

2. Why is this issue so important

2.1. There is an increasing need for economic development in the Albertine Rift countries



The Albertine Rift countries, like any other developing countries in Sub-Saharan region, are striving to improve on economic development for the wellbeing of their people. According to the African Economic Outlook 2013, agricultural activities, mining and energy resources (Including oil and Gas) are listed as the top areas that could boost the continent's economic growth and pave the way for a breakthrough in human development. Mostly, these projects are targeting the ecosystems shared by one or more countries in Albertine Rift and are undertaken at a scale that may critically damage environment and affect the ecosystem services provision. The consideration of transboundary issue and harmonised environmental assessment regulations will help to ensure the sustainable development in the Albertine Rift countries.

2.2. Albertine Rift, one of the target of international investors in extractive industries



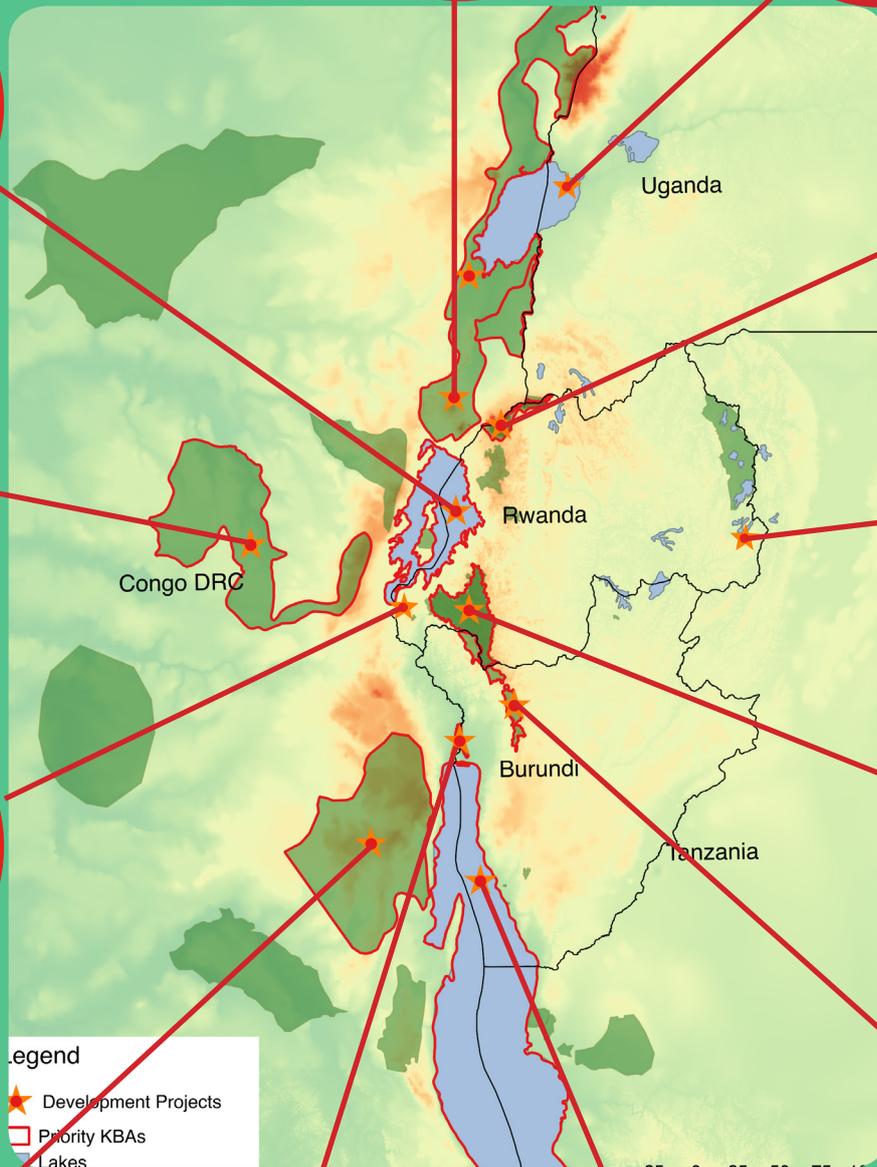
The Albertine Rift is increasingly becoming a potential target for western investors in terms of extractive industry such as oil and gas exploitation, and mining. In the recent past, drilling activities were initiated in most of the Albertine Rift Lakes and in Virunga National Park with success in some of the lakes especially in western Uganda in Lake Albert and Edward. In some other lakes such as Lake Kivu in western Rwanda, exploitation of Gas methane have already started. Also, mining activities are now taking place in many areas of the Albertine rift , particularly in the eastern DRC where natural ecosystems are highly targeted. Most of these activities are highly damaging and need a special assessment before their implementation as well as proposed alternatives and mitigation measures.

