

UNJUST TRANSITIONS

Intricacies of Exclusion and Exploitation in Green Energy Projects in Northern Uganda



Theresa Auma and Alex Ssebukalu

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Canada

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Introduction

The Preventive Legal Empowerment: Early Alert and Action to Strengthen Rights in the Context of Land-Based Investments in Uganda (registration number SS1115ES 2002–2025) project sought to preventively address conflicts related to land-based investments and elite capture of community lands. Rather than providing legal support after a land-based injustice has occurred. This project was designed to support communities to 1) proactively identify where investment-driven land conflicts may occur; 2) seek legal support as soon as they perceive this may be needed; and 3) engage with the potential conflict from a place of agency and legal empowerment—thereby ensuring that the conflict is avoided, the communities' land

rights are not transgressed, and harm does not occur.

The project explored how preventive legal empowerment support and conflict resolution strategies can help rural communities in Uganda to ensure that their land rights are respected, that communities do not suffer the negative impacts of land-based investments (in particular increased displacement, injustice, environmental degradation, impoverishment, and human rights abuses). It also sought to understand how preventive legal empowerment approaches can play a more proactive role in democratic, inclusive governance of land and land-based investments.

The project was implemented by Land and Equity Movement in

1. Dr. Theresa Auma is the Executive Director of LEMU, she was the Principal Investigator during this study.

2. Alex Ssebukalu is a Project Manager at LEMU, he was a research assistant during this case study

Uganda (LEMU) between January 2022 to May 2025, in collaboration with International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in the United Kingdom and with funding from International Development Research Center (IDRC). This action research study conducted fieldwork and advocacy initiatives to preemptively address conflicts between communities and investors over land. It utilized early warning hotlines and rapid response mechanisms, conflict hotspot mapping, and participatory monitoring of investor compliance. The study was conducted in 4 sub-regions of Uganda including Acholi, Karamoja, Lango and Teso covering over 15 districts. LEMU received over 48 land-based investment cases and over 1,000 related grievances and reached over 3,673 (2,045 males and 1,628 female) direct beneficiaries. This policy brief presents key findings of the project and their implications for policy.

This policy brief draws on the case study of Bukona Agro-Processing Factory, located in Koch-Goma sub-county, Nwoya district. The Uganda government launched “the cassava commercialization project” in 2017, through the Acholibur parish project and Bukona Agro-processing factory which were the two main avenues the government sought to use to eradicate poverty and cause a shift towards the use of green energy in northern Uganda³. This policy brief

presents a case study of the intricate relationship between Bukona Agro-processing factory and the local community of Koch-Goma sub-county in Nwoya district. To account for the implications of the investment from a more detailed examination, focusing on telling the story of the local community as a case study, the researchers collected empirical data drawing from the experience of the local community members, local leaders and the investment over a period of three years in order to draw on the ongoing changes on the ground. Data was collected between January 2022 and January 2025 through focus group discussions with men, women, youth and local leaders. Key informant interviews were conducted with laborers and the management of the factory, with the leaders of Koch-Goma sub-county and Nwoya district local government. Further data was collected through secondary sources such as newspapers, online news channels. By the end of the study, a total of about 220 individuals had participated in the study. The location of the green energy factory is Lapem village, Coo rom parish, Koch-Goma sub-county, Nwoya district, Northern Uganda.

3.<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/acholibur-cassava-processing-factory-project-seeks-shs42-billion-to-start-4745654>

This case study presents findings on the nature and extent of local community grievances as being related to displacement of land use patterns, exploitation of labour, environmental degradation and shows that the power imbalance between the investment company and the local community is reinforced by the interest of the Uganda government and those of the global and regional financial institutions that fund the investment in the name of promoting a just transition to green energy. This case study shows that open community dialogue can be an effective tool for preventive legal

empowerment as it enables community members to identify the stakeholders driving the conflict as well as those stakeholders that need to be brought on board to resolve the conflict. The paper concludes that the so-called “green transition,” happening in the community surrounding the Bukona Agro-processing Factory’s green energy project is actually an unjust transition, based on the level of exploitation and exclusion that is experienced by the local community in whose name the green energy transition is initiated and is being promoted.

