

## CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT: Uganda - 17.10.2024

## Opportunities, Challenges and Options in Transforming Livelihoods Through Clean Energy Access in Nebbi District.



*Yellow Power Women's group in Nebbi subcounty*



*Innovation - modified shielded firewood stove  
by Yellow Power Women's group in Nebbi  
subcounty*

### SUMMARY

- 1. The biomass resource in Nebbi district is fast reducing** due to pressure to extract wood beyond natural replenishment for commercial timber, fuel wood, charcoal production, and clearance for agriculture and pasture improvement. **Approximately 100% of the population relies on biomass energy resources for cooking.** Nebbi district is also faced with critical challenges of **access to renewable energy connection to hydro-electric power at 5.5%.**
2. Furthermore, **migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo and districts bordering Nebbi which straddles from Akworo sub county, Parombo, Erussi and Nebbi sub county have resulted in undue pressure** on social services such as health, education, water, environment and other livelihoods
- 3. Through the Climate Action for Improved and Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISL) project intervention (2023-2024),** Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP) and Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD) in partnership with the Nordic Folkecentre for Renewable Energy have a primary target group of 2,296 persons (60% youth of 18-30 years), 30% women of 31-45 years and above) and 10% men who have been selected as Trainers of Trainers in their communities.
4. JEEP and UCSD as partners have prepared **this Civil Society statement to contribute to discussions during the Renewable Energy Conference 2024 and Expo (REC24 & Expo) to take place from 31st October to 2nd November, 2024 at the Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort, Kampala-Uganda under the theme "Transforming Livelihoods Through Clean Energy Access", with reference to the energy situation in Nebbi district (Padwot and Nebbi Subcounties).**
5. The Statement summarizes experiences and emerging issues from implementation of the CAISAL project that call for attention of Nebbi District Local Government (DLG), the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, the Ministry of Water and Environment, development partners, CSOs and other actors.
6. It is a result of a review of project reports and other literature, interviews were held in August 2024 with 25 persons including the Nebbi District Local Government (DLG) staff, Focus Group Discussions with: Padwot subcounty leaders, JEEP's Green Ambassador's Club (youths) from Nebbi and Padwot subcounties, and representatives from the Yellow Power Women's Group in Nebbi sub county.

7. It includes **issues from JEEP nd Nebbi District Local Government representatives as well as Youths, Women and other stakeholders in Nebbi and Padwot Sub counties**
8. Based on the above issues, proposals for action to promote clean energy in Nebbi district are put forward including the following:
  - a. The **Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS)** should **scale up its operations to regulate counterfeits in solar energy equipment** that frustrate communities yearning for clean energy options
  - b. The **Ministry of Water and Environment, Nebbi DLG** should **support a continuous tree growing campaign in Nebbi district** (for example in partnership with other actors) by all including women and youths to restore vegetation cover and secure a future supply of biomass energy for Padwot, Nebbi and other parts of the district.
  - c. The **Uganda Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA)** should **review the electricity tariff rates and lower connection fees in West Nile, to incentivize wider use of electricity** for lighting, cooking (for example introduction of a cooking tariff), and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in urban areas
  - d. **Nebbi DLG** should increase community awareness on the **potential of biogas as a clean cooking alternative at household level and for institutions**
  - e. The **Ministry of Energy and Mineral development** should also **roll out the One million free LPG cooking kits campaign to Nebbi district**
  - f. **Development actors in Nebbi district** should as part of their project interventions, **act in consonance to support the Nebbi District Multi-hazard Contingency Plan: 2019/20 - 2024/25.**

## INTRODUCTION

Nebbi District is located in the North-western part of Uganda between 02 27N, 31 15E (Latitude: 2.4500 and Longitude: 31.2500) with an altitude ranging from 2289 ft to 5224 ft above sea level. It is bordered by Madi Okolo District to the North, Zombo District to the west, Pakwach District to the East and Democratic Republic of Congo to the South. The District headquarters is situated in Nebbi Municipal Council which is approximately 450 Kilometres from Kampala, the Capital City of Uganda. Nebbi District has a total area of about 1,047.9 Sq.km, of which land area is 985 Sq.km and 62.9 Sq.km is under water. 86.5% is arable land, 7.5% is occupied by forest reserves, 6% wetlands and surface water. Nebbi is blessed with the presence of River Nile, Lake Albert and up to 15 key wetlands.

