

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre invited ReconAfrica to comment on the following articles:

- “Okavango goes international with ReconAfrica under fire”, 15 February 2021, Energy Voice: <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/africa/ep-africa/299602/reconafrika-protest-caprio-namibia/>
- “Why is Oil Exploration Controversial in Namibia”, 31 January 2021, Petro Industry News: <https://www.petro-online.com/news/safety/15/breaking-news/why-is-oil-exploration-controversial-in-namibia/54278>

ReconAfrica’s comments are available below, in yellow.

[“Okavango goes international with ReconAfrica under fire”](#), 15 February 2021, Energy Voice

**Opposition to Reconnaissance Energy Africa’s work in northern Namibia is growing, with a petition handed in to the Namibian consul general in South Africa and Leonardo diCaprio tweeting against the drilling plans.**

Local environmentalists launched a protest walk in South Africa on February 1. This culminated in the group handing in a petition today.

The document from the San people said the area in which ReconAfrica was working was a “most sacred homeland”. The company did not consult with local people, the petition complained.

**Comment:** ReconAfrica does consult local populations and interested stakeholders on a continuous basis. ReconAfrica works with traditional authorities, community headwomen and headmen and community members. ReconAfrica also works with regional authorities, ministry representatives and interested stakeholders and has a pro-active approach to their stakeholder engagement and regulatory consultation activities.

It went on to say Namibia and Botswana were breaking their international commitments, in addition to domestic laws. **Comment:** ReconAfrica has excluded Tsodilo Hills protected area and taken several actions to demonstrate the importance of cultural and historical unique areas. ReconAfrica was never going to work in these areas, like the Tsodilo Hills, and our approach to ESG demonstrates this.

Local communities “don’t need this oil and gas exploring or drilling”, Q Seven Beckett, who participated in the walk and handover of the petition, told Energy Voice. “We are looking at activating the youth across Africa for environmental issues, which are of great concern, not just what is happening in Okavango.” **Comment:** The local communities have made clear, on several occasions and continue to do so that they see ReconAfrica’s project as positive overall impact for their communities and their region. They see the actions that ReconAfrica takes environmentally and socially and with good governance, will create opportunities that will have a sustainable impact.

The petition involved indigenous leaders, communities and the general public, he said. “We are now looking at moving actions Joburg, Pretoria and Durban before two of us walkers head to Namibia.” The group will work with local communities “to voice their concerns and translate the fight into indigenous languages”. **Comment:** We respect the importance of this information and we hope that this group will be open to receiving project information so that they see the valid story of the ongoing

project activities. The traditional authorities and community leaders would be part of this information sharing activity.

#### Drilling progress

The concerns follow some reports of difficulties for ReconAfrica in operations. The Frack Free Namibia & Botswana group said on February 5 that the drill bit on its rig had broken at a depth of about 1,000 metres. The group said it would take weeks to rectify the problem. **Comment: Completely untrue statement**

The company began drilling the well on January 11. At the time, it said it expected to complete the well around the end of February.

Another local group, Saving Okavango's Unique Life (SOUL), alleged ReconAfrica had not lined a containment pool at the well. The company's plans did not explicitly state this would be done, but did say that it would not "allow any hazardous substance to soak into the soil".

**Comment:** ReconAfrica chose to take extra measures with respect to environmental standards and is using drilling fluids that are water based. The Polyamine/PHPA/Polymer system utilizes a 100% freshwater fluid phase as a base to yield all polymer compounds within the system. The selection of polyamine technology in place of running KCl Brine for the base Fluid Phase of the system, was solely contingent to the fact that without the presence of excessive chloride content the system becomes FULLY environmentally safe referencing topsoil and water table contamination. ReconAfrica is decisively working with chloride free premium polyamines making their drilling fluids fully environmentally safe, for many aspects including topsoil development. This approach is taken worldwide in North America, Australia, Middle East, other parts of Africa and in Europe. This approach is more costly for our company, but it is more important to put the well-being of the environment first.