Methodology

Research ethical standards

The study Preventive Legal Empowerment: Early Alert and Action to Strengthen Rights in the Context of Land-Based Investments was approved by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), registration number SS1115ES (2002–2025). The project proposal, data collection tools, and informed consent materials—translated into local languages relevant to the research sites—were also approved by the Makerere University College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Research and Ethics Committee (REC) with protocol number MUSSS-2021-81. The research ethics committee approved subsequent amendments to the study, including updated data collection and informed consent tools. LEMU submitted annual continuing review applications, supported by interim project reports. During data collection, LEMU researchers adhered to all the ethical standards and ensured written consent was obtained from research participants and confidentiality observed during data entry and analysis and reporting.

Presentation of Findings

1. Grievances around land and land use

In recent years, Uganda begun to experience the reality of the global hype about “green transition” in an economic context driven by capitalist-market imperatives through mainly Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). This case study arises from a foreign investment in the green energy sector in northern Uganda. In March 2022, the Bukoona Agro-Processing Factory was officially inaugurated by the President of Uganda, H.E. Yoweri K. Museveni, as a project aimed at providing financial opportunities for local farmers in the Acholi sub-region and meant to solve the energy transition question. To align with the promise of economic benefits, the President simultaneously launched the Acholibur Parish Project (APP), a related initiative also known as the Cassava Commercialization Project in Pader district. This initiative was designed to supply the necessary raw materials—cassava—for the production of ethanol at Bukoona Agro-Processing Industry⁴. The ethanol was intended to serve as a green fuel alternative to charcoal derived from burnt firewood, positioning the project as a nature-based solution to mitigate environmentally harmful practices. One of the major promises Bukoona used to woo the support of the Uganda government and local leaders was their pledged to purchase cassava from local farmers. This prompted widespread investment in

cassava cultivation across the Acholi region. However, despite this surge in production, the factory failed to establish a viable market for the locally harvested cassava.

This disconnect between presidential assurances and corporate commitments left the local community in a precarious situation, with large quantities of dried cassava remaining unsold. The resulting economic imbalance created a win-lose scenario: while Bukoona faced no financial losses, the rural farmers bore significant setbacks. They had allocated substantial portions of arable land to cassava cultivation at the expense of subsistence farming, leading to reduced household food security and diminished purchasing power. Instead, the company resorted to bulk purchase from the big business (middle) men who bid and supply the factory the required quantity. The prioritization of established businessmen as suppliers of dry cassava to the factory was the primary exclusion of the small-scale farmers from participating the green energy supply chain. Besides the factory, the Nwoya district local government in cooperation with the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) also created a false market by distributing cassava stem varieties, telling people to grow and supply the factory. To the utter dismay and disappointment of the local

Nile Post, Monday 30th October 2023: Cassava dreams turn to maize reality: The transformation of Uganda's Bukoona Agro-processors by Joseph Omagor: <https://nilepost.co.ug/business/176478/cassava-dreams-turn-to-maize-reality-the-transformation-of-ugandas-bukona-agro-processors>

small-scale farmers surrounding the factory in Lapem Parish, Koch-Goma sub-county, the cassava supplied by OVC was a type that rots within the first six months of planting, and as if that was not bad enough, the factory declined to buy cassava they produced and so many farmers got stranded with the cassava⁵.

Another dynamic of how the factory undermined local-farmers' position as suppliers involved the factory changing the rules about what type of cassava the factory would purchase. Initially, the factory stated that farmers would supply fresh cassava and factory workers would dry it, but later the rules were changed: the farmers were told to instead dry their cassava and sell to the factory and since they did not have the drying equipments, they delayed and the cassava all got rotten in the garden, the farmers then gave up growing cassava as a means of earning income and returned to other alternatives which included cutting trees for commercial charcoal production⁶.

