

Complaint. Residents accuse the government of neglecting them at their moment of need.

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SIRONKO. At least nine people were still missing by Friday, more than a week after a landslide in Bufupa Parish, Masaba Sub-county in Sironko District.

Relatives and friends of those feared buried alive are now using hand hoes to dig through the rubble and mud in frantic efforts to locate the bodies despite heavy rain now in the area.

The relatives and friends of the victims told *Sunday Monitor* that at least 10 people were killed and one body recovered. Nine are still missing.

The body retrieved was identified as that of Topista Wanyenze, 45, a resident of Rusave Village, Bufupa Parish, Masaba Sub-county in Sironko District, who has left behind eight children.

Some of those missing include Ivan Wezamba, 4, son of the deceased, Sam Woyega, 13, Cedrick Wodeya, 8, Jane Namono, 9, Oliver Nabuzaale, 55, and Micheal Wodiango, 10.

Last Monday's evening landslides buried homes, livestock and crops in the area.

Mr Patrick Mafabi, a resident, said the government has neglected them at their moment of need.

"We are shocked to see our government mistreat us to this extent. We are now like orphans without parents," said Mr Mafabi, who could not hold back his tears.

Mr Mafabi, who lost his brother and sister in the tragedy, said he has lost hope of recovering their bodies. He identified them as Jane Namono, 8, and Sedrick Wodeya, 10.

"The weather is bad and we are just using hand hoes to search for them. But we shall not give up, the struggle continues," said Mr Mafabi, who later collapsed.

Ms Grace Nafuna, who lost his cousin in the disaster, told *Sunday Monitor* that the gov-

Elgon residents use hoes to dig through mud, rubble for bodies



Desperation. Sironko District residents search for the bodies of their colleagues buried alive by landslides in Lusalanje Village, Bufupa Parish in Masaba Sub-county on Monday. PHOTOS BY YAHUDU KITUNZI

ernment should intervene and join the community in searching for the missing bodies.

"If it was a political campaign, they could be sleeping here looking for votes, but now we have a disaster and they have all shied away. But it is wrong for them to love us only during [political] campaigns," Ms Nafuna said.

She also accused the government of failing to evacuate people living close to the landslide-prone areas.

"Most people have nothing to eat and where to sleep but government is not bothered," she said.

The MP Bungokho North, Mr Gashomu Sizomu Wambede, said the government should have done better and criticised it for failing to recover the bod-



Misery. A man whose child is missing, at a landslide-ravaged area in Sironko District.

ies one week after the tragedy. "We are tired of empty promises by government to relocate

these people to safer areas. For the last 15 years, the government has been promising to re-

locate people, but surprisingly they have not," he said. The State minister for Envi-

ronment, Dr Mary Goretti Kitutu, said the heavy rain that hit Bugisu sub-region in recent days triggered the landslides.

"People should be relocated to nearby trading centres. We are going to talk to the people and we work with government to relocate them to safer areas. Let people use this place for only cultivation but not resettlement," Ms Kitutu said.

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GRACE NAFUNA, LANDSLIDE VICTIM

She advised the residents to plant trees to avoid further disasters, saying trees can help absorb the excess rain and prevent landslides.

Ms Kitutu also directed the police to cordon off the area and not allow people to visit the area to avoid more casualties.

The Sironko RDC, Mr Moses Wamoto Kigayi, said government is working hard to recover the missing people.

"Whether it takes one year, the bodies will be recovered. We are expecting machines to be deployed for the search," Mr Wamoto said. He asked the people to be patient and refuted allegations that government had neglected the residents.

The Uganda Red Cross Society branch manager for Mbale, Mr Vincent Odoch, said more than 49 homesteads were affected by the landslide.

He said they have distributed some relief items, including soap, Jerricans, saucepans, and plates.