ReconAfrica had told National Geographic in October 2020 that it would line pits and dispose of cuttings properly. **Comment:** See above and ReconAfrica is reusing their drilling fluids to ensure a sustainable approach to their business.

The company has not yet responded to a request for comment on progress at the well and containment plans.

Local groups are concerned that the Canadian company will carry out fracking in the region. ReconAfrica has denied this repeatedly and it would be economically challenging given the lack of local infrastructure. **Comment:** ReconAfrica has been clear that we are focused on conventional oil. Furthermore, ReconAfrica owns their Crown 750 drilling rig. It was purposefully bought as it is a relatively small rig designed for mobility and drilling conventional wells only. The rig is truck mounted and designed for light impact and mobility across desert conditions. With 1000 HP the Crown 750 can drill to a maximum depth of 13,000' which restricts operations to vertically drilled conventional formations only. Local groups in true definition of local are advocates of ReconAfrica's project. To be even more clear, Frac'ing is un-necessary for conventional oil and gas production. Again, the Kavango is a newly identified sedimentary basin. This being the case, ReconAfrica's focus is on conventional.

The Botswana Ministry of Mineral Resources, Green Technology and Energy Security, on February 10, said fracking was not part of the exploration plan. **Comment: True**

Study time

ReconAfrica's local subsidiary is acquiring data and commissioning an environmental impact assessment (EIA) on the area, the ministry said. These are the steps that lead to seeking a licence to drilling.

WWF Namibia has called for a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) on the cross-border area, rather than "piecemeal EIAs". The NGO said Namibia should not approve any more EIAs, or further work, in the basin.

Progress should be contingent on a "holistic SEA ... and the full set of exploration implications assessed".

**Comment:** ReconAfrica is initial stage of exploration. ReconAfrica is drilling stratigraphic wells and are gathering core data, meaning gathering geological data that is below the ground. Core data can be reviewed to determine more information on the geological basin. These core samples are important for the Government of Namibia, in particular, the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the University of Namibia, in particular the Geology Department. Furthermore, in initial exploration phases whereby, a company is gathering more data, the steps are to complete an EIA per different activity of exploration. ReconAfrica is in the very initial stages of exploration and as stated, ReconAfrica is gathering more data. We are following the correct process.

A more thorough review in an incremental approach would be used for ongoing more in-depth impactful projects like the mining industry in Namibia.

- i. An example that will help to describe the situation of an actual case area in Namibia: Example: In the uranium industry in Namibia, uranium in Namibia was discovered in 1928. More steps in exploration took place in the late 1950s. Production in uranium occurred in the late 1970s – like 1976 and onwards. SEAs, or the documents that you are referring to with respect to impact assessments were published around 2010 for uranium mining projects. 82 years for the uranium industry.

Leonardo diCaprio retweeted a National Geographic article about drilling in the Okavango Delta. The article raised concerns about potential hydraulic fracturing, the impact of seismic testing and a lack of local consultations. **Comment:** ReconAfrica is not fracking as previously stated. Regulatory consultations and ongoing stakeholder engagement take place. Seismic survey is a nonintrusive exploration method used in validating the subsurface search for geological structures.

DiCaprio has talked of the importance of shifting away from hydrocarbons. He supports efforts to end carbon emissions by 2035.

[“Why is Oil Exploration Controversial in Namibia?”](#), 31 January 2021, *Petro Industry News*

A new exploratory drilling project in Africa has environmentalists concerned the delicate ecosystem of Namibia could be under threat. Spearheaded by Reconnaissance Energy Africa (Recon Africa), the project is taking place in the north of the country, a region crisscrossed with key interconnected watersheds such as the [Okavango Delta](#). Conservationists warn oil and gas projects could compromise the health of the watersheds, with a potentially devastating impact on local wildlife and communities. **Comment: same as below -**

#### Protecting the KAZA

In late December, the company announced plans to start exploratory drilling in the Namibian zone of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA). Recon Africa is currently in possession of a license that allows it to drill in 2.5 million hectares of northeastern Namibia, with a significant footprint located within the KAZA. In addition to the Namibian section, the company also holds a license to drill in a 1 million hectare area of the Botswanan KAZA.

