

Initiative for Peace Workshop on oil and conflict in the Albertine Graben, Uganda

Workshops held:

16th -18th March 2009 in Hoima district

28th April 1st May 2009 in Arua district

With the recent discovery of oil in Uganda, there has been much excitement about the potential scale and significance of the new resource at national and local levels. Progress has already been seen with talk of a mini-refinery to help reduce the country's energy shortages; publication of a National Oil and Gas Policy which is expected to lead to implementing legislation before end of 2009; investment in training by government to prepare Ugandans to gain employment in the oil industry; and a number of stakeholder fora organised by different actors.

International Alert has found through its preliminary research that while the oil discoveries have the potential to enrich the national economy and enhance development, their potential to exacerbate existing conflicts at regional, national and local levels is also high. While stakeholders interviewed as part of Alert research to date showed a high consciousness of such risks, there is limited attention from government, donors, civil society, parliamentarians, media or other stakeholders towards better understanding and mitigating conflict factors.

Under the Initiative for Peacebuilding, International Alert and Associates Research conducted two workshops Arua and Hoima district. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with communities involved in different livelihoods activities, e.g. farming, fishing, herding, cultivation and business; but also with opinion leaders, religious leaders and local professionals such as nurses or teachers. The research ensured a range of age and gender.

Information so far obtained outlines some urgent regional concerns raised by discussants of the workshops. In one of the survey areas in Arua district, feedback from sampled communities indicates that a significant number of people been attracted to move to settle from DRC in parts of Arua causing a population explosion. Most of the newcomers are in search of jobs from oil companies. Behavioral change in these communities is associated to the settlement of newcomers. There was already a growing fear of increased permissiveness among the youth and worry of a possibility of increased spread of HIV Aids. Some of the respondents were of the view that though there was peaceful coexistence between newcomers and indigenous people, there was a need for oil companies to give priority to the indigenous people instead of bringing in skills from neighboring DRC. The potentiality of conflict over employment in this area is evident with a number of people citing competition for scarce resources such as land and jobs. Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents in this particular survey area seemed not aware of any other regional dimensions to the impacts of oil.

Information gathered from Hoima district indicates that Congolese and Ugandans have coexisted for a number of years with fishing communities moving freely along the waters

of Lake Albert. Due to the discovery of oil and tensions over the Uganda-Congo border¹, relationships between the fishermen from the two countries have become estranged. Respondents noted that though it had been a common practice for fishermen from both countries to move across the borders of the two countries, the movement has become very restrictive to Ugandans on the Congo side and yet Congolese are still free to come to Uganda. This has caused hostility among Congolese fishermen and their Ugandan counterparts. A number of fights have ensued over this restrictive movement and the situation threatens to deteriorate.

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¹ 'Tensions at Uganda, Congo border', *The New Vision*, 10 August 2007. Also see: Uganda: Oil Team Attacked, Briton Killed.' *The New Vision* 3 August 2007; and Uganda, DRC conflict over Rukwanzi Island resolved'. *Daily Monitor*, 10 September 2008;