



OIL-AFFECTED WETLANDS IN EAST AFRICA: AFRICAN CSOS DEMAND THAT RAMSAR SECRETARIAT TAKES ACTION

NAIROBI (September 4, 2023) — As the [Africa Climate Summit](#) gets underway, 61 African civil society organisations (CSOs) have written to the Secretary General of the secretariat of the Ramsar Wetlands of international importance. The CSOs are demanding that the Ramsar Secretariat adds Ramsar Wetlands that have been affected by TotalEnergies and China National Offshore Oil Corporation’s (CNOOC) projects in Uganda and Tanzania to the [Montreux Record](#).

The Montreux Record is a “record of Ramsar Sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur due to technological developments, pollution or other human interference”.

The CSOs, which are also demanding that the Ramsar Secretariat adds Virunga National Park, which contains a Ramsar site, to the Montreux Record, argue that oil exploitation or exploration activities by TotalEnergies, CNOOC as well as the Ugandan, Tanzanian and Congolese governments, have put at least three Ramsar sites at risk of degradation. They want these Ramsar wetlands to be better monitored by third parties to aid their conservation so that they continue to play their biodiversity conservation and climate stabilisation roles.

BACKGROUND

The CSOs’ calls come at a time when TotalEnergies, CNOOC and the Ugandan government are developing the Tilenga and East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) projects; the Tanzanian government is a co-developer of the EACOP alongside the above-mentioned parties. Part of the Tilenga upstream project in Uganda is within the [boundaries](#) of the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar wetland in Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP).

The EACOP, a planned 1,443-kilometer pipeline from the Tilenga and Kingfisher oil fields in Uganda to the port of Tanga in Tanzania, is set to affect [over 158](#) wetland sections in Uganda. Some of these, which are connected to Ramsar sites in Uganda, include Kibale/Bukoora, Kisoma, Kasemugiri, Jemakunya and Katonga. The Ramsar sites connected to the aforementioned wetlands

include the Sango Bay-Musambwa Island-Kagera (SAMUKA) Ramsar Wetland System, which has an economic value of USD 117 million per year (Sango Bay only) and Nabajjuzi Ramsar Wetland. The EACOP-affected wetlands that may be connected to Ramsar sites in Tanzania remain unknown.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Congolese government launched an oil exploration licensing round for 27 oil and 3 gas blocks in July 2022. Some of the blocks cover Virunga National Park, which contains a Ramsar site. This has raised concerns amongst environmentalists and CSOs that work to protect communities' socio-economic rights.

Mr. Dickens Kamugisha of Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) in Uganda says, “We are worried about the high pollution risk that the Tilenga and EACOP projects pose to Ramsar wetlands in Uganda, Tanzania and the DRC. The Victoria Nile Crossing, which is within the boundaries of the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar site, is particularly worrying.”

He adds, “While TotalEnergies has promised to ensure biodiversity conservation amidst its oil exploitation activities covering Ramsar wetlands and other biodiverse areas, it is very difficult to believe them. In Uganda and Tanzania, they have been unable to manage impacts arising from their compulsory land acquisition processes for the Tilenga and EACOP projects. They have also been unable to manage the flooding as well as dust, noise and light pollution impacts seen because of the Tilenga project in Buliisa district in Uganda.”

NEW MAPS DEMONSTRATE THREAT TO MFNP, PEMBA

Amidst the above concerns, using July 2023 satellite imaging, [new mapping analysis](#) demonstrates how MFNP is being changed and could be further changed by the Tilenga project.

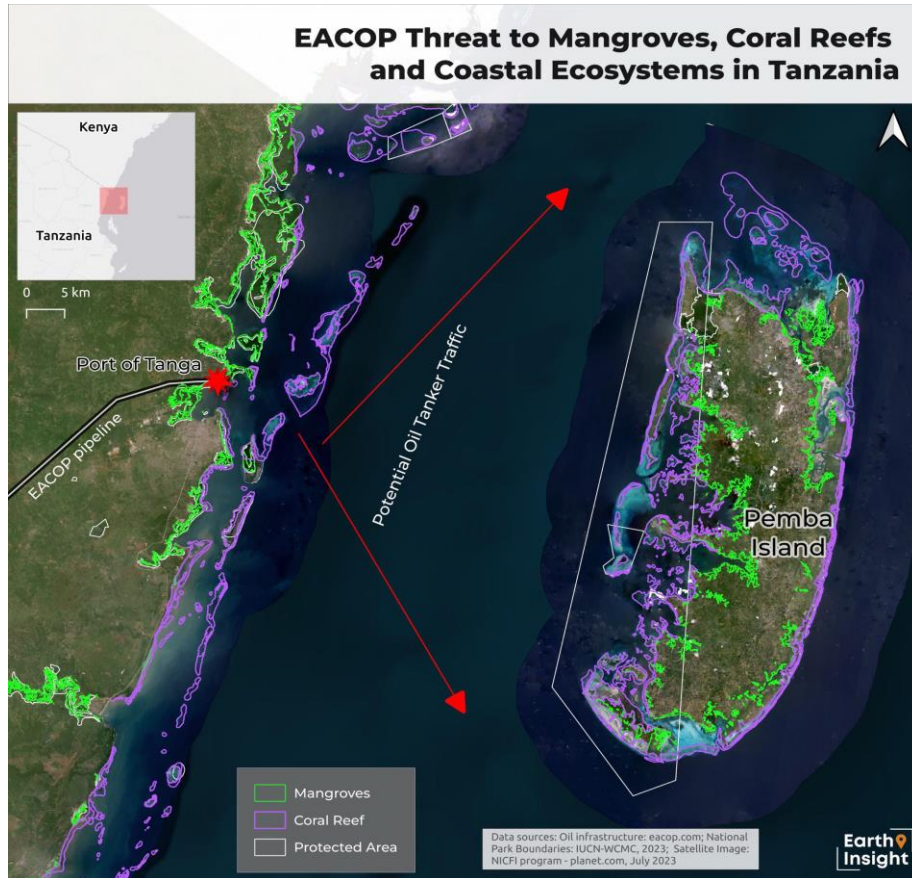
Ms. Patience Katusiime of the Environment Governance Institute in Uganda, says, “The mapping analysis shows that TotalEnergies is already constructing seven of the ten wellpads that are to be located within MFNP. Two of the wellpads are too close to the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar site. This is disheartening to see. So is seeing how large swathes in the park have been pockmarked by oil exploration wells, roads and other infrastructure. TotalEnergies often says that they are using a small part of the park but these new satellite images show that a combination of oil roads, bridges, oil feeder pipelines and wellpads could destroy the park.”