The contestation around the Bukoona intervention having implications for both land rights and land use is that, much as the call for local farmers to grow cassava was not a direct form of land grabbing, the farmers argue that it was a new form of land grabbing (indirect land grabbing) because their land was rendered useless during the period they grew cassava since all their labour, land and time went to a waste after the factory declined to buy the

cassava produced solely for factory consumption. The farmers argue that contrary to the positive benefits of employment (through out-grower schemes) promised by the President of Uganda during the launch of the factory, they had ended up in famine and poverty because they did not grow other food crops necessary to their household survival during the time most of their land was used for growing cassava. Deprived of the expected financial returns from cassava sales, community members were compelled to revert to charcoal production through deforestation as a means of securing an alternative income. This outcome not only frustrated the objectives of the cassava commercialization initiative, but also exacerbated environmental degradation, highlighting the challenges of implementing large-scale agricultural projects without robust market guarantees

2. Grievances around pollution (water, land and air)

i) Water pollution: In a community meeting, community members described how the waste product from the factory had polluted the local Ayego river and killed aquatic life (different fish breeds, birds, snails, e.t.c). Human beings and animals that consumed the water were also reported sick. This same polluted water from Ayego river

5. Focus group discussion with community members in Lapem Parish, 6th January 2025

6. Focus group discussion with community members in Lapem Parish, 6th January 2025

drains into the River Nile, expanding the cycle of water pollution beyond the source of pollution itself.

ii) Air and land pollution: A terrible stench comes from the waste (molasses) that the factory deposits on the open ground (land pollution). Community members believe that this stench could cause some diseases to humans and animals, and has already lowered their quality of life as one cannot eat outside their house because the stench makes people to lose appetite. The community also believes that the air pollution (greenhouse emissions) is responsible for the long dry spell they are experiencing in their community. They demanded a scientific report as to whether the foul smell from the factory does not cause harm to both human, animal and plant health, because they had no explanation as to why their food crops in the gardens were getting rotten at very fast speed. The smell from the factory has attracted some strange insects that enters in people's eyes and food and this has destroyed social life both in public and in families as people can no longer sit and eat in the open, as noted by a young mother in the community "most people now eat food inside their mosquito nets" to prevent the strange insects from entering their food"⁷. The smell from the factory waste goes far, into square kilometers and the community is helpless. Even when the sub-county

tasked the factory management to bring an air quality testing machine to check the level of pollution, the factory failed to respond, making the issue of air pollution a permanent problem for the local community⁸.

3. Labour related grievances

The type of grievances around labour generated by the Bukona Agro-processing factory include; 1) non-payment of labour and supplies,

2) wasted labour of small scale farmers who grow cassava, 3) inter-tribal and inter-racial discrimination, and 4) fatal and disabling accident and injuries. These grievances are described below.

- i) Non-payment of supplies and labour, community members report that the factory takes some produce such as bricks from the local community members but is not forthright regarding payment, so the youth who make these supplies must struggle to get paid. In another scenario in 2024, local people went to plant maize in a farm owned by Bukona, but the factory management refused to pay them until three weeks later, when they saw that the maize had germinated⁹. The other conflict related to labour is around the wasted efforts local small-scale farmers put towards the growing of cassava that the company never

7. A woman during a focus group discussion with community members in Lapem Parish, 11th January 2025

8. Focus group discussion with Koch-Goma sub-county leaders, Koch-Goma sub-county headquarters, 7th January 2025

9. Focus group discussion with men in Lapem village, 12th January 2025

purchased, as already described above.

ii) Inter-racial and inter-tribal conflicts among the factory workers. Community members of Lapem parish lamented at how the workers at the factory are split according to tribes and are accorded differential treatment. It is common knowledge to the workers that the people who come from the local community or within Acholi are treated as a low class of workers, for example the Basoga who come from another branch of Bukoona in Iganga district receive appointment letters while the Acholi from within the community work without appointment letters. In many circumstances, labourers who come from outside Acholi are paid more wages, even if they have the same qualification and are doing the same job such as casual work¹⁰. The racial dimension of labour discrimination is that Indian workers are given employment contracts while most Ugandan workers and specifically those from Acholi are not given employment contracts¹¹.

iii) Death and injury as another dynamic of labour exploitation. Physical injuries, including fatal injuries have been reported at Bukoona Agro-processing factory. Local community members reported that so far, two people have died resulting from injuries at the factory while three people have had their fingers cut off, as a result of non-protective gears while on duty. A community member stated that “we are not sure if their families are compensated, but we now live with disabled people among us, and they got disabled at the factory”¹², and it is difficult for one to imagine compensation since the workers do not have appointment letters¹³. While examining community claims around injuries, the researchers found media reports of a young Indian Engineer¹⁴ who committed suicide at the factory in 2018 and the reason was related to work stress¹⁵; and also interacted with one of the accident victims who got injured in September 2022, while operating the factory boiler, leading to the amputation of his finger.

