MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the November 2024 edition of the Tasha Research Institute Africa Newsletter. In this issue, we turn our focus to a pressing matter of corporate-community relations in Uganda. Through the diligent work of our field observers, we uncover key insights into the interactions between Total E&P Uganda, EPSILON (U) Limited, and the residents of Kabolwa village in Buliisa.

IN OUR NEWSLETTER THIS MONTH

Our feature story explores the challenges faced by local workers recruited for pipeline projects, emphasizing the critical themes of transparency, accountability, and the need for balanced corporate-community partnerships. These reflections serve as a reminder of the importance of ensuring that community voices are heard and respected in projects that shape their futures. **Page 2**

At Tasha, we believe in the power of dialogue and collaboration to address these imbalances and foster solutions that benefit both communities and stakeholders. Dive into the full article to discover how corporate practices can evolve to create resilient and equitable partnerships.

We also examine the mismatch in the corporate social responsibility rhetoric offered by corporate entities and the practices on the ground, emphasizing TotalEnergies labor relations with the community in Kabolwa village. **Page 3**

LESSONS FROM TOTAL E&P UGANDA'S AND EPSILON (U)'S ENGAGEMENT IN KABOLWA VILLAGE

In recent years, large-scale infrastructure projects in Uganda have brought not only economic opportunities but also a spotlight on the importance of responsible corporate-community relations. In August 2024, Total E&P Uganda and their subcontractor, EPSILON (U) Limited, undertook an important step by recruiting six local workers from Kabolwa village, one of the areas impacted by ongoing pipeline construction. This initiative has the potential to foster economic growth in the region, but recent developments reveal critical themes regarding transparency, accountability, and corporate responsibility that underscore the need for continuous improvement in community engagement.

Communication and Transparency: A Key Gap

One of the primary challenges facing Total and EPSILON (U) is the gap in communication and transparency. After the initial recruitment on August 27, the newly hired workers—enthusiastic about the job prospects—asked the project officials when they could expect to begin work. The response was vague, and weeks later, no definitive start date or further update has been provided. Such a lack of clarity not only creates uncertainty for the workers but also breeds frustration within the community. Transparent communication is essential to foster trust, and without it, even well-intentioned recruitment initiatives can sour relationships between the company and local residents. Moving forward, EPSILON (U) and Total could build stronger community ties by ensuring consistent, open communication channels that keep workers informed and valued.

Accountability and Trust: Upholding Commitments to the Community

Accountability is at the heart of building trust between corporations and the communities they operate in. When the recruits inquired about their start date, Total officials reportedly committed to following up on the timeline, yet no clear answer has been forthcoming. This leaves the recruited workers—and the larger community—feeling that promises are not being honored. To rebuild and maintain trust, it is crucial that companies follow through on their commitments. Reliable communication and accountability practices can serve as a foundation for a resilient relationship, enhancing both community confidence and corporate credibility in the region.

Community Engagement: More Than Recruitment

Recruiting local labor is an essential first step in corporate-community engagement, as it provides economic benefits directly to the community. However, this report highlights that engagement should not end with recruitment. EPSILON (U) and Total must recognize the value of deeper, sustained involvement with the community to understand and address their ongoing concerns. Active engagement goes beyond employing local labor; it involves a continuous partnership that includes listening, responding, and adapting to community needs.

A section of Epsilon (U) workers on site (photo credit, Epsilon Uganda)

Employment Uncertainty: Impact on Local Workers

The recruitment of six local youths from Kabolwa is an example of potential employment generation that, unfortunately, has been marred by uncertainty. These individuals have likely put other job opportunities on hold or made financial plans based on their anticipated income, only to be left in limbo. Such insecurity can have a lasting impact on the livelihoods and morale of workers and their families. It also sets a precedent that may discourage future recruitment efforts. Companies should prioritize clear timelines and well-defined commitments to avoid creating a sense of insecurity for their employees.

Corporate Responsibility: The Importance of Upholding Community Values

Operating within local communities is a privilege that comes with social responsibilities. For Total and EPSILON (U), part of this responsibility involves recognizing the local impact of their work and upholding community values. >>>**Next page**

STRENGTHENING CORPORATE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

By ensuring that recruits are informed and fairly treated, these companies can strengthen their social license to operate. A corporate responsibility approach that emphasizes respect, reliability, and responsiveness to the community will build a positive reputation and support long-term project sustainability.

Power Imbalance: Providing Channels for Community Voices

One underlying issue that the report brings to light is the power imbalance between corporate actors and the local population. Community members, particularly those recruited as casual laborers, often lack the means to seek recourse or assert their rights if corporate entities do not fulfill their obligations. EPSILON (U) and Total can address this imbalance by establishing formal channels for dialogue, enabling workers and other affected residents to voice concerns and seek timely resolution. Ensuring that the community has a voice fosters a sense of agency and partnership, contributing to a balanced, mutually respectful relationship.

Moving Forward: Fostering Resilient Corporate-Community Relations

The situation in Kabolwa is a reminder that for corporate initiatives to succeed, the companies involved must embrace a holistic approach to community engagement. By prioritizing transparency, accountability, sustained engagement, and corporate responsibility, Total E&P Uganda and EPSILON (U) can turn this challenge into an opportunity to build a more resilient relationship with the community. Addressing employment uncertainty and power dynamics through formalized communication and grievance processes will not only support the welfare of local workers but also enhance the companies' standing and reputation in the region.

Strengthening these corporate-community relations is not only beneficial for Kabolwa's residents but also vital for the long-term success of Total's projects in Uganda. In this era of increased social accountability, communities expect and deserve to be active, respected stakeholders in the projects that impact their lives.

CSR DECLARATIONS VS. ON-THE-GROUND PRACTICES: A CASE OF INCONSISTENCY

While TotalEnergies and EPSILON (U) Limited present themselves as champions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), their actions in Kabolwa village reveal a concerning gap between their declared commitments and actual practices. These companies publicly commit to fostering economic growth and community development, yet their recent engagement with Kabolwa unders cores a need for greater accountability and transparency.

Despite operating in a region deeply impacted by pipeline projects, the companies have demonstrated a lack of clarity and follow-through in their interactions with the local community. For instance, workers recruited by EPSILON (U) for project roles have been left uncertain about when they will begin their employment, with vague or nonexistent responses to their inquiries. This lack of communication reflects poorly on the companies' stated CSR values of transparency and accountability, leaving workers and the community frustrated and mistrustful.

Moreover, the recruitment effort, while economically beneficial on the surface, failed to address the broader need for sustained engagement. Effective CSR requires more than symbolic actions like hiring—it demands consistent dialogue, timely follow-through, and genuine responsiveness to community concerns. The disconnect between TotalEnergies' and EPSILON (U)'s declarations and their treatment of local workers highlights the power imbalance that often characterizes corporate-community interactions.

To align their practices with their CSR commitments, these companies must prioritize clear communication, honor promises, and foster ongoing partnerships. Addressing these inconsistencies is not only a matter of corporate ethics but also a critical step toward building trust and securing the social license to operate in Uganda.