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Uganda

The pipeline of shame in Uganda

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Challenged in Russia, because of the war against Ukraine, TotalEnergies' business is also contested in East Africa. A month ago, we denounced the oil company's mega-project in Uganda and Tanzania in these columns. We return to the development of mobilisations against this programme on the occasion of the visit of three Ugandan activists to France who took part in the march against the climate and social crisis on 12 March in Paris. Contested in Russia, because of the war against Ukraine, TotalEnergies' business is also contested in East Africa. A month ago, we denounced the oil company's mega-project in Uganda and Tanzania in these columns¹. We return to the development of mobilisations against this programme on the occasion of the visit of three Ugandan activists to France who took part in the march against the climate and social crisis on 12 March in Paris.

Hilda Flavia Nakabuye of Fridays for Future Uganda, which brings together thousands of young people in English-speaking Africa in the fight against global warming, Diana Nabiruma of AFIEGO (Africa Institute for Energy Governance), an NGO supporting environmental struggles, and Maxwell Athuhura of the Tasha Research Institute, explained the dangers of this project to around a hundred participants in Paris. They pointed out that this goes against the reduction of fossil fuels agreed by France at COP26.

Yes, the lake is on fire!

Total's aim is to exploit a billion-barrel oil deposit discovered in 2006 near Lake Albert. A lake that is vital for almost 45 million people. For the French multinational, this means no less than 400 drillings. The EACOP (East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline) project is to transport oil through a pipeline heated to 50 degrees over nearly 1,500 kilometres, from Uganda to the port of Tanga in Tanzania.

Maxwell Athuhura explains that this work involves the eviction of almost 100,000 people from their land. A process that has already begun, mostly by force. He himself has been arrested and jailed twice without any court decision. The evicted villagers receive such low compensation that they cannot buy other land. Sometimes, some are still waiting for their compensation. In Tanzania, the land belongs to the state, which avoids any compensation process.

Although the French multinational claims to be reassuring for wildlife, the start of operations belies these claims. In Uganda some species are endangered, such as the Rothschild's giraffe. Diana Nabiruma explains: "They are trying to capture them to transfer them to other natural parks that are not impacted by the oil project" and "the elephants, because of the shrinking of their territory, are now encroaching on and destroying the villagers' crop fields". The work causes continuous dust emissions that invade the villages and disturb the birds. The construction of asphalt roads, which are hot during the day, prevents the movement of reptiles. It is therefore a major disturbance of the ecosystem and a challenge to the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Natixis, MPs, Macron's advisors and the... Pope

Between Ugandan and French organisations such as Survie, Friends of the Earth, 350.org and many others, a coalition has been formed to prevent such a project from happening. Although this fight seems to be David against

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Goliath, significant successes have been achieved. Firstly, Total's relative financial isolation: for example, all the French banks refused to participate in this project, with the exception of Natixis, which has not yet made its decision and which should receive a visit from the Ugandan delegation. At the legal level, there too, a step victory was achieved. On the basis of the 2007 law which aims to "prevent serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the health and safety of persons and the environment", the Court of Cassation confirmed that the competent court could not be the Commercial Court to decide on such fundamental issues.

Juliette Renaud of Friends of the Earth explains that "the one million signatures against the project have strengthened the legitimacy of our fight". Meetings have been held with the various UN rapporteurs, but also with French MPs. Meetings are planned with Macron and Le Drian's advisors. Finally, an appointment has been made with the Pope in the next few days. Let's hope that his prayers and the mobilisations in France and Uganda will bring about a miracle: that, as Hilda Flavia Nakabuye says, "the power of the people is stronger than the people in power".

25 March 2022

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