10. Data collection by LEMU researchers under the IDRC funded “preventive legal empowerment: early alert and action in the context of land based investments”. Data collected through community dialogue meetings and FGD with factory workers in 2023 and 2024.

11. Community meeting with labourers and community members in Lapem village, 22 October 2023

12. Focus group discussion with community members in Lapem Parish, 6th January 2025

13. Focus group discussion with community members, 6th January 2025

14. TND News, 25th October 2018. <https://tndnewsuganda.com/2018/10/25/indian-engineer-commits-suicide-due-to-workload/>

15. <https://www.pmldaily.com/news/crime/2018/10/indian-national-commits-suicide-over-heavy-work-load.html>

4. Contradictions in the funding of green energy project:

The Bukona factory management partnered with the government of Uganda and won two major projects recently. First, a GIZ project which focused on distributing clean energy cooking gadgets to 1,500 households at subsidized rates to 67%. This has increased the uptake of the company clean energy cooking products such as; biofuel (from cassava), green energy cooking stoves and pressure cooker. The second project is a four year World Bank funded project through the Government of Uganda's energy ministry, specifically channeled through the Uganda Energy Credit Capitalization Company (UECCC), which subsidizes Bukona's clean cooking initiative by subsidizing the cost of cooking stoves, bio-fuel and cooking equipment (pressure cooker) to make it affordable for hard to reach rural areas, such as the rural population of Acholi region. This project was launched in October 2024 and runs for four years, covering about 85 companies in Uganda promoting the use of solar and clean cooking. The company is also in the process of signing an MOU with one of the major banks in Uganda, so that bank clients can access to the clean energy cooking equipments through bank loans. To widen the market base of the green energy products, the factory is opening new outlets for selling the clean energy products in several new locations around the country, specifically in; Kampala, Fort Portal, Mbarara, Soroti, Arua, and Lira¹⁶. All these initiatives are deemed to increase the demand for the factory products and widen the market for the transition towards green energy. Despite the heavy financial support for the green energy

initiatives going on in northern Uganda, this case study has shown that the financing has not liberated the affected communities from the inherent nature of economic exploitation embedded in profit making companies. The global hype for the need to transition to green energy and the need for "economic development" has made the same global and national institutions that promote the advancement of human rights, responsible investments, and just transitions blind to the numerous forms of injustices faced by rural communities, as in this case of Koch-Goma in Nwoya district. Under these circumstances dominated by community grievances and unmet expectations, the ongoing green energy transition taking place in Northern Uganda becomes an unjust transition, profiteering investment companies and donors operating under "climate financing", while further impoverishing the local poor communities.

5. Local government unable to hold investment company accountable for non-compliance.

While the green energy initiative of Bukona agro-processing factory seems to appeal to the central government of Uganda and the donors, the study found that the local government leaders – represented by both the sub-county at Koch-Goma and district leaders at Nwoya district local government – are disgruntled by the lack of compliance with agreed MOUs, standards and principles that promote responsible investment, rural economic development and environmental protection. In their

¹⁶. Key informant interview with an employee of, Bukona Agro processors Ltd, factory premises in Koch-Goma sub-county, 7th January 2025

response to several community grievances, sub-county leaders state that they have made several efforts to engage with the factory management on several issues around due diligence to establish principles such as: Employment of the local population, Remittance of local taxes, Management of both water and air pollution, Ensuring that the quality of the fertilizers and animal feeds produced meets the nutritional requirements of animals they are produced for, the absorption of small-scale farmers into the supply chain of cassava, the engagement of the local population in growing of pine trees used by the factory for fuel wood so that the fuel wood can be locally supplied by the community in the future, and enforcement of the MOUs signed with the district.

However, the factory management has been dodgy and non-committal to any of the efforts by sub-county leadership¹⁷. In response, the factory management has used the following tactics:

- Denying critical information, excluding the community,
- Patronizing the community by allocating their development contribution such as water sources in the homes of local leaders who pay allegiance to them, rather than in the locations that would benefit the whole community,
- Denying access to their accounting records such as filing of returns,
- Refusing to provide scientific

machines to test air quality,

- Refusing to distribute tree seedlings to the local farmers,
- Ignoring the existing mous signed with the district, and
- Refusing to specify the nutritional value of the fertilizers and animals feeds produced¹⁸.

