

CSCO's ENGAGEMENT ON BIODIVERSITY ISSUES CONCERNING MASINDI-BIISO OIL ROAD CONSTRUCTION

Introduction

Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) is constructing roads to facilitate oil development. One of such roads is the Masindi-Biiso Road. The construction of this road has raised several biodiversity concerns. Civil Society has identified several issues especially along the 3.5 km section which passes through Budongo Central Forest Reserve. The road passes through a key biodiversity area which is a critical habitat for the biodiversity trigger species namely Chimpanzees and Nahan's Francolin, yet there are not enough animal crossing structures provided in the design. The proposed increments in the existing carriageway from the current approximately 5-9m to about 10-12m will also lead to loss of forest canopy in the right of way, split off and isolate the southern portion of the forest from the northern section which will adversely affect the connectivity and movement of wildlife. It will also fragment the habitat and reduce its value for wildlife use due to the break in habitat continuity. Highly vulnerable forest patches will most likely accelerate forest encroachment; unlocking forest carbon due to forest clearing which will result into distortion of the microclimate of the area; and disturbance of animals in Protected Areas and road kills of crossing wild animals.

CSCO with its partners have studied the situation and several recommendations made that can create a win-win situation for biodiversity conservation and road construction. These include:

- (i) Exploring the possibility of including the construction of overpasses and canopy bridges for wildlife crossing in the road designs. Overpasses and canopy bridges ensure safe wildlife road crossings. Overpasses include all wildlife passages that cross roads above the level of traffic to create permeability of wildlife. In swampy areas, the canopy bridges could also be considered.
- (ii) Construction of appropriate culverts for maintaining the water course and flow of the river to mitigate flooding downstream. Establishment of additional means of minimizing wildlife road kills including strategically placed speed bumps, installing caution and animal crossing signs, and investing in a broader educational program for road users.
- (iii) Following good environmental practices during construction to ensure protection of biodiversity and replanting trees in areas where they were cut.
- (iv) Use of qualified experts and relevant institutions to monitor the effectiveness of passageways for the primates and other wildlife.

CSCO engagements on the matter?

Preparation of a memorandum of issues and advocacy letter: CSCO with the leadership of WCS constituted a team to review the issues and submitted a memorandum to Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA). A letter was written and a meeting requested to discuss the issues and expound on the proposals suggested.

CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION ON OIL AND GAS
UGANDA

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February 25, 2021

The Executive Director
Uganda National Roads Authority
Plot 3-5 New Port Bell Road, UAP Nakawa Business Park,
P.O. Box 28487, Kampala.



Dear Mrs. Kagina,

**RE: BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS WITH REGARD TO THE MASINDI
- BIISO ROAD, BUDONGO FOREST SECTION**

The above subject matter refers.

The Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas (CSCO), is a loose network of over 63 organizations working towards sustainable governance of Uganda's oil and gas resources to maximize the benefits to the people of Uganda. It is hosted by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE). Periodically, CSCO conducts independent monitoring of oil and gas activities, engage communities, and share with relevant Government Agencies and other stakeholders in the sector our findings for action. It is in this spirit that we wish to draw your attention to concerns which relate to the Masindi-Biiso road, one of the critical oil roads. We noted with concern that the manner in which the road is being upgraded has limited biodiversity and environmental safeguards. This is in reference to the 3.4km section of the road which goes through Budongo Central Forest Reserve.

As you may be aware, Budongo Forest Reserve is a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), and thus a critical habitat for the endangered Chimpanzee and a host of many other species, some of which are endemic to the region. As such, a comprehensive assessment of the biodiversity loss anticipated, and the potential cumulative negative impacts ought to have been undertaken before construction commenced. We have noted with concern that this was not done. As such, several would-be measures to mitigate the visible and imminent negative impacts of the road upgrade in this critical area are not in place and/or have not been implemented. These issues are articulated in the memorandum attached hereto for your information.

We write to draw your attention to this matter, and we are open to meeting you or your team to articulate these issues further. Attached is a memorandum of information about this matter.

We look forward to your timely and positive consideration.

Yours sincerely,

James Muhindo
National Coordinator
Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas (CSCO)

Cc: Executive Director, National forestry Authority

CSCO, a loose network of member organizations is hosted by Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE)

Our Vision: A well-managed Oil and Gas sector for the benefit of all Ugandans

A copy of the letter sent to UNRA requesting for a meeting to discuss biodiversity and environmental concerns with regard to the Masindi-Biiso Road construction in Budongo forest section

Preparation and Publication of a Press Statement: In order to raise the profile of the issues, CSCO prepared and published a press statement in the print media. It appeared in the new Vision of 9th March 2021. The statement attracted the attention of many stakeholders and further concerns were echoed in public fora and sector meetings.

