

# **Oil and Gas Extraction in Africa: Employing ESG Tenets for Sustainability and Conflict Management**

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**Kariuki Muigua**

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**Oil and Gas Extraction in Africa: Employing ESG Tenets for Sustainability and Conflict Management**

**Kariuki Muigua\***

**Abstract**

*This paper discusses how sustainability and conflict management can be infused in the oil and gas sector in Africa. The paper notes that Africa has a rich oil and gas sector due to the availability of viable deposits of these vital natural resources in the continent. It posits that Africa's rich oil and gas industry has the potential to drive economic growth and human progress in the continent. However, the paper notes that Africa is yet to harness full benefits from its rich oil and gas sector. The paper observes that unsustainable extraction of oil and gas in Africa is fuelling several challenges including human right violations, environmental degradation and conflicts. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that achieving sustainability in the oil and gas sector in Africa is*

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\* PhD in Law (Nrb),SC, FCI Arb (Chartered Arbitrator),OGW, LL. B (Hons) Nrb, LL.M (Environmental Law) Nrb; Dip. In Law (KSL); FCPS (K); Dip. in Arbitration (UK); MKIM; Mediator; Consultant: Lead expert EIA/EA NEMA; BSI ISO/IEC 27001:2005 ISMS Lead Auditor/ Implementer; ESG Consultant; Advocate of the High Court of Kenya; Professor of Environmental Law and Conflict Management at the University of Nairobi, Faculty of Law; Member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) [December, 2025].

*an imperative for the continent's development. The paper examines how Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) tenets can be employed for sustainability and conflict management in the oil and gas sector in Africa for development.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Oil and gas are vital natural resources that play a key role in the global economy. These resources, which are also referred to as fossil fuels, originate from plants and animals that existed in the geological past<sup>1</sup>. Oil and gas alongside coal, are referred to as fossil fuels since they are mixtures of hydrocarbons that formed from the remains of animals and plants that existed millions of years ago<sup>2</sup>. It has been observed that all fossil fuels including oil, gas and coal contain carbon and were formed as a result of geologic processes acting on the remains of organic matter<sup>3</sup>.

Oil and gas in addition to other fossil fuels are integral in global economic development. When fossil fuels are burned, they release heat<sup>4</sup>. As a result, oil and gas play an important role in global energy supply. For example, it estimated that fossil fuels provide nearly 80 percent of global energy supply<sup>5</sup>. Fossil fuels including oil and gas have been powering global economies for many decades and still supply most of the world's energy<sup>6</sup>. It has been observed that energy derived from oil and gas has been a fundamental driver of global technological, social and economic development<sup>7</sup>. This energy is essential for transportation, industrial processes and household energy demands thus driving human progress and development<sup>8</sup>.

Fossil fuels such as oil and gas therefore play an important role in the global economy. It has been observed that since the industrial revolution, energy has always been a key

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<sup>1</sup> Glossary: Fossil Fuel., Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Fossil\\_fuel](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Fossil_fuel) (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>2</sup> Oil and Petroleum Products Explained., Available at <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/oil-and-petroleum-products/> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>3</sup> Fossil Fuel., Available at <https://www.britannica.com/science/fossil-fuel> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'What is the sustainable energy transition and why is it key to tackling climate change?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-sustainable-energy-transition-and-why-it-key-tackling-climate-change#:~:text=sustainable%20energy%20transition?-.The%20sustainable%20energy%20transition%20is%20a%20transformative%20shift%20in%20how,equity%2C%20inclusion%20and%20human%20development.> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>6</sup> Fossil Fuels., Available at <https://www.eesi.org/topics/fossil-fuels/description> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>7</sup> Fossil Fuels., Available at <https://ourworldindata.org/fossil-fuels> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>8</sup> McClay. R., 'Understanding the Oil and Gas Industry: A Comprehensive Overview' Available at <https://www.investopedia.com/investing/oil-gas-industry-overview/> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

factor of production with fossil fuels providing most of this energy<sup>9</sup>. Oil and gas is one of the largest industries in the world and is a significant source of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for oil producing and exporting countries<sup>10</sup>. As a result, the oil and gas sector has been described as one of the world's most important industries and contributes significantly to the growth of economies while also creating jobs for millions of people globally<sup>11</sup>. In addition, petroleum products can be found in most commodities including personal protective equipment, plastics, chemicals and fertilisers, clothing, fuel for transportation and solar panels<sup>12</sup>.