The project has garnered fierce criticism from environmentalists, who say it threatens the unique ecosystem. As well as being home to one of the largest remaining populations of African elephants in the world, the KAZA conservation area protects endangered packs of African wild dogs. The exploration areas also encroach on the Okavango River Basin, which feeds the Okavango Delta UNESCO World Heritage site.

“There is a serious lack of knowledge on groundwater resources in the target oil and gas extraction area,” warns Surina Esterhuyse, a geohydrologist at the University of the Free State, South Africa. “In Botswana, the Okavango river basin is still relatively pristine, but the planned exploration and extraction could have serious impacts on the [Okavango] delta.”

**Comment:** ReconAfrica understands the importance of wildlife and water. ReconAfrica is implementing their water management strategy and also has team members solely focused on wildlife surveys. We are working with the various ministries within the government along with the universities and technical personnel. We also appreciate the importance of designated and government approved areas and work alongside government authorities to ensure required elements are followed. We have ongoing direct relationships with representatives within conservancies, NGOs, OKACOM, UN organisations and otherwise. It should also be noted that oil projects have worked alongside these types of organisations and their environmental requirements in several instances and projects continue to do this. As previously stated, ReconAfrica has excluded Tsodilo Hills protected area and taken several actions to demonstrate the importance of cultural and historical unique areas. ReconAfrica was never going to work in these areas, like the Tsodilio Hills, and our approach to ESG demonstrates this.

#### Protecting the Kavango Basin

Recon Africa will start by drilling into the Kavango Basin, a 9000-metre-deep sedimentary basin that geologists suspect could be rich in oil and gas deposits. If the project is successful geochemists estimate it could hold similar quantities of oil and gas to the Eagle Ford Basin in Texas, where more than 20,000 wells have been drilled since exploration began in 2008.

“The possible impact that oil and gas extraction would have on the water resources in Namibia and Botswana is the biggest concern,” warns Esterhuyse, an expert in the impact of oil and gas extraction on groundwater resources.

While the Namibian government has only approved a handful of test wells, environmentalists say production could rapidly increase if not regulated properly. Further activity will require independent environmental impact assessments, though opponents say these can be surprisingly easy to obtain. **Comment:** Namibia has strong environmental law and regulations and as has been stated, EIAs are required at each stage of project activities. International standards and review organisations have reviewed these laws and regulations and have positive findings of the processes and requirements in place.

#### Local communities voice concern

Local communities are voicing concerns over the projects, though are becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of response from the Namibian government and Recon Africa. “The local community are in darkness, they don’t have clues on what is going on,” says Max Muyemburuko, chairperson of African wildlife conservation group, Muduva Nyangana Conservancy. “They want their voices to be heard. Kavango is the only land that we have. We will keep it for the generation to come.”

**Comment:** The Voices of Kavango are heard. <https://reconafrika.com/our-sustainable-approach/the-voices-of-kavango/> Chapter two is also forthcoming. Please note as well, that the individual mentioned above, has been present at several stakeholder engagement activities and regulatory consultation sessions. His colleagues have been thankful for ReconAfrica’s engagement activities and regulatory consultation activities that have taken place.

As well as the pollution of natural water sources, the oil and gas industry must also remain vigilant about monitoring wastewater. Find out more in [‘Gas detection with networked communications for safety and process automation in refinery wastewater treatment applications.’](#) **Comment:** ReconAfrica has extensive monitoring programs and government ministry representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform and NamWater authorities (waste water and otherwise) as well as other Government Ministry authorities (MME, MEFT) have complete inspections and site visits on a regular basis. The feedback has been positive and useful.