Despite these unmet expectations of the local government, the Nwoya district local government remain committed to their interest towards; Strengthening the local economy to increase district revenue; Ensuring that local farmers benefit from supplying the factory, rather than being limited to consuming its products; Revising and updating the initial Memorandum of Understanding (Mou) between the district, community, and Bukoona to reflect current needs; Seeking CSO support to revive the Investors Forum and build district officials' capacity to monitor investments¹⁹.

6. Where did things go wrong? Exclusion of local farmers in the design of the Cassava commercialization project in northern Uganda:

Bukoona Agro-Processing Industry's approach to the just transition fostered a master-servant dynamic in the region, where local farmers—the primary stakeholders—have been systematically sidelined in key strategic discussions and project design. Findings from focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and desk data reviews indicate that the very people expected to drive the transition were largely

17. Focus group discussion with Koch-Goma sub-county leaders, Koch-Goma sub-county headquarters, 7th January 2025

18. Focus group discussion with Koch-Goma sub-county leaders, Koch-Goma sub-county headquarters, 7th January 2025

19. Key informant interview with District Community Development Officer, Nwoya 11th February 2025

excluded from decision-making processes. Newspaper reports reveal that the feasibility study for the Acholibur Parish Project (APP) focused solely on the designated project site rather than assessing the overall relevance and sustainability of the initiative. Even district local governments were only involved at the stage of signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)²⁰, without prior consultation during the project's conceptualization and planning phases. This lack of inclusivity raises concerns about the transparency and participatory nature of the project's development. In an interview, the Chairperson of the Acholibur Parish Project (APP), admitted that the short life span of cassava forced them to sign the MOU with Bukoona to prevent the harvested crop from rotting in the fields. Similarly, the Director of Bukoona Industry, disclosed that the agreement to purchase cassava was negotiated with the diocese—not with the farmers themselves. According to him, the agreed purchasing rates were UGX 500 per kilogram for dried cassava and UGX 175 per kilogram for fresh cassava²¹. However, Susan Ayaa, one of the farmers, expressed frustration, stating that she had no choice but to sell her cassava to the industry at an unfair price out of fear that it would spoil²².

These developments highlight a fundamental flaw in project implementation: key decisions were made by government agencies such

as NAADS, Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), and the diocese—none of which engage in active farming. By excluding local farmers from the decision-making process, the project not only failed to ensure equitable economic benefits but also risked reinforcing the very practices it aimed to eliminate. Nature-based solutions that overlook the perspectives and livelihoods of host communities risk financial losses, conflict, and the persistence of environmentally harmful activities such as charcoal burning. Without genuine community engagement, sustainable development initiatives remain ineffective and potentially counterproductive. Like many land-based investments, Bukoona initially presented itself as a catalyst for economic security and social transformation. However, its shifting priorities have instead contributed to a series of socio-economic disruptions, including racial tensions, labor disputes²³, environmental degradation²⁴, economic exploitation, and worsening poverty and food insecurity. This case underscores the need for stringent regulatory frameworks and accountability mechanisms to ensure that large-scale investment projects, particularly those linked to rural livelihoods, do not exacerbate existing inequalities under the guise of sustainability. As a result, rather than alleviating poverty, the initiative exacerbated economic hardship. Farmers who had dedicated their resources and land to cassava production found themselves stranded with unsold crops, deepening financial

20. NAADS Website: NAADS signs MOU with Gulu Archdiocese to promote commercialization of Cassava in Northern Uganda: <https://naads.or.ug/naads-signs-mou-with-gulu-archdiocese-to-promote-commercialization-of-cassava-in-northern-uganda/>

21. Uganda Radio Network, 9th September 2019 (Text & Audio): 6900 Farmers in Pader Stuck with Cassava due to Market Scarcity: <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/6900-farmers-in-pader-stuck-with-cassava-due-to-market-scarcity?districtid=0>

22. Uganda Radio Network, 9th September 2019 (Text & Audio): 6900 Farmers in Pader Stuck with Cassava due to Market Scarcity: <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/6900-farmers-in-pader-stuck-with-cassava-due-to-market-scarcity?districtid=0>

23. Uganda Radio Network, 8th March 2023: Conveyor belt crashes Laborer to death in Nwoya: <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/conveyor-belt-crashes-laborer-to-death-in-nwoya>

24. Chimp Reports Blog, 21st March 2019: NEMA suspends operations of Nwoya Agro processing Company over water pollution:

distress across the northern districts. This failure underscores the risks of poorly coordinated agricultural commercialization projects, where policy-level commitments do not translate into sustainable market opportunities, leaving local farmers vulnerable to economic instability.