Despite its role in fostering global economic growth, the oil and gas industry is associated with several sustainability concerns. For example, it has been observed that burning fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change<sup>13</sup>. The current global energy system which is dominated by fossil fuels including oil, gas and coal is a major driver of climate change since it accounts for nearly 75 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions<sup>14</sup>. Further, unsustainable extraction of oil and gas can trigger sustainability challenges such as environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, human rights violations and conflicts<sup>15</sup>. As a result, integrating sustainability and conflict management in the oil and gas sector is key towards harnessing these vital resources for development.

This paper discusses how sustainability and conflict management can be infused in the oil and gas sector in Africa. The paper notes that Africa has a rich oil and gas sector due to the availability of viable deposits of these vital natural resources in the continent. It posits that Africa's rich oil and gas industry has the potential to drive economic growth and human progress in the continent. However, the paper notes that Africa is yet to harness full benefits from its rich oil and gas sector. The paper observes that

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<sup>9</sup> Stevens. P., 'The Role of Oil and Gas in the Economic Development of the Global Economy' Available at <https://academic.oup.com/book/27405/chapter/197217823> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>10</sup> What Percentage of the Global Economy Is the Oil and Gas Drilling Sector?., Available at <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/030915/what-percentage-global-economy-comprised-oil-gas-drilling-sector.asp> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> World Economic Forum., 'Why do oil prices matter to the global economy? An expert explains' Available at <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/02/why-oil-prices-matter-to-global-economy-expert-explains/> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>13</sup> United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'What is the sustainable energy transition and why is it key to tackling climate change?' Op Cit

<sup>15</sup> The United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action., 'Extractive Industries and Conflict' Available at [https://globalprotectioncluster.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/Extractive Industries and Conflict Guidance Note Practitioners 2010 EN.pdf](https://globalprotectioncluster.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/Extractive%20Industries%20and%20Conflict%20Guidance%20Note%20Practitioners%202010%20EN.pdf) (Accessed on 25/12/2025)

unsustainable extraction of oil and gas in Africa is fuelling several challenges including human right violations, environmental degradation and conflicts. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that achieving sustainability in the oil and gas sector in Africa is an imperative for the continent's development. The paper examines how Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) tenets can be employed for sustainability and conflict management in the oil and gas sector in Africa for development.

## **2.0 Oil and Gas Extraction in Africa: Promises and Pitfalls**

Africa has a rich oil and gas sector. It is estimated that the continent holds 8 percent of the world's natural gas and 12 percent of the world's oil reserves<sup>16</sup>. The Africa Energy Commission (AFREC) notes that crude oil production in Africa is estimated at almost 10 million barrels per day, representing nearly 10 percent of global crude oil production<sup>17</sup>. Most of Africa's oil reserves are concentrated in Libya, Nigeria, Angola and Algeria<sup>18</sup>. In addition, other countries such as South Sudan, Egypt and Gabon have notable oil reserves with countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ghana holding significant potential in oil production<sup>19</sup>. AFREC further notes that Africa is endowed with high quantity of natural gas, which can be found mainly in countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Nigeria and Egypt<sup>20</sup>. Further, it has been observed that most of the global new natural gas discoveries over the past decade are in Africa<sup>21</sup>.

It has been observed that Africa has considerable oil and gas deposits that can accelerate socio-economic growth in the continent if harnessed strategically<sup>22</sup>. Further, since Africa is the continent with the most frequent and substantial new discoveries of oil and gas, it is well poised to become a major player in the global oil and gas sector<sup>23</sup>. Oil and gas production in Africa is expected to continue rising for the foreseeable future providing immense opportunities for the continent's growth agenda<sup>24</sup>. It has been pointed out that

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Our Work in Africa' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/our-work-africa> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>17</sup> Africa Energy Commission., 'Oil and Gas Programme' Available at <https://au-afrec.org/oil-gas-programme> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>18</sup> Oil and Gas in Africa: Reserves, Potential and Prospects of Africa., Available at <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/za/pdf/Oil-and-Gas-in-Africa-2014.pdf> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Africa Energy Commission., 'Oil and Gas Programme' Op Cit

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> African Development Bank Group., 'Oil and Gas in Africa' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Oil%20and%20Gas%20in%20Africa.pdf> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

oil and gas are key drivers of economic growth in producing countries in Africa and the ongoing discoveries of vast reserves of these resources in Africa points to an exciting future for the continent's development<sup>25</sup>. With a rising population and increasing energy demands, it has been observed that fossil fuels including oil and gas will continue playing an important role in Africa's energy mix<sup>26</sup>. Harnessing Africa's rich oil and gas potential is therefore vital in meeting rising energy demands in key sectors such as transport, industry, manufacturing and household energy needs<sup>27</sup>. African Union's *Agenda 2063*<sup>28</sup> acknowledges that Africa has the potential to be a dominant player in the global markets in natural resources including extractives such as oil and gas.

