

## **My dream: A prosperous Uganda**

Developing Uganda's oil and gas resources will create opportunity and prosperity

Cyril Boynes, Jr.

I am of a Christian background. However, one of my favorite people was Jewish, and another is Muslim.

The Jewish man was business professor and author Julian Simon. He taught that people are the world's most valuable resource, and the "ultimate resource" is our creative intellect.

The Muslim is Bangladeshi banker and economist Muhammad Yunus. He says "poor people are like bonsai trees," planted in a little pot. "There is nothing wrong with their seeds. It's just that society never gave them an adequate soil base to grow."

"Once the poor can unleash their energy and creativity," Dr. Yunus continues, "poverty will disappear very quickly. The poor themselves can create a poverty-free world. All we have to do is free them from the chains that governments have put around them."

We need freedom, and opportunities to get an education and open businesses. We need a government and legal system that protects our property rights and contracts, regulates dangerous pollution and activities, and protects us from criminals and unscrupulous business people, but without having so many rules that people and businesses cannot function properly.

But even if we have all these things, we still cannot have opportunity, health and prosperity unless we also have energy. Maybe most of all we need enough affordable, reliable electricity to power lights, ovens, refrigerators, computers, machinery, fans and air conditioners, office and hospital equipment, mobile phone chargers and other modern devices.

These technologies let us work past sundown, create good jobs, make products that people need, and provide clean water, surgical centers and countless other benefits.

That's why Mr. Roy Innis, chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality in America, calls energy the "master resource." He says our ingenuity is the ultimate, most important resource, because it lets us design, build and operate so many things.

However, without energy that families and businesses can afford, energy that is there every time we need it, even the most modern, creative, educated, technologically advanced country cannot function properly. People in poor countries are even more constricted, like bonsai plants in little pots.

Right here in Uganda, we have many educated, energetic, creative, hard working people. Our legal system lets us open businesses and do many other things. But outside of Kampala and other growing municipalities like Ishaka, Jinja and Gulu, most families, villages and businesses still don't have electricity – and even in these municipalities frequent power outages create problems. Almost 30 million Ugandans never have electricity or get it only a few hours a week.

That means over 90% of Ugandans cannot really use their education, skills and desire to improve their lives. They can only do what is possible with wood, charcoal, paraffin and muscle power. How is that different from what our ancestors could do 100 years ago?

It's a good thing we have the Nulubaala Power Station. Otherwise Uganda wouldn't have any electricity. But when we wanted to generate more hydroelectric power at Bujagali Falls, environmentalists opposed the dam and the World Bank refused to support its construction. Now we have new hope.

Drilling companies report that they have already discovered 380,000,000 cubic meters (2.4 billion barrels) of oil – and enough natural gas to provide 400,000 cubic meters (14,000,000 cubic feet) every day – just in Uganda. Much more will likely be discovered in Uganda and other Great Lakes countries.

Some say this will just be another “oil curse,” fueling corruption. I think it is a huge blessing that could fuel an economic boom. It’s up to us. We need to choose our destiny, and work hard to achieve it.

Turning oil into usable energy requires pipelines, refineries and other infrastructure. But with the turmoil in the Middle East, and oil prices climbing, we need to develop it. It will take time, but we need to do it.

Natural gas is a different story. This clean burning energy could fuel several big power plants that would generate enough electricity to turn lights on all over Uganda and the Great Lakes region. We wouldn’t need to dam Bujagali Falls. We wouldn’t have to continue living in poverty and darkness, without the jobs and other blessings that electricity can bring. And we can do it quickly, in a couple of years, if environmentalists would stop fighting us.

Our natural gas really could be the “master resource” that transforms and improves our lives. This precious resource, which companies used to burn off as useless and unwanted, is the energy Uganda deserves to have, the energy it needs to become a modern, healthy, prosperous nation.

Some say we should use wind and solar power, instead of gas. But the “renewable” electricity these systems generate is too limited, expensive and unreliable for African families and businesses. Even France, Germany and Spain are ending their subsidies and giving up on wind and solar power, for these very reasons. If they can't afford it, how can Africa?

Besides, even if Uganda did build wind turbines and solar panels, we would still need gas-powered electric power plants, to generate electricity every time the wind stops blowing or the sun stops shining. We should just build the gas-fired generating plants, instead.

Let everyone in Uganda – President Museveni, Members of Parliament, ministers, companies, village elders and our people – join together in making this happen. Let us work to find companies and other investors who want to help us build the power plants we need to generate the electricity that will support homes, hospitals, schools, factories, shops, hotels, tourism, water treatment plants and farms. Let us do likewise throughout Africa.

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King told an audience in Washington, DC, “I have a dream, that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

Today, I too have a dream. That one day soon, this nation will rise up out of poverty, and every man, woman and child will have equal access to affordable, reliable electricity – and the blessings and true equality it can bring.

Together, we can make it happen.

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