7. Why did community grievances remain unresolved over the years?

i) Poor coordination within the Nwoya local government (i.e sub-county local government versus district local government).

There are existing MOUS, signed between the Nwoya district local government and the Bukona Agro processors management, but the enforcement of this MOU by the sub-county local government has been impossible, as the sub-county leaders attest that they do not have copies of the MOUs, neither do they know when and how the MOUs are reviewed²⁵. Because of this, the sub-county has not been able to enforce the provisions of the MOUs, even when they are aware of possible breach, as evidenced by the community outcry.

ii) The counterproductive politics of district autonomy and the struggle for power:

At this stage, it is essential to examine the intersection of the Acholibur Parish Project (APP), spearheaded by Gulu Archdiocese in Pader district, and the Bukona Agro-Processing Industry located in Nwoya district. While the APP mobilized farmers to cultivate cassava on a

large scale with the expectation of supplying a starch factory, Bukona's ethanol production project sought to offer an environmentally friendly alternative to charcoal. However, despite their interdependence, both initiatives operated in isolation, particularly in relation to district local government structures. A lack of coordination with relevant authorities in both districts is evident in the testimonies of local officials. In a media interview, the Pader District Agriculture Officer, clarified that the APP project fell exclusively under the jurisdiction of Gulu Archdiocese, with Pader District serving merely as a partner without oversight authority. He stated: *"We are aware of the feasibility study conducted on the proposed site for the starch factory, but to date, as a district, we have not witnessed any development because we are not directly in charge; the church is responsible"*²⁶. The sidelining of local authorities not only undermines accountability but also limits the capacity of government institutions to ensure that development projects fulfill their intended socio-economic objectives. This case exemplifies broader governance challenges, where the exclusion of key stakeholders can lead to inefficiencies, unfulfilled promises, and negative socio-economic consequences for local communities.

iii) Government efforts to address community grievances yield minimal results:

The district has engaged in multiple discussions with the factory, even involving the

25. Focus group discussion with Koch-Goma sub-county leaders, Koch-Goma sub-county headquarters, 7th January 2025

26. Daily Monitor, August 31st, 2024: Acholibur cassava processing factory project seeks 42 billion to start: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/acholibur-cassava-processing-factory-project-seeks-shs42-billion-to-start-4745654>

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Water, to seek solutions²⁷. The conflict has persisted between Bukona factory management and the community because the factory is adamant in addressing these conflicts and the lack of effective communication channels. For example, the non-resolution of the persistent bad odor from the waste lagoons remains a primary concern. Even when the district invited the Permanent Secretary for Ministry Water and Environment to discuss possible solutions with Bukoona, the challenge still continues. In the ongoing negotiations between the Bukona factory, Nwoya district local government and the Uganda central government, local leaders report that they are aware of a waste management strategy being suggested by the Bukona factory management. For the short-term: Bukoona was advised to purchase an enzyme that accelerates waste decomposition, thereby reducing both the quantity and odor. For the mid-term: An assessment should be conducted to determine whether

waste byproducts can be converted into fertilizers for local farmers. For the long-term: Bukoona plans to install a modern waste dryer, with a facility already constructed. However, the machine costs UGX 2.5 billion, and the company has applied for funding from the Uganda Development Corporation to support its purchase²⁹. Bukoona is in the process of installing a large-scale dryer to manage waste more effectively and eventually distribute the byproducts as free fertilizers to the community³⁰.

iv) Lack of grievance redress mechanisms at the community level: The community has not been able to channel their grievances directly to the factory management, as they complain of lack of engagement forums with the factory management and a high level of secrecy in the way the factory operates its business. The community grievances are always channeled through the local and district leaders who have not done much to address the situation.

