



PRESS STATEMENT ON THE INSECURITY ARISING FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WADELAI IRRIGATION PROJECT SCHEME IN PAKWACH DISTRICT.

Wadelai Irrigation Project is one of the four irrigation schemes under Farm Income Enhancement and Forestry Conservation Project (FIEFOC-2) financed by the African Development Bank, supported by the Nordic Development Fund and implemented in Uganda. The project aims at contributing to improvement of farm incomes, rural livelihoods, food security, climate resilience, sustainable natural resources management and agricultural enterprise development. The project involves land acquisition and the consent of farmers to be a part of this project.

In January 2021, Bullisa Initiative for Rural Development Organization (BIRUDO), a non-government organization and member of the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA), conducted a situation analysis to assess the impact of the Wadelai Irrigation Project on the environment and livelihoods of the affected communities during its implementation in Wadelai sub-county, Pakwach District.

One of the concerns raised by the affected communities, particularly the Paten clan was the acreage of land that the project sought to acquire for its agribusiness component left limited land for their own use. The community had consented to give the project 365 acres only for the surveyors to indicate that the 365 acres were in fact hectares. This gap in information created mistrust of the project within the community. These concerns as raised by the community were documented by BIRUDO and shared with the Pakwach District Local Government and the Project Implementation team with support from the UCCA. Consequently, a meeting was held with the community and the District Local Government wherein the community insisted that they could not give away their land until they were content that they have enough land left for their own use.

On 1st June 2021, a follow up meeting was convened by the Chief Administrative Officer of Pakwach District Local Government and attended by the Resident District Commissioner, the Project focal person, BIRUDO and UCCA representatives to discuss the community's decision. In a turn of events, the Pakwach District leadership made a decision to suspend BIRUDO from operating in the District and to open up investigation into BIRUDO's work due to claims that the organization was behind the community's refusal to offer their land.

In July 2021, the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police at Pakwach summoned six (6) members of the community with allegations that they are sabotaging the project.



BIRUDO was able to provide legal representation for them during the police interrogation and secured them police bond. The Community members had to keep reporting back to police at a time when the whole country was under a total lockdown with walking on foot as the only means of transport to the police station. As of now, the number of arrested persons has increased to Nine (9) including Clan leaders and two civil servants with the Pakwach District Local Government. The two civil servants were summoned to appear before the District's Award and Sanction Committee for having stood up with the community in rejecting the forceful grabbing of their land.

On 19th July 2021, the project team went to the community guarded by the army to measure the land without involving the community members. Once the community tried to question the team, more arrests were conducted. Furthermore, one clan member was beaten by Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) on orders of the Deputy Resident District Commissioner and he sustained injuries on his arm.

On 10th August 2021, Local Government through the Resident District Commissioner, Deputy Resident District Commissioner, District Chairperson, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer and District Internal Security Officer trespassed on the Paten clan land using the UPDF and Police who shot and wounded 13 paten clan members. Police in Wadelai refused to issue the injured with Police Form 3 for purposes of documenting their injuries and Wadelai Health Centre staff refused to treat them too. On August 11th 2021, UPDF further arrested and beat up four (4) women including a pregnant one who were on their way to fetch water. Through these continued acts of intimidation, COIL Company Ltd which is undertaking the irrigation scheme construction is now on the ground forcefully opening boundaries of the paten clan land.

This has an impact on the rights of the Project Affected Persons requiring the adherence to the safeguard policies of the financier, the African Development Bank, particularly operational safeguards 1 and 2. Operational safeguard 1 sets out the Bank's overarching requirements for borrowers or clients to identify, assess, and manage the potential environment and social risks and impacts of the project. The objective of this is to mainstream environmental and social considerations. One of the specific objectives under this safeguard is to provide for stakeholders' participation during the consultation process so that affected communities and stakeholders have timely access to information and are consulted meaningfully about issues that may affect them. The safeguard also provides for the establishment of a credible, independent and empowered local grievance mechanism to receive, facilitate and follow up on concerns about the social performance of the project. Operational safeguard 2 ensures that where the affected people do not have land titles, cadastral surveys are carried out to establish the basis for compensation,



and it may be necessary to establish procedures to recognize claims to land including claims that derive from customary law and traditional usage.

Despite these safeguard policies in place triggered through the different occurrences, the communities continue to decry the flaws in the acquisition processes. The community insist that they had agreed to 365 acres but the surveyors later indicated that the consent was for 365 hectares. This gap in information created mistrust of the project within the community. It is also clear from the ongoing developments that there is no grievance mechanism in place to handle these issues and if it is in existence, it is neither performing nor empowered to perform its duties.

The UCCA condemns such continued acts of intimidation and the use of force to acquire the project land. This intimidation has spread to the community where many feel it is unsafe to express their concerns regarding the land acquisition process by the project.

The UCCA therefore calls upon the Government of Uganda to:

- Respect the rights of the community to consent to giving away their land for development.
- Desist from any form of threats, intimidation, harassment or injury to community members seeking to assert their rights.
- Desist from threatening NGOs and Human Rights Defenders working with the community.
- Engage the community in a meaningful discussion to resolve the matter.

The UCCA calls upon the African Development Bank to ensure implementation of the safeguard policies they have put in place for development projects, specifically as they relate to the protection of human rights.

We also call upon COIL company to support meaningful engagement with the community to resolve the impasse.