A CALL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF OIL ROADS THAT TRAVERSE FRAGILE ECOSYSTEMS

Introduction

Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA), has prioritized the 12 Critical Oil Roads (CORs), about 700km in total, which are required to facilitate oil production. Over the last five years, road works to upgrade, pave, and construct these roads have remained on course. The oil roads are intended to facilitate the movement of construction materials, workers, and consumables from other parts of the country to the oil region. These roads include Kabaale-Kizirantumbi, Hohwa-Nyairongo-Kyarushesha-Butole, Kaseeta-Lwera, Hoima-Buliisa-Wanseko, Masindi-Biiso, Masindi-Paraa-Pakwach, Kisanja-Park Junction, and Sambiya-Murchison Falls which go through the Bugoma and Budongo Central Forests, Bugungu Wildlife Reserve and Murchison Falls National Park. The work done on these roads so far has not only facilitated the efficient development of Uganda's oil resources as intended, but also boosted trade and eased transport.

Notwithstanding the positive progress and outcomes of these roads, the Albertine Graben in which these roads are being constructed is one of the most ecologically sensitive regions, not just in Uganda but in Africa. The region is rich with biodiversity and thus any infrastructure developments must pay attention to their environmental footprint on the rich flora and fauna. We have observed with concern the limitation of some of the oil roads in respect to some critical habitats for wildlife such as mammals (primates such as chimpanzees, monkeys, and baboons), birds, among other species that use the canopy for crossing the existing roads. The environment and social management plans have not provided for adequate mitigation measures for biodiversity loss.

What are the issues?

There are several biodiversity concerns noted about construction of critical oil roads which go through critical biodiversity areas

namely Kaseeta – Lwera via Bugoma Forest, Masindi-Biiso and Masindi-Paraa-Pakwach via Budongo Forest, and Murchison Falls National Park. These roads pass through key biodiversity areas which are critical habitats for the biodiversity trigger species namely Chimpanzees and Nahan's Francolin, yet there are not enough animal crossing structures provided in the designs.

Increments in the existing carriageway from the current approximately 5-9m to about 10-12m will lead to loss of forest canopy in the right of way, split off and isolate the southern portion of the forest from the northern section which will adversely affect the connectivity and movement of wildlife. It will also fragment the habitat and reduce its value for wildlife use due to the break in habitat continuity. Highly vulnerable forest patches will most likely



An animal over-pass. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com>

accelerate forest encroachment; unlocking forest carbon due to forest clearing will result into distortion of the microclimate of the area; and disturbance of animals in Protected Areas and road kills of crossing wild animals.

What are the recommendations?

- Include adequate wildlife crossing structures like overpasses and canopy bridges in the road designs. Overpasses and canopy bridges ensure safe wildlife road crossings. Overpasses include all wildlife passages that cross roads above the level of traffic to create path ways for wildlife.
- Construct appropriate culverts for maintaining the water course and flow of water to mitigate flooding downstream.
- Establish additional means of minimizing wildlife road kills including strategically placing speed bumps, installing caution and animal crossing signs, and investing in a broader educational program for road users.
- In collaboration with lead agencies, replant trees in areas where they are cut and hire qualified organizations to monitor the effectiveness of passageways for the primates and other wildlife.

For details Contact: Mr. James Muhindo on Mob: 0782-134708
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Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas - Uganda (CSCO) is hosted by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE).

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Screenshot of the published statement in the media on the need for environmental sensitivity of oil roads that traverse fragile ecosystems

Preparation and Publication of a Newspaper Article: In addition to the above activities, CSCO wrote an opinion article highlighting conservation issues and proposed measures. The article was published in the press media on 6th April 2021. The article can be accessed at; <http://csc0.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/oilRoads.pdf>

Feature story

To further engage stake holders on the issue, CSCO and partners released a feature story highlighting the issues at stake and captured commitments from sector players to conserve the environment amidst oil roads construction. a The full feature story can be got here <https://youtu.be/OGD9AG9luKU>

CSCO efforts have not been in vain

Meeting with UNRA: Following UNRA's receipt of CSCO's memorandum of issues and a letter requesting for a meeting to discuss environmental and biodiversity concerns over the construction of this road, UNRA environment team met with the CSCO team and discussed the matter. In the meeting, the UNRA team committed to address all concerns raised on the matter.

Participation in monitoring: UNRA also asked CSCO to select a team of members who will be engaged and co-opted to play oversight role on the project and work with URA team during the monitoring exercise.

Invitation to participate on the Roads Construction Committee: CSCO has also been invited by Ministry of Works and Transport to nominate a representative to the Construction Industry Development Committee (CIDC). This provides an opportunity for Civil Society to inform other projects and ensure that biodiversity concerns are taken care of during infrastructure development.