2.3. Albertine Rift is a global Biodiversity Hotspot



As earlier mentioned, the Albertine Rift is one of the most important regions for conservation in Africa. For example, it contains more vertebrate species than any other region on the continent and contains more endemic species of vertebrate than any other region on mainland Africa. The Albertine Rift Afromontane forests also support many endangered species such as the Mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*), which are among the most charismatic flagship species in Africa. As a result, this region has been identified by many key international conservation NGOs as a top priority area for biodiversity conservation in Africa. Many of the proposed development projects targeting these areas, have a high potential to convert the natural ecosystems into other form of land use while destroying animal habitat with a big risk to loose both plant and animal species endemic to this region. Hence, the need to pay a special attention in welcoming some development projects to this region.

KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS UNDER PRESSURE IN THE ALBERTINE RIFT



Oil explorations have been threatening the Virunga National Park, being one of the oldest in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Africa

The Government of Uganda is planning to exploit oil in the bloc NGANJI found in Lake Eduard. This lake is part of the Virunga National Park on the side of DRC

In Lake Kivu the extraction of methane to produce gas and electricity has started. Kibuye Power1 produces 2.5 MGW. Since 2012, Vanoil Energy Ltd conducted seismic survey and discovered the trace of oil crude; the studies still going on

In Volcanoes National park, a cable car project was proposed by the government of Rwanda. The project will be on Mountain Karisimbi, will include all necessary cable car infrastructures, for safe usage of cable cars by tourists.

Around Kahuzi-Biega National Park the company, LA Societe Banro is starting some mining projects and road constructions

A Hydropower project is being developed on Akagera river. The dam and power station will be situated at the Rusumo Falls where the Kagera River forms the boundary between Tanzania and Rwanda, and about two kilometres downstream of the river's confluence with Ruvubu River. The project is envisaged to equally distribute, the 90MW to be produced, to Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania

The Hydropower project named Ruzizi III is being implemented under CEPGL umbrella for Rwanda, Burundi and DRC. The project is planned to generate 145MW and consist of 105 m long dam crest whose height is 20.5 m, 2.82 km Headrace Tunnel and a surface power station with 3x50 MW Francis Units

In Nyungwe National Park, a government project of road construction/repairation is being implemented by Chinese company. Also, WASAC is proposing a project of water abstraction in Nyungwe to supply communities in Nyaruguru district

In the Itombwe Mountains, La Societe Banro also started with mining and road construction

In Rusizi National Park near the Burundian capital Bujumbura the Tanganyika Business Company is extending its commercial agriculture of sugar cane plantations

In Lake Tanganyika different companies including an Australia's oil and gas exploration company, Beach Energy Limited have started oil drilling activities

In Kibira National Park the government's project to build hydropower is being implemented by a Chinese company

3. Existing policy efforts and gaps in Environmental Assessment in Albertine Rift

Tremendous efforts to develop and review the policy, legal and institutional frameworks in all the Albertine Rift countries have been made for the sustainable management of the environment. Particularly, legal documents guiding the designing and implementation of development projects were so far put in place (to certain extent depending on the country). Some example, include environmental policies, general and specific EIA guidelines, etc.

However, a gap is still existing in the management of development projects that affect the shared ecosystems. The existing frameworks guiding the Environmental Impact Assessment of such projects are to some extents inadequate, not harmonized, and where harmonization attempts have been initiated, the pace is slow. Currently, important developments/initiatives are emerging in some of the transboundary ecosystems, (e.g. Greater Virunga) but the mandate of the transboundary collaboration institutions is limited over the control of such projects. Furthermore, though the Albertine Rift countries have their own national environment assessment regimes, with some dynamics to consider transboundary issues, there is still need for the region to have harmonised environment assessment policies, regulations, procedures and guidelines for shared ecosystems.

At East Africa region level, which covers a big part of the Albertine Rift, the need to provide common environmental assessment policies is underlined in the Treaty establishing the East African Community (EAC). It is for this reason that in 2005 EAC has developed the Regional Environment Assessment Guidelines for Shared Ecosystems in East Africa. However, this was only concerning the 3 partner states, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, before Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan joined.

4. Policy recommendations for more effective environmental assessment in transboundary ecosystems of Albertine Rift

Given the rapid increasing development activities in the Albertine Rift countries most of which targeting the KBAs with the risk to irreversibly loose many of the endemic species and a variety of ecosystem services; also, given the need for Albertine Rift countries to sustainably increase their economic growth and while meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreements, the following action points were recommended:

- *To harmonise the environmental assessment policies, regulations, procedures and guidelines for shared ecosystems in the Albertine Rift region.*
- *To develop specific Environmental Impact Assessment guidelines for project targeting transboundary ecosystems.*
- *To develop sector specific guidelines for countries which only have general EIA guidelines*
- *To update the existing East Africa transboundary environmental assessment guidelines for shared ecosystems by extending it to the five partner states.*
- *To create a platform for public participation in Environmental Impact Assessment in transboundary ecosystems.*



The present policy brief is produced by the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS) as part of the project “Civil Society Alliance for enhanced implementation of EIAs in the key biodiversity Areas of the Albertine Rift region” with generous support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF).

