

Tilenga Project Biodiversity Program in Murchison Falls National Park

Located in Buliisa and Nwoya districts in the Albertine graben, the Tilenga project is operated by TotalEnergies EP Uganda in partnership with Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) Limited and Uganda National Oil Company (UNOC). It includes the development of six fields and the drilling of around 400 wells from 29 wellpads. Approximately 0.05% of Murchison Falls National Park surface area will be occupied by the project facilities including 10 wellpads, access roads and pipeline network to develop one of the fields located inside Murchison Falls National Park.

TotalEnergies EP Uganda has committed to developing the project in conformance to national legislation and international standards particularly International



David Ochanda is also the Winner of the 2020 award of the Outstanding Young Professional Award by the International Association of Oil And Gas Producers (IOGP).

Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards on Environment and Social Sustainability.

TotalEnergies EP Uganda overall mission and commitment is to leave **Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) and the surrounding landscape in better condition than if the project had not taken place by achieving positive effects for biodiversity and communities.** The company is working in collaboration with the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) as well as other mandated intuitions, partners, and stakeholders in designing and implementing appropriate mitigation measures and conservation actions that positively contribute to and promote coexistence of Oil and Gas development with wildlife conservation, tourism development, and enhanced livelihoods. The Tilenga Biodiversity Program was officially launched in June 2022 to achieve this objective and since then a number of pilot projects have been initiated.

Adherence to the mitigation hierarchy to achieve positive, measurable and long lasting outcomes for conservation and communities requires a robust strategy. As such, the company rigorously applies avoidance, minimization, and restoration measures to address impacts throughout the project lifecycle (design, construction, operations, and decommissioning). This is done consistently whilst compensating for any remaining impacts that may persist.



Figure 1: The Tilenga Project follows the Mitigation Hierarchy to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain

The Tilenga Project has already avoided a lot of the preliminary adverse impacts through project design, working with contractors to further minimize impact through various control measures and ensure full restoration during and after the construction phase.

In addition, the company has started implementing actions designed to finally compensate for any remaining residual impacts on a pilot basis. This is a key commitment of the project in line with the National Environment Act 2019 and the IFC performance standards as detailed in the project's Environmental and



(L-R) Haruna Kulu Kiirya, Warden Law Enforcement of UWA at Murchison Falls National Park (L), David Ochanda, Biodiversity Manager Rangelands (2nd L), Denis Muhereza, Head of Intelligence Unit UWA (2nd R) and Isaac Kiirya, Project Manager WCS (R) during one of the field supervisions of Snare Removal and Ranger Patrol Effectiveness Project.

Social Impact Assessment report approved by the authorities on 15th April 2019 (certificate no. 12805).

The project avoided adverse impacts by carefully placing infrastructure while avoiding sensitive sites, optimising footprint by reducing number of wellpads to bare minimum from 75 to 29 at final design, use of technology such as Horizontal Directional Drilling, avoiding sensitive seasons of animal species, and relinquishing part of the project area within the park. Out of the 29 wellpads, only 10 will be located within the park. Additionally, several physical and operational control measures described within the various Biodiversity Management Plans are being implemented to minimise and restore construction impacts to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Tilenga Project is operating in a Critical Habitat and is therefore committed to achieving biodiversity net gain within the Murchison Falls Protected Area which includes MFNP and the adjoining Bugungu and Karuma Wildlife Reserves, to enhance species populations, habitat quality and extent, while also improving tourism and livelihoods of communities. In consultation with UWA and other stakeholders, the company has identified four key pillars for the Program as described with the Project Biodiversity Action Plan. Each of these pillars has specific objectives to achieve the Tilenga Biodiversity Program vision:



Figure 2: The Tilenga Biodiversity Programme Pillars for achieving Biodiversity Net Gain.