Forest reserves cover 4,568 hectares of which 4,387 hectares are central forest reserves controlled and managed by the National Forestry Authority (NFA) while only 181 hectares are community and Local Forest Reserves (LFR) managed by the District Forestry Services (Nebbi district Local Government, 2019). These resources serve Nebbi's population of 306,300 people (149,400 males, 156,900 females) based on the 2023 projection. Nebbi's population density stands at 311 people per square kilometre, higher than the national average of 250 per square kilometre. (Nebbi District Multi-hazard Contingency Plan, 2023/24 - 2024/25 & worldometers.info)

Hence, the biomass resource in Nebbi district is fast reducing due to pressure to extract wood beyond natural replenishment for commercial timber, fuel wood, charcoal production, and clearance for agriculture and pasture improvement. In fact, approximately 100% of the population relies on biomass energy resources for cooking (Nebbi district Local Government, 2019).

Nebbi district is also faced with critical challenges of access to renewable energy connection to hydro-electric power are limited to 5.5%. For lighting 64.1% of the population use kerosene, 21.9% use solar and 1.6% use hydropower (Nebbi district Local Government, 2019). Furthermore, migration from the Democratic Republic of Congo and districts bordering Nebbi which straddles from Akworo sub county, Parambo, Erussi and Nebbi sub county have experienced influx that is visibly seen in rural growth trading centres and towns. This unregistered influx of immigrants has caused undue pressure on social services such as health, education, water, environment and other livelihoods (Nebbi District Multi-hazard Contingency Plan, 2023/24 - 2024/25)

Through the Climate Action for Improved and Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISL) project intervention (2019-2024), Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP) and Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD) in partnership with the Nordic Folkecentre for Renewable Energy (See Box 1 below) have a primary target group of 2,296 persons (60% youth of 18-30 years), 30% women of 31-45 years and above) and 10% men who have been selected as Training of Trainers in their communities.

The CAISL project is expected to benefit 60,280 individuals as secondary target group within Nebbi district including community members, national decision makers, similar minded CSOs, children and youth in schools.

At the launch of the Green Manifesto in August 2024, which is one of the activities under the CAISL project, the District Community Development Officer for Nebbi District – Mr Peter Okiria who was also the Guest of Honor, expressed fear on consequences of people especially women that walk long distance into the Murchison Falls National Park in search of firewood, as they risk being grabbed by wild animals while they have no compensation under the law. The Nebbi District Probation Officer – Ms. Ayiorwoth Yerusa who was also in attendance, noted that energy poverty in the area is real and is one of the biggest constraint to poverty reduction. She reported that, ‘There are no more trees for cooking, making it a burden for women to move very long distances in search for wood, which they sometimes even fail to get’.



A Girl carrying firewood in Akworo sub county

### Box 1: About the CAISL Project in Nebbi #MakeNebbiGreen

The Climate Action for Improved and Sustainable Livelihoods (CAISL) Project in Nebbi District (West Nile) is working towards promotion of sustainable local energy solutions and improved livelihoods for poor rural communities in Nebbi district with funding from Civil Society in Development (CISU) and Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy (NFRE)- Denmark. It has duration of 18 months (July 2023 – December 2024). **The goal of the intervention is to make Nebbi a model district in climate mitigation measures, community resilience, and accessibility to local sustainable solutions and advocacy skills. The CAISL project target area includes 11 sub counties and 2 Town Councils.**

The Project activities that seek to contribute to the Global Goals (SDGs): 1 No Poverty, 5 Gender Equality, 7 Affordable and Clean energy, 13 Climate action, and 17 Partnerships for the goals include: **clean up campaigns, energy hub exhibitions, radio talk shows, airing of radio spot messages, community mobilization drives, training in construction of fireless basket cookers, training in environmental rights and climate action, training in construction of energy saving stoves, support to two community tree nurseries, installation of LED lights in two schools, advocating for investment in agricultural enterprises which utilize climate - smart farming practices and appropriate technology for value-addition with energy efficiency, and monitoring visits**

JEEP and UCSD as partners have prepared this Civil Society statement to contribute to discussions during the Renewable Energy Conference 2024 and Expo (REC24 & Expo under the theme “Transforming Livelihoods Through Clean Energy Access” with reference to the energy situation in Nebbi district (Padwot and Nebbi Sub counties), to take place from 31st October to 2nd November, 2024 at the Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort, Kampala.

The Statement summarises experiences and emerging issues from implementation of the CAISL project that call for attention of Nebbi District Local Government, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, the Ministry of Water and Environment, development partners, CSOs and other actors.