Despite being endowed with oil and gas, Africa is yet to fully harness the potential of these resources for development. For example, due to unsustainable practices, the oil and gas sector has often triggered violent conflicts, degraded the environment, worsened gender and other inequalities, displaced vulnerable communities, and undermined democratic governance in some countries<sup>29</sup>. It has been observed that most of the oil and gas extraction activities in Africa are conducted by foreign Multinational Corporations (MNCs)<sup>30</sup>. The exploration of oil and gas in Africa by MNCs is fueling several challenges including human rights abuses, ethnic militancy, displacement of indigenous communities and environmental concerns including environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and soil and air pollution as a result of oil spillages<sup>31</sup>.

Further, it has been observed that revenues from the extractive industry in Africa including the oil and gas sector in most cases concentrate wealth and power in the hands

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<sup>25</sup> Oil and natural gas industry in Africa - statistics & facts., Available at [https://www.statista.com/topics/7493/oil-and-natural-gas-industry-in-africa/?srsltid=AfmBOoqn5hkKZQnlunVgFntAWPjD\\_Vkh-wFt77p36aKJdVFXRTLn0YtG#topicOverview](https://www.statista.com/topics/7493/oil-and-natural-gas-industry-in-africa/?srsltid=AfmBOoqn5hkKZQnlunVgFntAWPjD_Vkh-wFt77p36aKJdVFXRTLn0YtG#topicOverview) (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>26</sup> African State of Oil & Gas Industry., Available at <https://watericon.me/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/African-State-of-Oil-Gas-Industry-l-Watericon.pdf> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> African Union., 'Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want' Available at [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework\\_document\\_book.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework_document_book.pdf) (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'UNDP's Strategy for Supporting Sustainable and Equitable Management of the Extractive Sector for Human Development' Available at [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/StrategyNote\\_ExtractiveSector.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/StrategyNote_ExtractiveSector.pdf) (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>30</sup> Ajibade, L.T & Awomuti, A.A. 'Petroleum Exploitation or Human Exploitation? An Overview of Niger Delta Oil Producing Communities in Nigeria' *African Research Review* Vol. 3 (1), 2009. Pp. 111-124

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

of the few, thereby fueling inequality, poverty, high levels of corruption and conflicts<sup>32</sup>. Inadequate engagement of communities and stakeholders in oil and gas extraction, unfair distribution of the benefits, costs, risks and responsibilities accruing from oil and gas, impacts on the environment, communities, and the local and national economies, and corruption and diversion of funds to satisfy individual gains at the expense of national and community interests are some of the factors fuelling and worsening resource-based conflicts in Africa<sup>33</sup>.

In light of the foregoing concerns, it is imperative to foster sustainability and conflict management in order to effectively utilise Africa's oil and gas resources for development.

### **3.0 Employing ESG Tenets for Sustainability and Conflict Management in Oil and Gas Extraction in Africa**

Africa is endowed with oil and gas. When these resources are sustainably harnessed and benefits shared equitably with all stakeholders including local communities, oil and gas can drive development and prosperity in Africa. Oil and gas can power transport, manufacturing and industrial growth while creating employment opportunities and generating revenue for key sectors such as education, healthcare and agriculture<sup>34</sup>. However, poor extraction practices are undermining the sustainability and profitability of the oil and gas sector in Africa through human right abuses including land injustices against indigenous peoples and local communities, corruption, inequitable benefit-sharing, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and pollution as a result of oil spillages<sup>35</sup>.

ESG tenets provide a valuable approach towards integrating sustainability and conflict management in the oil and gas sector in Africa. ESG is a model of sustainable business development that is premised on responsible attitude towards the environment, high social responsibility, and good governance<sup>36</sup>. It focuses on integrating Environmental, Social and Governance tenets in both public and private decision-making processes for sustainability<sup>37</sup>. In particular, ESG seeks to achieve sustainable, responsible and ethical investments by incorporating Environmental, Social and Governance factors in corporate

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<sup>32</sup> The United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action., 'Extractive Industries and Conflict' Op Cit

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> African Development Bank Group., 'Oil and Gas in Africa' Op Cit

<sup>35</sup> Ajibade, L.T & Awomuti, A.A. 'Petroleum Exploitation or Human Exploitation? An Overview of Niger Delta Oil Producing Communities in Nigeria' Op Cit

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'ESG: From Challenges to Opportunities' Available at <https://www.undp.org/belarus/stories/esg-challenges-opportunities> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

decision-making<sup>38</sup>. ESG is a holistic framework that covers *environmental tenets* including emission reduction, sound climate action, sustainable waste management, biodiversity conservation, water management, circular economy and pollution control<sup>39</sup>; *social tenets* such as sound labour practices, respect for human rights, gender diversity and community engagement<sup>40</sup>; and *governance tenets* including board diversity, shareholder rights, and good governance practices<sup>41</sup>.