Conclusion

Despite the growing financial support for the green energy initiatives going on in northern Uganda, this case study has shown that the financing has not liberated the affected communities from the inherent nature of economic exploitation embedded in profit making companies. The global hype for the need to transition to green energy and the need for “economic development” has made the same global and national institutions that promote the advancement of human rights, responsible investments, and just transitions blind to the numerous forms of injustices faced by rural communities, as in this case of Koch-Goma in Nwoya district. Under these circumstances dominated by community grievances and unmet expectations, the ongoing green energy transition taking place in Northern Uganda becomes an unjust transition, profiteering investment companies and donors operating under “climate financing”, while further impoverishing the local poor communities.

27. Key informant interview with Nwoya district official, 10th February 2025

28. Key informant interview with District official, Nwoya, 10th February 2025

29. Key informant interview with District official, Nwoya, 10th February 2025

30. Key informant interview Local government official, Koch-Goma sub-county, Nwoya district, 11th February 2025

Recommendations

1. Improve small scale farmer participation in the green energy value chain.

To address the community outcry that they have been excluded from the supply chain of the factory, the researchers initiated a conversation between the factory management, the community, the sub-county and district leadership to mobilize the currently scattered farmers into groups into cooperatives so that they are able to grow cassava to the quantity required within Nwoya district to be supplied at the factory, this will help to cut off the middle men who currently exploit farmers through buying cassava cheaply and selling to the factory at higher prices due to their advantage of bulk buying. To aid community participation in the vertically integrated value chain, the factory should create cassava drying centers within the community so that the local farmers can harvest and dry their cassava and have it supplied to the factory as required. Farmers should be mobilized into cooperatives to enhance their bargaining power and facilitate bulk supply to Bukoona. NGOs working on this question, such as LEMU should help organize farmers into cooperatives to prevent exploitation by middlemen and enable direct sales to Bukoona at better prices.

2. Relevant stakeholders to work with the factory to enable the local

community be part of the green energy transition.

The study found that the local community members had not been introduced to, has not been made aware or given access to the green energy equipments being manufactured by their factory within their village. This left them out of the green energy transition, as they continued to cut trees for firewood and charcoal for both domestic consumption and commercial purposes as charcoal is seen as a source of income for many rural dwellers in Nwoya district. To address the situation, stakeholders should work create initiatives through which the local community can access the green energy equipment at affordable rates; such as exchange of cooking equipment with cassava or getting more funders to subsidize the cost of cooking equipment for communities. A successful shift would mean that the local community that currently cuts trees for charcoal for commercial purposes would transition to growing cassava (and earning from it) towards the production of bio-fuel for clean cooking. In this way, the initiative would be heating two birds – preventing cutting trees as a climate action and contributing to household income as a way of overcoming rural poverty – with one stone.

3. Improve coordination and collaboration with the local government and with other stakeholders

through the creation or strengthening of a multi-stakeholder platform through which all the actors

involved (community, factory, local government, donors, e.t.c) publicly share their grievances and sustainable solutions are discussed, agreed and implemented. This will include support towards the revival of the Nwoya District Investors Forum, which last convened in 2019 but has been inactive due to financial constraints.

4. Continuous engagement with the Bukona agro-processing factory to be accountable and address the environmental crisis caused in the locality of the factory establishment.

In the ongoing negotiations between the Bukona factory, Nwoya district local government and the Uganda central government, local leaders report that they are aware of a waste management strategy being suggested by the Bukona factory management. For the short-term: Bukoona was advised to purchase an enzyme that accelerates waste decomposition, thereby reducing both the quantity and odor. For the mid-term: An assessment should be conducted to determine whether waste byproducts can be converted into fertilizers for local farmers. For the long-term: Bukoona plans to install a

modern waste dryer, with a facility already constructed. However, the machine costs UGX 2.5 billion, and the company has applied for funding from the Uganda Development Corporation to support its purchase. Bukoona is in the process of installing a large-scale dryer to manage waste more effectively and eventually distribute the byproducts as free fertilizers to the community.

- The funders of the green energy projects should begin holding companies accountable for principles of responsible investments, such as those stated in the VGGTs should make their funding conditional to adherence to these principles. This will force investment companies to become compliant to these principles.
- A grievance redress framework should be developed to foster harmony between the investor, the community, and the district. This may include community sensitization to restore confidence of local farmers in cassava production. The district's capacity should also be strengthened to enable its active participation in the production value chain.

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Projects in Northern Uganda

Theresa Auma and Alex Ssebukalu

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PROJECT PHOTOS