It is a result of a review of project reports and other literature, interviews with 25 persons including the Nebbi District Local Government staff (Nebbi Energy Officer and District Natural Resources Officer), Focus Group Discussions with: youths in Nebbi and Padwot, Padwot sub county leaders, JEEP's Green Ambassador's Club (youths) from Nebbi and Padwot sub counties, and representatives from the Yellow Power Women's Group in Nebbi sub county. This was carried out in August 2024.

The choice of Padwot sub county (with total population of 13,300 of which 6,400 are males and 16,000 females) is a result of the interaction and feedback from the CAISL project beneficiaries' to JEEP about the worsening energy situation in the area due to heavy clearance of trees for home and commercial use with few interventions to offset this trend. For Nebbi sub county (with total population of 31,600 of which 15,600

are males and 16,000 females), the choice was due to the enthusiastic and energetic Yellow Power Women's Group that among others has resolved to secure that all their members benefit from the training of trainers outreach on improved cookstoves, the fireless basket cooker and other energy saving technologies and practices.

The Nebbi District Multi-hazard Contingency Plan (2023/24 - 2024/25), further points out that both Padwot and Nebbi sub counties are prone to prolonged dry spell / drought resulting in food insecurity, insufficient water for animals and human consumption. They are also susceptible to floods resulting in destruction of infrastructure (roads rendered impassable, etc.), loss and damage to crops and animals. This drives communities to depend more on nature, cutting down trees as a viable option to earn a living but also to secure steady supply of firewood for their households.

### Energy Issues from JEEP and Nebbi DLG representatives

- There is widespread use of firewood, charcoal for cooking in urban centres and towns across Nebbi district. Use of solar lamps is high as many households are not connected to the main electricity grid. Some still use the Kerosene tin wick lamps (*Tadooba*) for lighting.
- Charcoal burning is still rampant with people involved coming from as far as DR Congo.
- In Padwot sub county, the practice of tree planting is low, whereas large swathes of land lie bare due to bushfires for hunting wild animals, for agricultural expansion and fresh pastures.
- The growing population that demands firewood and charcoal for cooking is resulting in degradation of landscapes in Nebbi. For example, Acwera Local Forest Reserve is set alight annually due to bushfires started by reckless people.
- Women trek long distances (whole days' work) searching for firewood from Nebbi sub county to as far as Kucwiny and some to Murchison Falls National Park with potential risks including attacks by wild animals.
- Nebbi DLG has a Renewable Energy access Strategy: 2019/20 – 2024 /25 which guides actors on investment and actions in the renewable energy subsector. Under this a District Renewable Energy Forum has been held every year involving private sector, CSOs, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, GIZ and other development agencies, where reviews and experiences and learning points have been picked. Review of this strategy is planned soon to identify progress made, lessons learnt, constraints and the way forward.

*'It is now common to find a household of elderly persons with food but no firewood to cook'- JEEP staff*

- Despite the enthusiasm for communities to adopt solar lighting, counterfeits remain a challenge, and there is no credible system to track them. The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) standards are basic resulting in compromises; moreover despite its national mandate its presence is minimal.
- Overall, in the period 2020 – 2024, over 1,800 community members (some as TOTs) have been sensitized and trained in Nebbi district on energy stoves, briquette making, solar lighting, *Sistema* biogas for schools and institutions and related issues across Nebbi district. This includes JEEP's interventions under the (previous) EASE-CA and the CAISL projects has also supported.
- Nebbi DLG has also supported planting of about 250,000 timber, fruit and firewood tree species along road serves in the district
- All the ten Government-aided schools in Nebbi district that prepare meals have been provided with Institutional energy saving cookstoves. Maintenance of the stoves is the responsibility of the Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) working in collaboration with the service providers
- Stove dissemination in Padwot has been slow due to poor mindset that the stoves are hectic to construct, their kitchens are small and people demanding to be paid for collecting local materials (water, grass, soil)

before being trained by the TOTs. Similar lukewarm experiences have been noted for biogas in schools due to low affordability and a negative mindset.

- Demand for tree seedlings is high but there are challenges of water stress at the nurseries that have been set up due to the prolonged dry spell / drought
- The Community mobilization drives, clean up exercises and the energy hub exhibitions coordinated by JEEP have enabled additional outreach to community members that would have otherwise been hard to reach. This is an opportunity to share challenges like energy and water scarcity, options available including the need to move away from the three-stone fire place to adopt improved cookstoves, other options like solar lamps, fireless basket cooker, etc.

