

GAINING INSIGHT INTO UGANDA'S OIL AND GAS PROJECTS

In a collaborative endeavor marked by faith, stewardship, and community engagement, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU), together with the Uganda National Oil Company (UNOC), Total Energies Uganda, and the Petroleum Authority of Uganda, embarked on a transformational four-day field visit to the oil and gas projects nestled in Uganda's Albertine region. Among which were; Uganda Petroleum Institute Kigumba (UPIK), Kabalega industrial park (KIP), Enviro-serve Uganda, EACOP and the Tilenga Projects.

Religious leaders are often seen as shepherds of God's people, tasked with a higher calling of stewarding God's creation. However, fulfilling this divine calling requires capacity building, exposure, and the sharing of vital information. It was with these goals in mind that religious leaders embarked on a journey to explore Uganda's oil and gas sector.

The head of the delegation and Co-Chairperson of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, His Eminence Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje, the Grand Mufti of Uganda, emphasized the need for responsible stewardship of Uganda's oil and gas sector. He envisioned a sector that blesses rather than burdens the people of Uganda.

Hon. Peter Lokeris, the Minister of State for Energy and Mineral Development in Uganda while flagging-off the team stressed the importance of religious leaders in providing clear information and addressing misconceptions when communicating with their congregation, who in fact, stand to benefit the most from Uganda's oil and gas projects.

A Journey through time with diverse investments and incredible opportunities for transforming Livelihoods

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The odyssey begun at the Uganda Petroleum Institute Kigumba (UPIK), the religious leaders witnessed the astounding growth and transformation of the institute since their last visit in 2009 during its commissioning by the President. Once a thick forest, UPIK has evolved into a fully-fledged technical institute, diligently training and producing skilled technicians for the oil and gas sector in the different workshops, including the Electrical, Instrumentation, and Mechanical Maintenance sections.

“I started as a cleaner at UPIK seven years ago, gained knowledge and training while performing my cleaning duties. Recognizing my interest, the institute supported me in acquiring numerous certifications. Today, I proudly serve as a workshop technician, a living testimony to the opportunities within Uganda's Oil and Gas sector” Collins Mwesigwa explained an inspiring success story.

This was followed by an enlightening visit to the Kabalega Industrial Park (KIP), a strategic site that will encompass Uganda's second International Airport, the Uganda oil Refinery, and facilities for petrochemical and fertilizer Industries.

The exploration culminated with a visit to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) pump station One. The EACOP, a 1,445 KM long pipeline, 24 inches in diameter buried underground and heated to facilitate the transportation of crude oil from Uganda (Tilenga and Kingfisher projects) to Tanga, Tanzania. This crucial component in the oil and gas sector is essential for the export of Uganda's crude oil.

Environmental Responsibility at Enviro-Serve Uganda

The delegation also paid a visit to Enviro-Serve Uganda, an Oil and Gas waste management company. Here, the religious leaders witnessed the pivotal role played by Enviro-Serve in meticulously managing and rigorously testing hazardous wastes generated by petrochemical production processes. This visit exemplified the commitment to environmentally conscious waste management in the industry.

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Impactful Resettlement, Livelihood and Community Empowerment

The highlight of the tour was the visit to the Tilenga project in Bulisa District. The delegation had the privilege of exploring various facets of the project, including the drilling site, the homes of the Project Affected Persons (PAPs), the Central Processing Facility (CPF) and the associated Bugungu camp, home to employees and contractors.

The Inter-Religious Council were impressed with the resettlement of the Project Affected Persons (PAPS) in Bulisa District. These individuals received a commensurate package from Total Energies Uganda including a new house, and investment opportunities in the value chains enabled by the oil and gas project. The visit provided an opportunity to interact with Project Affected Persons (PAPs) who have experienced positive transformations in their living conditions due to the project.

One remarkable example was the story of Mr. Rashid Ochir and his sister, shedding light on the positive impact on their livelihoods. The council commended them for choosing housing compensation over monetary compensation, which aligned with their vision for a sustainable future.

Another inspiring tale revealed a community member who, thanks to the project, embarked on the production and sale of honey, showcasing how well thought through projects can empower and uplift lives.

The field visit addressed various critical questions and concerns that religious leaders had prior to the visit. Here below are the issues they had

Presence of Oil: The delegation affirmed the existence of oil, They witnessed the exploration and drilling activities in the Tilenga Projects.

Oil Export and Theft: by the time of the visit, the infrastructure for oil production had not been fully installed, thus negating allegations of oil theft.

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Sustainable Development: Plans for value addition and the construction of a national oil refinery were underscored. The government's investment in training human resources through the Uganda Petroleum Institute, Kigumba, further reinforced the commitment to sustainable development.

Ownership of Oil: delegation was presented with the facts regarding the management oil and gas industry. The existing policy documents and guidelines convinced the delegation, the ownership is entrusted to the citizens and that the proceeds would not go to the Consolidated fund but to a Petroleum fund to support only development needs for the current generation and those of future generations.

Benefits for the local People: The field visit provided evidence of Ugandans being employed, local contractors and services being engaged, and beneficiaries of the Project Affected Persons programs achieving personal and economic growth.

Environmental Responsibility: No signs of environmental pollution were observed at the oil and gas sites. A visit to Enviro-serve, the waste treatment facility, demonstrated responsible waste management practices.

Compensation and Resettlement: The visit confirmed that land and property were not taken without proper compensation and highlighted the success of resettlement programs.

Conclusion

The journey unveiled the promise of Uganda's oil and gas sector and the commitment to responsible resource utilization and improved livelihoods to the surrounding communities.

It has gone a long way in equipping religious leaders with appropriate information to play the dissemination role. It will also enable them to engage with their congregants regarding their concerns about the oil and gas projects.

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