

To pump or not to pump Uganda's oil?

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Guest Columnists



Prime

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What you need to know:

Those asking us to stop are currently consuming the bulk of global energy.

Politics

Environmental activists have come together in an extremely powerful lobby to stop Uganda from producing oil, to block the pipeline and to defund it. Stories have been published against the Ugandan oil project in some internationally respected newspapers,

including UK newspapers such as The Financial Times and The Guardian.

Related

These groups make a number of colourful arguments. They argue that the Ugandan oil project will “cook the planet”. They argue that our pipeline is on the verge of causing a “full blown climate catastrophe.” They call the project “corporate colonialism.” They say the whole world is abandoning oil and gas and yet Uganda chooses this time to develop an oil project.

There can be no denying the fact that our oil project must, as much as possible, mitigate the social and environmental risks the project comes with. The people affected must receive adequate, prompt and fair compensation.

Benefits from oil

We must discuss how well the oil companies are doing on this aspect; in fact we should debate how ordinary Ugandans will benefit from the project.

However, we must also respond to the arguments being made by the international activists.

Contrary to their statements, this project is not “corporate colonialism.” It is not true that the planet will be “cooked” by Uganda’s oil. In truth, these groups seek to suffocate our potential economic development for a problem that has largely been created elsewhere. The argument that the world is moving away from oil and gas is false. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we have seen a move to increase global oil production. For example, the UK is set to issue licences for companies to drill in the North Sea. Yes, in the deep blue sea.

Recently, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that it would be “crazy” for the UK to shut down its oil and gas production in the face of global shortages.

The United States currently pumps about 13.5 million barrels of oil per day. This year alone, the US shall increase this production by an additional one million barrels per day. In light of these facts, I haven’t seen a strong campaign against US oil production, have you?

For context: Uganda will produce, at most, 250,000 barrels of oil per day. That is 2 percent of what America produces. If we do not question the narrative being created by these groups well, apparently it is Uganda that is going to “cook the planet” and cause a “climate catastrophe”.

Uganda’s oil will be a small addition to the global oil market and those asking us to stop are currently consuming the bulk of global energy; it heats and lights their homes, it fuels their cars.

You can imagine why, to them, our oil is negligible. It will, however, be a big deal for Uganda. For us, it has the potential of adding a substantial amount of money to our Treasury. It has the potential of making a contribution to our infrastructure. It has the potential of developing local industry.

This whole debate reminds me of a story from the Bible. 1 Samuel 12: 1-4 reads, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children.

It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.”

“Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

Our rich neighbours are asking for our little lamb. It may be time for us to ask them, politely but firmly, when are they willing to give up theirs?

The writer is an advocate and partner at Kampala Associated Advocates

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