- JEEP has taken advantage of the progressive leadership to promote the improved stoves and their technologies. For example, Ms. Nikum Peace Anen - the sub county chief of Alala convinced leaders to have improved stoves in their homes and to invite their neighbours to come when they start using them to testify their advantages. Furthermore, public talks about the energy challenges and options are held as part of meetings on the Parish Development Model (PDM) programme, for beneficiaries to take local action in adopting solutions like energy efficient cookstoves, fireless baskets and the solar lamps as part of its pillar 7 (mind-set change). They believe programme beneficiaries will increase chances for investing the availed resources in poverty reduction rather than buying firewood or charcoal (that is a key immediate need for many households).

## Energy Issues from Youths, Women and other stakeholders in Nebbi and Padwot Sub counties



A boy carrying firewood near Nyaravur town

*'Due to firewood scarcity, when harvesting cassava, instead of taking the food (root tubers) home first, urgency is to take the cassava stems that have to be debarked for cooking after drying for about two days. If they are not taken away in time, others will fetch them' - JEEP Green Ambassador (JGAC) Woman Youth respondent*

- Scarcity of firewood makes women to walk long distances (about 4-5 kilometres) from 6:00 am to 8:00pm in search of it with various risks on the process including attack by wild animals, but rape cases have also been reported. In addition, women are not allowed to fetch firewood including tree stumps dug out from people's farms, without permission. As a result there are growing conflicts related to collection of firewood. Worse still, the firewood may still be wet
- Digging out tree stumps as firewood means trees that sprout are not lost for ever, and when efforts to plant trees are limited or none, landscapes are left bare.
- Leaders in Padwot and Nebbi sub counties are not adequately 'walking the talk' in dissemination of the improved stoves, fireless basket cooker and other technologies, tree growing, etc.
- In Padwot Sub County, vegetation cover has reduced substantially due to demand for firewood, expansion of farmlands, which leaves soil to be susceptible to erosion. Whereas the electricity grid passes within Padwot sub county (in Olago), there are no connections The option of using inferior fuels is now
- The indigenous Sheanut tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) is a culturally restricted in use for firewood, charcoal production and other uses, so people are not allowed to cut it down. Failure to abide results in a penalty of 2 goats by cultural leaders. As a hostile response, some people are reportedly not willing to plant or allow it to naturally grow on their land.
- Restrictions in tree cutting now apply. For example those with trees only allow branches to be removed but not the entire tree.
- Innovations have also come up in the stoves. For example, Yellow Power Women's group has modified the transferable shielded cook stove (given floods that inundate kitchens and houses) that uses both firewood and charcoal by inserting a used bicycle sprocket as a grate, and have named it 'Anyonga Pa Megu' (Mother's joy). This modified stove uses less charcoal and reduction in cost has been reported if the household uses the fireless basket together with it.
- In order to meet communal needs like cooking food at funerals, individual households are being asked to contribute firewood in kind if they do not have any contribution in money terms.

common. For example, households use grass, maize and sorghum stover, cassava stems after debarking for faster drying (though reportedly yields excess smoke when cooking). In addition, some people cut and dry a common weed called 'Azungulu' (*Ageratum conyzoides*) as cooking fuel due to the growing firewood scarcity. Use of the kerosene lamp (tadooba) for lighting is still rampant, while lack of lights in many households limits children to study after school.

- Currently an average household needs about 10 pieces of firewood cost ugshs 7,000 or a basin of charcoal costs between Ugshs 8,000 – 10,000 per day, depending on quality and source.

*'Given the high cost of charcoal, I cook once from 10:00am - noon with charcoal of only Ugshs 500, and preserve the food in a fireless basket cooker' - JEEP Green Ambassador (JGAC) Woman Youth respondent*



1. **The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) should scale up its operations to regulate counterfeits in solar energy equipment that frustrate communities yearning for clean energy options for lighting, cooking, charging phones, etc., as few are connected to the main grid.**
2. **The Ministry of Water and Environment, Nebbi DLG should support a continuous tree growing campaign in Nebbi district (for example in partnership with other actors) by all including women and youths to restore vegetation cover and secure a future supply of biomass energy for Padwot, Nebbi and other parts of the district:**
  - a. Support tree nurseries that are closer to communities to reduce the current transport and other inherent costs incurred in delivery of tree seedlings in Padwot and other sub counties
  - b. Upscale efforts of youth groups recommended by agricultural officers and leaders, that have established tree nurseries

