

FLOODS cut off Lango, Karamoja



A vehicle stuck in the water with goods aboard

By Paul Watala

Over 100 people have escaped death after four trucks loaded with merchandise were swept away by floods that submerged Alito-Acoan Pii bridge that connects Lango, Karamoja and the Teso sub-regions.

Two United Nations trucks heading to Kampala were also swept away by the same floods.

Buses could not cross, leaving hundreds of passengers stranded.

Other government and private cars were diverted to longer routes – Lira-Dokolo-Soroti – while those from Amuria turned to Soroti, to access Karamoja and Lango, through Lira.

Businesspersons cried foul as they watched their merchandise float away.

Residents made a fortune directing daring drivers across the submerged parts of the roads at sh20,000 per car, while others set up kiosks to sell snacks to feed the stranded passengers.

The faint-hearted and those with less money spent more nights at the bridge, hoping for the waters to subside, to no avail.

"Alito-Acoan Pii bridge connects Amuria, Abim, Moroto, Kotido, and Kaabong districts. If it is not repaired, millions of people will be cut off from the rest of the world," Caroline Adong,



Residents crossing the submerged Alito bridge. In the background are stranded passengers after a bus failed to cross the bridge. Photos by Emmanuel Alomu

a passenger said.

"I thank God for saving us because one of the trucks that we had boarded was swept away, but residents saved our lives," Jane Nandudu, a fresh foods dealer, said.

"This seasonal river has become a death trap because, last year, we lost three people who tried to wade through a submerged bridge," Jacob

Opio, a resident, said.

Nandudu expressed worry that if the bridge is not repaired soon and the rains continue, food prices will rise because of the high cost of transport.

She also said transport fares have increased, adding that the Kangoole Bridge that connects Napak and Katakwi districts was also recently swept away by floods

and is currently under repair.

Joseph Lokiru, a cattle dealer, said transporting animals had become difficult because of the bridge that had been washed away.

He urged the concerned authority to upgrade the bridge to a fly-over, other than using culverts.

"God designed Karamoja in unique way, that it is ever dry. But when it

rains, water flows in large quantities and at a high pressure," Lokiru said.

"The challenge is that engineers from Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) visit these bridges during the dry season and get a wrong impression. We request that they raise the roads and bridges to create enough waterway," he added.

Last month, works minister Azuba Ntege, MPs on the committee on physical infrastructure and UNRA executive director Allen Kagina toured Karamoja and Teso regions, to ascertain the number of damaged bridges.

However, their cars got stuck in mud, making them to abandon the journey.

Azuba expressed concern over the poor status of the roads in the region and attributed it to heavy rains. She appealed to districts to make good use of the recently bought equipment to maintain roads.

Kagina said the Government is determined to ensure that transport is made easy.

She appealed to the MPs on the physical infrastructure committee to approve the supplementary budget so that other bridges and roads can be constructed.

Kagina also warned UNRA engineers, contractors and district engineers against corruption and shoddy work.