

Tisai: Island with no govt health unit



Sorry state: Patients receive treatment at a private clinic on Tisai Island in Kumi District. PHOTOS BY GEORGE MURON

Alienated. The island has not had ARVs outreach services in the last two years, putting the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS at risk.

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KUMI. A narrow water inlet sandwiched on either side by lush marshes leads you from Ongoni Sub-county to Tisai Island in Kumi District.

It is a 30-minute sail from mainland Ongino to Tisai, the source of milk and charcoal for Kumi Town.

While one is on the shores, he or she might be tempted to think all is well on the island.

But as they draw closer, they hear stories of mothers who have died during labour, people living with HIV/AIDS whose health has deteriorated due to absence of ARVs. The island has about 4,000 residents.

Besides the difficulty the residents find in travelling to and from mainland Ongoni, accessing most parts of Tisai is hampered by poor roads.

The footpaths there are mainly created by cattle when they leave kraals for the grazing lands.

Many mothers in Tisai, such as 30-year-old Jessica Ipupu, have delivered at the hands of traditional birth attendants (TBAs).

However, having been attended to by TBA, Ipupu missed out on timely immunisation for her children, which she would have got had she given birth at a government health centre.

"Due to the difficulty in reaching Ongino for antenatal services, when we experience labour pains, we rush to our traditional birth attendants," Ipupu says.

"I am lucky to have given birth to all this six children without any incident," She adds that some



Option. A mother receives medication at a private health facility on Tisai Island.

mothers have had life-threatening incidents while being attended to by TBAs.

"My sister was a victim in 2015. [Later,] she had to undergo an operation at Atatur Hospital. She has since then been advised not to conceive anymore," Ipupu says.

"The promise of a school and health centre has remained elusive," JOHN WILSON OLEIMO, SPEAKER OF ONGINO SUB-COUNTY, KUMI

Ipupu says the government should fulfil its pledge to establish a health centre on the island. Such tales are a concern for every mother on the island.

Beatrice Apio, 40, a mother of eight, told *Daily Monitor* that babies delivered in the hands of TBA have missed out on early

immunisation.

Ms Apio adds that many expectant women do not go for antenatal care services because of transport.

"The health centre that the government promised us should be given priority in order to save mothers in Tisai," she says.

Private makeshift health units are mushrooming because of the lack of a government-aided health facility on the island. Accessing this treatment comes at a cost.

When this newspaper visited one such unit, it found Richard Otulu lying on papyrus mat as he took a drip. Otulu is suffering from malaria.

"Regardless of the state of this private health unit, for every malaria admission, we part with Shs30,000. This is expensive for me,

who solely depends on farming," he says.

Mr Otulu says in case they do not have money to buy anti-malaria drugs, patients take herbs.

According to the LCII chairperson of Tisai Parish, Mr Patrick Ochen, women have to use boats to reach Ongino. Some end up delivering while in the boats.

"It is not strange delivering at hands of traditional birth attendants or in the middle of boat rides. But some of babies have ended up contracting HIV/AIDS from their mothers," Ochen says.

Challenges

Ochen adds that for two years now, the residents have not had HIV/AIDS outreach services. As a result, many cannot access medication.

Those who opt to go to Kumi mainland complain that the boat fare is, in the long run, high.

James Peter Alutia, who is living with HIV/AIDS, says ever since Ongino and Kumi hospitals stopped their HIV/AIDS outreach programmes, the increase of viral load has claimed lives of some of his colleagues.

"Opportunistic infections like tuberculosis are taking toll on us," he adds.

Mr John Wilson Oleimo, the speaker of Ongino Sub-county, says the government is aware of the island's problems.

Mr Oleimo says the continued lack of health and education services shows the lack of will either by the district or the government to address the islanders' suffering.

However, Dr John Opolot, the district health officer, attributes the problem to poor transport, saying: "Without engines [for] boats, doctors cannot travel to the island."

The LC5 chairperson, Ms Christine Apolot, says Uganda National Roads Authority should improve the transport means to the island.

briefly

Leaders faulted on land

BUSIA. Bukedi Diocese Bishop Samuel Bogere Egasa has accused leaders in Busia District of allegedly allocating land belonging to Busikho Primary Teachers' College to build a market. While conducting prayers at the college last week, Bishop Egasa said the district allocated 25 acres of land belonging to the institution without church knowledge. He said the land belongs to the Church of Uganda. The Resident District Commissioner, Mr Hussein Matanda, said the chief administrative officer, Mr Walter Irlama, was handling the matter. [David Musenger]

Five killed in accident

KAPCHORWA. Five people have been killed and one injured in an accident after a fuso lorry overturned on the Kapchorwa-Sironko road last week. According to eye witnesses, the lorry, which was travelling from Kapchorwa enroute to Jinja District, failed to brake and overturned several times. Police attributed the accident to a mechanical problem and reckless driving. The Sipi region police spokesperson, Mr Rogers Taitika, identified the deceased as Richard Nagoli, 30, Nulu Mutesi, Joseph Kirevu, 26, Robert Isabirye and Andrew Nekemeya. The bodies were taken to Kapchorwa hospital mortuary for postmortem. [Yahudi Kitunzi]

Residents protest over road

JINJA. Residents of Masese III in Walukuba-Masese Division, Jinja District, last Friday hurled stones at police officers who were deployed to protect a grader which had been brought to open an access road. The altercation started when police fired teargas to disperse residents after an elderly woman in her 70s threw herself on the ground, protesting the opening of the road, claiming it sits on her land. Mr Julius Isabirye, a member of the committee in-charge of land in the area, said residents were aware of opening up of the road which had delayed for more than 10 years. Mr Joseph Okurut, a resident, accused leaders of not sensitising them about the project. However, the LC3 chairperson, Ms Zanzam Namakula, said she was implementing what was already in the pipeline since no initiative had been taken by her predecessors. [Denis Edema]

Bishop castigates leaders

SOROTI. The Bishop of Soroti Diocese has protested the district leadership for surveying land belonging to primary schools founded by the Anglican church without consulting the founding body. Bishop George Erwaui told Christians at St Luke Odudui Parish at the weekend that the district has surveyed more than 50 acres of land belonging to two church founded primary schools in Odudui Parish without the consent of the custodian. "You cannot separate a child from his/her biological mother by force with intentions of changing status, that is theft," Bishop Erwaui said. However, Mr Francis Arimu, the chairperson of the works committee in the district council, said they are implementing government's policy to protect its land from encroachment. [George Muron]