether the families will also receive land titles or customary land certificates. The government committed to take responsibility for building roads and ensuring access to safe water and electricity in their new area.

THE WAY FORWARD

Thanks to their perseverance and the expert support from NAPE, AFIEGO and other civil society organisations, the people of Kyapaloni managed to resolve their conflict with the government satisfactorily. This serves as inspiration for the work of the Sustainability School in Uganda, which will continue to strengthen the knowledge and capacities of local communities and CSOs so that they become well-informed actors in policy debates and negotiations that concern sustainable development in the country. Both ENDS has supported NAPE in realising the training workshops and also organised a knowledge exchange visit to Ghana, sharing the concept and experiences of Uganda's Sustainability School.



We are convinced that had NAPE not come to our community and sensitised us on our rights and entitlements as enshrined in our constitution, many of us would not have been compensated or the rates would have been much lower. Geoffrey Kiwedde, community educator from Kyapaloni



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