Embracing ESG tenets is a practical and effective approach in ensuring sustainability and sound conflict management during oil and gas extraction both globally and in Africa. In particular, ESG provides a valuable approach towards ensuring responsible, ethical and sustainable oil and gas extraction<sup>42</sup>. ESG can enable companies involved in oil and gas extraction to mitigate their environmental and social impacts while also fostering good governance and sustainable investments<sup>43</sup>. Further, ESG tenets can also enable companies to optimise strategies that conserve the environment while maximising benefits for local communities through strong community relations and job creation<sup>44</sup>.

Employing ESG tenets is therefore pertinent for sustainability in oil and gas extraction in Africa. In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative for companies involved in oil and gas extraction to prioritise environmental conservation. For example, it has been observed that embracing strategies such as protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, conserving water, reducing and recycling waste, ensuring energy efficiency including through the use of clean technologies and restoring land and ecosystems at the end of extraction activities can ensure environmental sustainability in the oil and gas sector<sup>45</sup>. In addition, by upholding human rights including the land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, maximising community engagement through the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), embracing equitable benefit-sharing arrangements and upholding sound labour practices, it is possible to foster the social tenets of ESG towards

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<sup>38</sup> Stuart. L.G et al., 'Firms and social responsibility: A review of ESG and CSR research in corporate finance.' *Journal of Corporate Finance* 66 (2021): 101889

<sup>39</sup> Environmental Social Governance (ESG)., Available at <https://www.pwc.com/ng/en/services/environmental-social-governance.html> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> ESG Integration in the Extractive Industry., Available at <https://www.cekindo.com/blog/extractive-industry> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Sustainability in the Oil & Gas Industry., Available at <https://www.borregaard.com/markets/energy-resources/oil-gas/sustainability/sustainability-in-the-oil-gas-industry/#:~:text=1.,to%20optimise%20their%20production%20strategies> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

sustainability in oil and gas extraction in Africa<sup>46</sup>. Further, putting in place good governance practices can ensure sustainable, responsible and ethical oil and gas extraction practices in Africa<sup>47</sup>.

Effective conflict management is also a pertinent ideal for sustainable oil and gas extraction in Africa. Due to inequitable benefit-sharing arrangements, corruption, environmental damage and human rights violations, conflicts are prevalent in the extractive industry in Africa<sup>48</sup>. If not well addressed, these conflicts can prevent Africa from harnessing its rich natural capital including oil and gas. It has been suggested that conflict prevention and the use of collaborative and participatory approaches of conflict management such as negotiation and mediation can ensure sustainable extraction of oil and gas resources in Africa including through effective and meaningful engagement with host communities<sup>49</sup>. Effective conflict management is therefore key in harnessing the potential of oil and gas resources in Africa.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

Africa is rich in oil and gas. However, challenges such as unsustainable extraction and prevalence of conflicts are undermining the use of these resources to foster development. It is therefore vital to employ ESG tenets including through prioritising environmental conservation in the extractive industry, maximising benefits to local communities and fostering good governance practices for sustainable, ethical and responsible extraction activities<sup>50</sup>. Further, embracing effective conflict prevention and management strategies including collaborative approaches such as negotiation and mediation can ensure the viability and profitability of oil and gas extraction activities<sup>51</sup>. Employing ESG tenets in oil and gas extraction in Africa is therefore an effective approach for sustainability and conflict management. It is necessary to actualise this ideal in order to harness Africa's rich natural capital for development and prosperity.

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<sup>46</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'Extractive Industries for Sustainable Development in Kenya' Available at <https://www.undp.org/kenya/projects/extractive-industries-sustainable-development-kenya> (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> The United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action., 'Extractive Industries and Conflict' Op Cit

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners' Available at [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/NRCMediation\\_UNDPAUNEP2015\\_0.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/NRCMediation_UNDPAUNEP2015_0.pdf) (Accessed on 26/12/2025)

<sup>50</sup> Sustainability in the Oil & Gas Industry., Op Cit

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

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