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Developing a National Strategy for Management of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORM) in Uganda – Opportunities and Challenges

There are a number of mining and mineral processing activities carried out on a large commercial scale in Uganda. These include, oil and gas exploration, cement production, production of phosphate fertilizers, extraction of rare earth elements and extraction of monazite sand, among others. Studies carried out by scientific and research organisations such as UNSCEAR and ICRP, among others have indicated significant traces of natural radionuclides of radiological and regulatory significance associated with these minerals. This has seen a number of countries include such provisions in their national legislations owing to the standards and requirements published by IAEA.

Whereas the Atomic Energy Act No. 24 of 2008 apply to both practices involving radioactive material of natural and artificial origin, the regulation of radioactive material of natural origin in Uganda has remained a challenge due to a number of reasons.

Across the country, there is limited awareness amongst the public and other stakeholders about exposure to NORM including radon in the dwellings. Lack of information has limited government support from stakeholders in coming with appropriate strategies to address the NORM concerns and their implementation.

In addition, there has been limited facilities and equipment to detect and quantify the radiation levels and concentration of natural radionuclides in different sample matrices. This has led to long lead times between the public concern and taking action. This was exacerbated by the limited trained and qualified human capacity to conduct such studies. Whereas the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) requires applicants or license holders to conduct Environmental Impact Assessment of the different mining activities, only non-radiological studies have always been carried out due to lack of expertise among others.

In the recent past, the government procured the required basic equipment for detection, monitoring and analytical purposes with an aim of establishing a state-of-the-art environmental monitoring laboratory. There are also formal institutional collaborations being established to foster the regulation of NORM and the training of relevant stakeholders who will take part in the management of NORM practices.

This paper therefore seeks to highlight on the challenges and opportunities available in Uganda to develop and implement strategies for management of NORM.

Key Words: Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material, NORM management strategy, Stakeholder involvement.

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