

JEUNE AFRIQUE ÉCONOMIE · UGANDA

Uganda Oil Development Stalls Amid Deepening Land Disputes Affecting TotalEnergies

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In Uganda, the long-anticipated development of the country's oil resources has intensified land conflicts that have persisted for over fifteen years. Communities in the affected regions find themselves in a state of prolonged uncertainty, caught between competing claims over land ownership as the pace of oil development accelerates. The situation has drawn international attention to the governance and social licence challenges surrounding one of East Africa's most closely watched upstream projects.

At the centre of the dispute are villages whose residents say they have been dispossessed of their land without adequate resolution of prior ownership claims. The convergence of longstanding tenure disputes with the demands of industrial oil development has created a volatile environment for all stakeholders involved. Local communities describe the oil rush as having worsened rather than resolved their precarious situation, with the phrase 'oil is a curse' reflecting a sentiment of deep frustration on the ground.

TotalEnergies, the French major leading development in Uganda, and the government in Kampala are now facing mounting pressure from these dispossessed communities. The land conflict issue adds a significant layer of complexity to a project that has already faced a prolonged timeline. For operators and service companies planning to mobilise in Uganda, the social and legal dimensions of land access represent a material risk factor that sits alongside the more conventional

technical and logistical challenges of working in a landlocked East African environment.

The broader significance of this reporting extends beyond Uganda's borders. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, land rights disputes have increasingly emerged as a critical bottleneck in upstream oil and gas development, capable of delaying or blocking project execution regardless of the technical readiness of operators. International investors and service companies tracking Uganda's development trajectory will need to factor in the pace at which these community grievances are resolved — or not — as a leading indicator of when large-scale construction and contracting activity can realistically begin.

For Norwegian service companies already engaged in pre-positioning for Uganda's pipeline and upstream opportunities, this reporting underscores the importance of social risk monitoring alongside technical readiness. Projects that proceed without durable resolution of community land claims face the prospect of work stoppages, legal challenges, and reputational exposure that can cascade across the entire contractor ecosystem. The situation in Uganda is a reminder that the pathway from resource discovery to production involves navigating human and legal terrain that is no less demanding than the physical environment.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

Norwegian service companies should treat this reporting as a social risk indicator affecting project timelines in Uganda, particularly for pipeline and upstream contracting opportunities linked to TotalEnergies' development programme. Companies in pre-qualification or tendering processes should monitor how land dispute resolution progresses, as unresolved community grievances could delay mobilisation windows. Saga recommends a watch-and-monitor posture rather than active bid engagement until the land access situation stabilises.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Pipeline:** Land conflict resolution is a direct prerequisite for right-of-way acquisition on the East African Crude Oil Pipeline; Norwegian pipeline contractors should track dispute settlement progress as a trigger for tendering activity.

- **Drilling:** Drilling service companies planning Uganda mobilisation should assess whether unresolved land claims affect access to well sites and logistics corridors before committing resources.
- **FPSO:** Although Uganda is landlocked, FPSO operators with broader East African exposure should note that delays onshore can shift regional resource allocation timelines.
- **Service:** Well services and camp infrastructure providers should incorporate social licence risk assessments into their Uganda market entry planning, given the documented pattern of community-level opposition.

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