

STORIES FROM THE GROUND

Leonia Okela Itho's Plea Highlights Human Rights Concerns Amid Uganda's Oil Production Delays

Leonia Okela Itho, (pictured left) a resident of Avogera Village in Ngwedo Sub County, Buliisa District, is living a nightmare that encapsulates the darker side of Uganda's oil exploration. As oil production timelines continue to face delays, many residents like Leonia find themselves grappling not only with economic uncertainty but with tangible threats to their homes and safety. With cracks emerging in her home due to water seepage from a nearby oil well, Leonia's story highlights urgent human rights and climate justice concerns that remain unresolved in Uganda's oil region.



More on this story on page 3

IN OUR NEWSLETTER THIS MONTH

Story from the Ground: The human and environmental burden of the EACOP Project, Told through the experience of Leonia Okela Itho: "The water from the nearby oil pad is seeping into my house." **Page 2**

Analysis: Uganda's deadline for oil production delayed once more: What does it mean for human rights and climate justice efforts? **Page 3**

The delayed timeline for Uganda's oil production, now extended to late 2026 or possibly 2027, has broad and far-reaching implications, with human rights and environmental justice at the center of the conversation. While economic, social, and political factors certainly play critical roles in this development, the human and environmental costs of these oil projects that deserve urgent attention carry more weight. *More on the next page.*



EWURA and PAU delegations inspect oil and gas facilities. (Image: PAU)

OIL SEEPAGE CRACKING HOMES: HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS AMID OIL PROJECT DELAYS

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**A Crisis at Home: Oil Seepage and Safety Risks**

Leonia shares her modest home with her twelve grandchildren, making the house's structural integrity essential to their safety and livelihood. Yet, water from a nearby oil well pad operated by Total Energies has begun seeping into her house, causing significant cracking and sparking fears of collapse. She has repeatedly reached out to local authorities and Total Energies, appealing for urgent intervention. "Please help us before my house collapses and we have nowhere to go," she pleads, stressing the critical need for action to protect her family.

Despite her appeals, Leonia's engagement with Total Energies resulted only in a brief visit from officials who took photos of the house's damage. However, no substantial steps have been taken to address the problem. This lack of response not only threatens her family's safety but also raises broader concerns about corporate accountability and the rights of affected communities in Uganda's oil region.

Implications of Oil Production Delays: A Double-Edged Sword

The situation faced by Leonia and her neighbors is unfolding against the backdrop of delays in Uganda's oil production timeline, with operations now potentially pushed to 2025 or later. These delays bring both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, they prolong the economic limbo for communities in oil-rich regions, leaving residents like Leonia in difficult circumstances as oil infrastructure disrupts their traditional lands and livelihoods without the promised financial returns. On the other hand, the delays create a window to reconsider the environmental and human rights impacts of such projects.

For residents, the continuous disruptions caused by oil exploration—such as groundwater pollution, land displacement, and now housing risks—underscore the need for stronger protections and corporate responsibility. Human rights groups and environmental advocates argue that the delayed timeline could allow for enhanced regulations and reparations for affected communities, pushing for comprehensive solutions to address both immediate and long-term harms.



One of the water passage trenches leading to oil seepage in homes

Climate Justice and Human Rights: An Urgent Call for Action

Leonia's plight serves as a powerful reminder of the region's vulnerability to environmental damage and its people's need for climate justice. Many Albertine region residents have found themselves bearing the brunt of oil exploration, from displacement and agricultural loss to health risks posed by contamination. Climate justice advocates stress that as oil production ramps up, the government and companies like Total Energies must address the environmental costs of fossil fuel extraction and invest in strategies that ensure safety, clean water, and sustainable alternatives for the community.

For families like Leonia's, these efforts cannot come soon enough. The human impact of delayed timelines and inadequate response from corporations leaves communities caught in a cycle of fear, uncertainty, and loss. Calls for more robust accountability measures are growing, with local organizations and advocacy groups pressing for clear action plans to address damages, protect natural resources, and respect the rights of all people in oil-affected areas.

Balancing Economic Interests and Community Welfare

As Uganda's oil sector develops, a balanced approach prioritizing both economic growth and community welfare is essential. For residents like Leonia, oil promises mean little without safety, fair compensation, and corporate accountability. The Ugandan government and international stakeholders must ensure policies that protect the environment and amplify local voices.

Leonia's story highlights an urgent need for action. The cracks in her home reflect the fractures in commitments made to Uganda's oil-rich communities. Without intervention and justice, the region faces lasting economic and social scars.

UGANDA'S DELAYED OIL PRODUCTION: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS



Uganda's long-anticipated oil production, once slated to begin in 2025, has now been pushed to late 2026 or 2027, significantly affecting the country's economic, social, and environmental landscape.

This delay holds consequences that reach beyond immediate economic impacts; it poses pressing human rights challenges for displaced communities and deepens environmental and climate justice concerns. As Uganda navigates financial pressures and international scrutiny, the country stands at a crossroads: balancing economic ambitions with the protection of human rights and sustainable environmental stewardship. This analysis examines the broad implications of Uganda's oil production delay through the lenses of economics, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Economic Impact and Revenue Delays

The delayed oil production in Uganda, now pushed to late 2026 or possibly 2027, has substantial implications for the nation's economy. Policymakers at the Bank of Uganda and the Ministry of Finance had anticipated oil revenue as a means to bolster foreign reserves and manage increasing debt obligations amid shrinking reserves and high debt costs. This setback in revenue could deepen Uganda's financial vulnerabilities, particularly as the country awaits the completion of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) for economic stabilization.

Human Rights and Social Justice Implications

Beyond economic concerns, the EACOP project presents critical human rights challenges, particularly for displaced communities along the pipeline route. The land acquisition process has led to displacement, and many individuals affected have reported inadequate compensation and long-standing uncertainty due to financing delays. These disruptions to livelihoods, community stability, and access to essential services raise concerns around potential human rights violations, including the right to land, water, and sustainable living conditions. The prolonged uncertainty adds stress and insecurity, amplifying social justice concerns in affected communities.

Environmental and Climate Justice Concerns

The environmental impact of EACOP is a core issue for climate justice advocates. Traversing ecologically sensitive areas, the pipeline poses risks of oil spills, water contamination, and habitat loss. The extended timeline of the project prolongs the period of potential environmental risk and increases the likelihood of climate justice opposition, especially from groups like #StopEACOP. They warn that the pipeline's emissions and oil production will raise Uganda's carbon footprint, undermining climate commitments and intensifying global warming.



Uganda's oil production efforts will slow down, leading to delays that potentially stall production until 2027

International Pressure and Financing Challenges

Climate justice and environmental advocacy have spurred international pressure on EACOP financiers, with several European and American banks opting out of funding due to its conflict with global climate goals. This financial uncertainty places additional strain on the project, as these financial institutions heed public and activist demands for investment in cleaner, sustainable energy. This international pressure reflects the broader movement towards divesting from fossil fuels and prioritizing climate-conscious economic development.

Uganda's Balancing Act: Immediate Gains vs. Long-Term Impact

The Ugandan government faces the complex challenge of balancing the pursuit of economic gains through oil production against upholding human rights and mitigating environmental risks. While oil extraction and infrastructure development promise short-term economic stability, these efforts may come at the cost of community welfare, environmental integrity, and Uganda's alignment with international climate goals.