3. **The Uganda Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) should review the electricity tariff rates and lower connection fees in West Nile, to incentivize wider use of electricity for lighting, cooking (for example introduction of a cooking tariff), and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in urban areas.** This will reduce the current heavy dependence on firewood and charcoal. For example, outside West Nile / Nebbi for July-September 2024, UMEME limited charged ugshs 250 each for the first 15 kWh in a month, exclusive of VAT (for a domestic single use 240 volts); units between 16 -80 kWh was ugshs 803 each; units between 81-150 fell to ugshs 412 (cooking tariff) each and above 150kWh was ugshs 803 each. On the other side, for the supply of electrical energy to the same customer base for the second Quarter (April-June 2024), West Nile Rural Electrification Company Limited (WENRECo) charged (exclusive of VAT) ugshs 250 each for the first 8 kWh only, and a flat rate of ugshs 805 each above this (plus a monthly service fee of ugshs 3,360). In addition for new connections requiring

- a pole, each one costs Ugshs 2,400,000 which is unaffordable to many potential users in Nebbi.
4. **The Ministry of Energy and Mineral development should also roll out the One million free LPG cooking kits campaign to Nebbi district** to trigger switch from using biomass for cooking to modern energy sources.
  5. **Development actors in Nebbi district should as part of their project interventions, act in consonance to support the Nebbi District Multi-hazard Contingency Plan: 2019/20 - 2024/25** that highlight previous experiences and anticipated disasters (for example droughts, floods, lightening) Disasters are already undoing development progress in agriculture, livelihoods, housing, WASH, and stove dissemination. This calls for effective preparedness, mitigation and prevention approaches and to strengthen coordinated disaster response mechanisms.
  6. **Nebbi DLG and other development partners should pool resources to mobilise communities to address the energy poverty challenge:**
    - a. Support cross visits to expose selected community members for examplesubcounty leadership, women and youths leader, opinion religious and cultural leaders) to another community within or outside Nebbi district that has done well and so as to increase the stove adoption rate, and to motivate augmented tree growing especially by men, who own family land in Padwot and Nebbi sub counties.
    - b. Sustain the Radio spot messages that have been appreciated by communities as afar as Arua, Pakwach, Zombo. In addition, radio talk shows involving community members, Nebbi District Local Government (DLG), JEEP Green Ambassador's Club, youths and women representatives and nursery operators on global thematic days (Wetlands, Water, Women, Environment, and Food) have received positive reception.
    - c. Support the Training of Trainers and community champions (especially local leaders, youth and women) to sensitize, train, inspire and advocate for change in behaviour, attitudes and mind-sets towards improved and sustainable livelihoods; demonstration, construction of energy saving stoves, popularise use of the fireless basket cooker and other clean cooking options, as well as local seed collection and tree growing.
    - d. Make use of and sustain the community mobilization drives, energy hubs and clean up exercises that have enabled engagement of people who would be hard to reach in formal meeting settings due to socio-cultural, logistical limitations. This will show case options including energy saving stoves, electric pressure cooking, household solar light systems, biogas, and efficient energy devices to a wider audience in Nebbi district.
    - e. Organise and institutionalise modalities for regular joint field visits by Nebbi DLG (DNR and DCDO), CSOs and other development actors to projects being implemented for monitoring, learning and sharing experiences harmonisation of stoves standards and project exit mechanisms, incentives to communities for promoting cook stoves and pooling resources. For example, making use of TOTs trained, tree seed collection and provision of the desired types and quantities of indigenous tree seedlings on time.
    - f. Full implementation of existing laws and bye laws regarding the environment and natural resources including bush burning
  7. Through the periodic **Nebbi District Renewable Energy Forum** (perhaps to be held at least every six months), CSOs and other development actors **should build on the on-going Government Programmes like PDM, GROW project, YES to flag out energy poverty as a development issue that warrants constant and logical interventions.**
  8. Nebbi DLG and development partners should promote renewable energy alternatives through **setting up demonstration sites at household and institutional levels for foster learning and adoption including emphasis on energy trees, options for carbonised and non-carbonised briquettes from agro waste.** This can be speeded up by the community champions like the JGAC, cultural, religious and other opinion leaders.
  9. **Government should deconcentrate its (renewable) energy sector operations to district level beyond having focal persons/ personnel,** in order to cultivate stronger political will and to increase opportunities for resource allocation and mobilization. This also calls for development partners to support energy activities in Nebbi DLG that have hitherto been born by GIZ.



Shea nut tree seedlings at one of the community nurseries supported by the CAISL project

## REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING

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## AUTHORS:

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**CAISL Project Coordinator - Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP)**

Email: [sylvnalu@gmail.com](mailto:sylvnalu@gmail.com) / Tel: +256 (414) 578 316 / +256 (772) 468 662

**Programme Manager - Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD)**

Email: [rkimbowa@ugandacoalition.or.ug](mailto:rkimbowa@ugandacoalition.or.ug) / Tel: +256 772 457465

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