These pillars are dedicated to long-term conservation actions in and around Murchison Falls Protected Area (MFPA), premised around support to law enforcement, resource conservation, community conservation, and monitoring and research. TotalEnergies EP Uganda is working closely with the UWA and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in piloting one of the actions involving snare removal and improving effectiveness of ranger patrols through use of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) technology in MFNP. The aim is to support build capacity of UWA in managing poaching and other illegal activities within MFNP. Lessons from this pilot will inform scaling up the activities to the entire park, ensuring poaching and other illegal activities are mitigated, as animal populations, their habitats and tourism in MFNP continue thriving.

The pilot project involves 4 main activities:

1. Running monthly snare removal, extended patrols, and water operations to detect threats to wildlife,
2. Anti-poaching campaigns through community awareness meetings and Radio talk shows
3. Procuring SMART equipment and,
4. Training and equipping UWA Rangers in use of SMART for effective field patrols,

Majority of poachers in MFNP use wire snares and metal traps to catch mainly Antelopes and Buffaloes. However, these snares indiscriminately trap any animal including elephants and lions, causing immense pain, suffering and death to wildlife of MFNP. To reduce poaching threat to wildlife, UWA has to physically search and systematically remove snares and other traps in the park.

Together with UWA Law enforcement unit and with support from TotalEnergies EP Uganda, WCS organizes monthly snare removal operations within the NorthEastern section of the park. This involves UWA

Rangers moving within a selected area and removing any wire snares and other kinds of traps encountered. Out of 52 patrols conducted within 8 months (March 2023), 1932 wire snares, 7 spears, 5 wheels traps, 16 canoes, 16 illegal fishing nets have been retrieved and arrested 47 poachers and rescued 3 wild animals live from wire snares.



A wire snare dislodged and retrieved by an UWA ranger in Murchison Falls National Park

So far, 50 UWA Rangers have been trained and mentored in use of SMART which has been very helpful in collecting data on illegal activities while patrolling, and the Ranger outposts have been boosted with 12 smart phones, 3 solar systems, 3 external drives, and 2 laptops to aid data collection, processing, analysis, and transmission to UWA Headquarter.



An Elephant in Murchison Falls National Park.

Additionally, TotalEnergies EP Uganda is also working with UWA through Biodiversity Solutions Uganda to implement another pilot conservation project aimed at improving quality and extent of habitats of MFNP through management of invasive species of flora. This one-year pilot project involves working with local communities to manually remove invasive species around Bugungu Airstrip, a predetermined area highly infested with *Chromolaena Odorata*, and continuously monitor and manage the site to ensure full eradication of the invasive species. Lessons learnt will be replicated to other sites with the same species.

Over the years TotalEnergies EP Uganda through its implementing partners has collected significant amounts of data on biodiversity of MFNP forming a robust baseline. This data has to-date informed all the mitigation strategies and will be the basis for future monitoring of progress towards achieving Tilenga Project's Netgain targets. About seven (7) years ago TotalEnergies EP Uganda successfully implemented the exploration and appraisal phase of this Project with utmost adherence to environment and social safeguards, and best practices particularly the mitigation hierarchy. To-date, it is unnoticeable that oil and gas exploration ever took place in the park because all impacted areas were fully restored. Through experience from other projects across the globe and particularly the exploration phase of this project, TotalEnergies EP Uganda is highly confident that together with support from Government of Uganda, partners, and stakeholders, Tilenga Project will be a success and subsequently a model project to demonstrate coexistence of Oil & Gas development with wildlife conservation, tourism, and community livelihoods.

TotalEnergies EP Uganda remains committed to working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners to achieve its long-term mission and commitments in MFNP, and wishes to thank the Government of Uganda, UWA, the Petroleum Authority of Uganda, Joint Venture partners, all its implementing partners, and other stakeholders for the support rendered towards development and implementation of the Tilenga Biodiversity Program, and the Tilenga Project at large. TotalEnergies EP Uganda and its partners are committed to pro-active communication and collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure successful implementation and achievement of net gain for biodiversity and community livelihoods.

Written by:

David Ochanda, Biodiversity Manager Rangelands, TotalEnergies E&P Uganda, and an awardee of the 2020 Outstanding Young Professional Award by International Association of Oil & Gas Producers (IOGP).