



EAST AFRICAN
CRUDE OIL PIPELINE
HOST COMMUNITIES



THE MONTH THE LAND HELD ITS BREATH

JUNE 2026 NEWSLETTER

Dear Readers,
Welcome to our inaugural monthly newsletter, this month, we bring to you reality updates how the events of a repressed civic space in our nation affects the incidences happening in the vulnerable oil host communities. June came to the Albertine the way it always does with brown dust rising behind oil trucks, with maize leaning heavy toward a sky that has grown stingy with rain, and with the low, constant hum of machinery that never asks the soil for permission. But this June carried something else too: the news of a virus crossing borders, the news of human rights defenders sleeping on prison mattresses for the crime of speaking up, and the news of a Bill in Parliament that would make even our newsletters a matter of "national security."

And yet, in the middle of all of it, our communities gathered not to mourn, but to hold each other. This issue tells both stories: the repression that presses down on us, and the resistance, care, and imagination that continues to rise up despite it as our elders remind us, the tree that bends in the storm is not broken, it is only learning the shape of survival.

The Era When silence is legislated

Uganda's civic space, already rated "repressed" by international monitors, tightened further this year. In January, the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organizations suspended at least seven prominent human rights and governance organizations days before the general election, citing vague "intelligence information" and freezing their bank accounts. Offices closed. Salaries stopped. Independent election monitoring went dark at the exact moment the country needed it most.

That contraction has not eased with the passing of election season. In April, the Protection of Sovereignty Bill 2026 was tabled before Parliament, ostensibly to guard against foreign interference, but rights organizations warn it could be used to criminalize the everyday work of community mobilization, foreign-funded programming, and even the kind of grassroots documentation we do along the pipeline corridor. As of this June, the Bill remains evidently present which portrays a quiet, procedural sentence hanging over every host-community meeting, every training workshop and every documentation published.



For host communities already navigating land acquisition, displacement, and broken compensation promises, the message is unmistakable and rather plain and precise; to organize is to be watched, and to speak is to risk being named a threat to "sovereignty" rather than a citizen exercising a constitutional right. Despite of this fact, however long the night gets, the dawn will still break.

Now, no where is the cost of dissent clearer than in the case of eight young Stop EACOP defenders who were arrested on 1 August 2025 while holding placards outside a bank's head office, protesting its financing of the pipeline. Ten months later, after repeated bail denials, they were convicted in April of "nuisance on roads," an offence that would ordinarily carry a fine, yet has kept them behind the walls of Luzira Maximum Security Prison for the better part of a year. This isn't a new tactic used on EHRDs as seen being used on other civil and social justice rights defenders in the nation like Dr. Miria Matembe, the previous lord mayor, Elias Lukwago and other schemes done to allies so as to keep us shut.



Their story echoes what our own chapter coordinators, Tugume Recheal and Clinton Bikorwa, have documented closer to home: communities whose roads are cracked open by heavy pipeline trucks, who protest the damage to the only paths connecting them to markets, clinics, and schools, and who are met not with repair crews but with the language of "public order." Environmental and human rights defenders (EHRDs) across the Albertine eg students, fisherfolk, widows fighting for fair compensation and chapter coordinators like our own, continue to face arrest, judicial harassment, and prolonged pre-trial detention simply for insisting that a pipeline does not outrank a person.

Twin Crises: Ebola and Extraction

In May, health authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda confirmed an outbreak of Ebola disease, first detected in Ituri Province and soon after in Kampala. The World Health Organization declared it a public health emergency of international concern. By the end of June, Uganda's Ministry of Health had recorded twenty confirmed cases and two deaths, with health teams racing to trace contacts and contain further spread.

It is tempting to treat an epidemic and an oil pipeline as separate headlines. They are not. Both travel the same roads. Both move fastest through communities already weakened by displacement, broken health systems, and the constant churn of migrant labourers, truck drivers, and construction crews passing through host districts. A corridor not only neighbouring the DRC but also built to carry crude oil to the coast. It is also a corridor that carries people, goods, and, when we are unlucky, disease. Climate stress, extractive development, and public health are not separate crises, they are the same crisis wearing different faces. This is the understanding that shaped our response this month, not panic, but preparation and not silence but solidarity.

Rising Together: Our Community-Climate Health Camp

In the middle of June, EACOPHC convened a Community-Climate Health Camp across host villages in Kikuube and Hoima, bringing together health educators, chapter coordinators, and community members under one message that protecting the body and protecting the land are the same act of defiance.



The camp opened with practical Ebola preparedness sessions and general health sensitization and awareness such as handwashing demonstrations, myth-busting conversations about how the virus does and does not spread, and clear guidance on when and where to seek care all delivered in local languages by community health volunteers rather than distant officials. Alongside this, chapter coordinators ran climate justice dialogues linking the region's worsening dry spells, cracked roads, and vanishing wetlands directly to oil field construction and heavy-vehicle traffic through host communities that is a contribution to the already unfair climate change condition.



Elders spoke of rivers and streams that used to run year-round and now vanish by July. Young mothers spoke of clinics that are one dusty, pothole-ridden hour away. Fisherfolk from the Lake Albert shoreline spoke of nets that come up lighter each season. And through it all, the camp insisted on a single, true hope: that a community equipped with knowledge about a virus, about its rights, about its environment is a community harder to displace and harder to silence.

By the camp's close, over a dozen community members had been reached with both health screening information and climate-rights education a small but deliberate refusal to let the extractive economy and an epidemic be the only forces writing this month's story.



Closing Reflection

There is an old teaching, carried by griots and grandmothers across this continent, that the axe forgets, but the tree remembers. Uganda's civic space may keep forgetting its promises to the people of the Albertine, to the defenders in Luzira, to the villages breathing dust from broken roads, to the health workers racing an outbreak with too few resources. But we, the host communities, remember. We remember every eviction, every broken pipe, every silenced organization, every young activist's name. And we keep gathering, keep organizing, keep camping under trees to teach each other how to survive both unforeseen eventualities and an industry that too often treats us as expendable. Smooth seas do not make skilled sailors, and this has not been a smooth season. But EACOPHC and its chapters remain afloat rooted in community, sharpened by resistance, and still always, rising together.



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