She adds, “No well-meaning institution, including the Ugandan government, Ramsar Secretariat, financial institutions, export credit agencies and others should support TotalEnergies in its oil exploitation misadventures in our national park. The above institutions should call on TotalEnergies to invest in renewable energy instead of oil projects.”



A map showing oil infrastructure affecting a Ramsar wetland and other areas in MFNP

Mr. Richard Sekondo of Organisation for Community Engagement (OCE) in Tanzania says, “Along the Tanzanian shore, two important Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) – the Pemba-Shimoni-Kisite site and the Tanga Coelacanth site – are at high risk from oil leaving the port at Tanga. These EBSAs host several Marine Protected Areas, as well as Mangrove Forest Reserves. The Pemba-Shimoni-Kisite site is known for its coral reefs, as well as the endemic coconut crab (*Birgus latro*), the largest land-living arthropod. These need to be protected.”



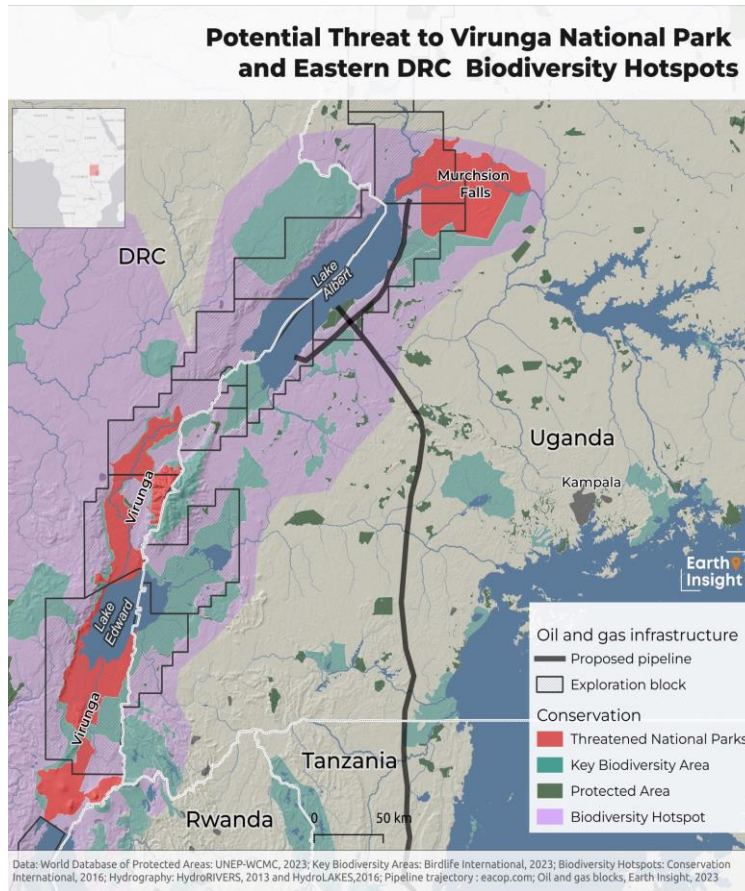
EACOP threats to mangroves and coral reefs

EACOP THREATS TO VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK

The first cut is the deepest in every fossil fuel project: pipelines beget more pipelines into increasingly sensitive and rare ecosystems. Oil expansion in critical forests and protected areas in the DRC is much more likely if the EACOP project moves forward.

Mr. Bantu Lukambo of Innovation pour le Développement et la Protection de l’Environnement (IDPE) in the DRC says, “Virunga National Park, which contains a Ramsar site and is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is at risk. This is because the DRC government has been emboldened by Uganda’s example. Because the world looks on as oil exploitation goes on in MFNP, the Congolese government also developed courage to put oil blocks covering Virunga up for exploration licensing in July 2022. Moreover, construction of the EACOP will make oil exploitation in the DRC Albertine Graben more viable.”

Mr. Lukambo adds, “We want international bodies such as the Ramsar Secretariat to act. They must engage the Ugandan, Tanzanian and Congolese governments to stop any oil exploitation plans covering Ramsar sites.”



The EACOP poses risk to Virunga National Park, which has a Ramsar wetland

*****ENDS*****

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ENCLOSURES

- [Congo in the Crosshairs released at COP 27 \(French and English\)](#)