

Frustrated. Residents whose houses were destroyed by the earthquake last year are blaming government for neglecting them, allegations the authorities deny.

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One year later, Rakai quake victims still wait for govt aid

Voices



"We had little funds which were all diverted to help out the hunger-stricken areas. This was an emergency. The ministry currently has other emergencies to handle in the districts of Sironko and Bududa which were affected by floods and landslides respectively."

MUSA EWERU,
STATE MINISTER
FOR DISASTER
PREPAREDNESS



"The situation is so bad that people have deserted their houses fearing they could fall on them. The schools are not any better as many operate without pit-latrines because the ones they had were damaged and can no longer be used."

CHRISTOPHER
KALEMBA, KAKUUTO
COUNTY MP

KYOTERA. When Mr Francis Kaliisa's house at Kisaakala Village in Kyotera District was destroyed by the September 10, 2016 earthquake that shook the villages near the Uganda-Tanzanian border, his only prayer was to get a good samaritan to help him reconstruct it.

President Museveni visited the area a week after the devastating earthquake. Mr Kaliisa and 644 other households whose houses were destroyed hoped for nothing but the best since the president had visited.

President Museveni promised the victims that government would assist them in reconstructing their houses.

Although Mr Museveni did not put a time frame, he was clear that each household would get at least 30 iron sheets, cement and iron bars.

He noted that most of the houses that were destroyed by the 5.7 magnitude earthquake were poorly constructed and needed to be rebuilt properly.

But to date, as victims said, this pledge has not yet been fulfilled.

"We really wonder whether our President cares about us. We have waited for a full year now but the building materials he promised have not been delivered," laments Mr Kaliisa.

Mr Kaliisa says his six family members currently sleep in a makeshift structure he improvised after failing to get assistance to rebuild his house.

A total of 3,186 houses, including schools, also developed cracks after the earthquake. The disaster forced more than 4,000 people in the villages of Kifamba, Kanabulemu, Kibanda, Kyebe, Minziro, Kasensero and Gwanda to abandon their homes and seek shelter under trees and banana plantations.

Several schools were also not spared and many pupils and students still study under tree shades since their classrooms were also destroyed.

Mr Christopher Kalemba, the Kakuuto County MP, says as leaders from the district, they have on several occasions reminded officials in the Office of the Prime Minister to fulfill the presidential pledge in vain.

"I have presented this issue three times on the floor of Parliament. I also personally met the Prime Minister but all the efforts have yielded nothing," Mr Kalemba says.

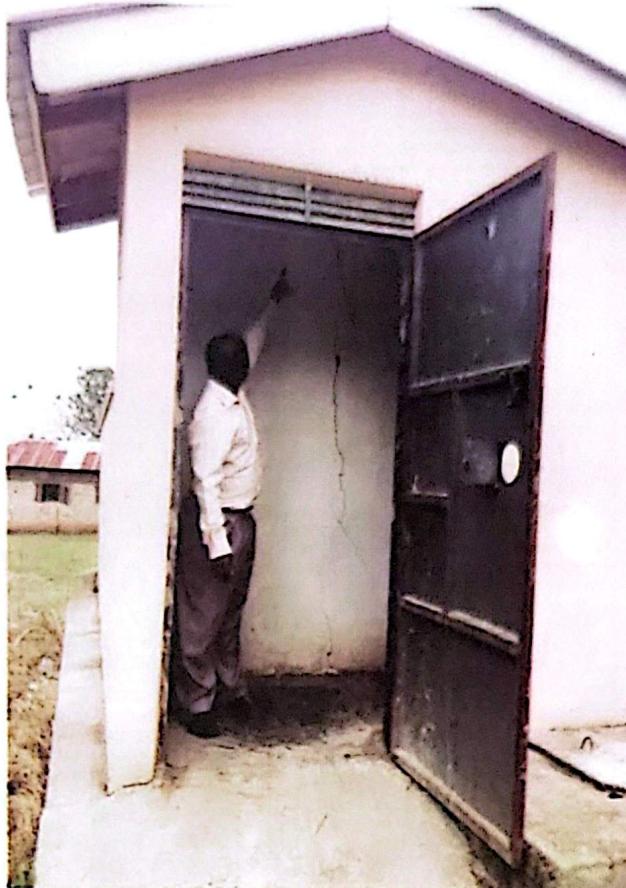
He stresses that he is much concerned about a section of helpless residents who continue to sleep under makeshift structures and others under tree sheds after their houses developed cracks.

"The situation is so bad that people have deserted their houses fearing they could cave in. The schools are not any better as many operate without pit-latrines because the ones they had were damaged and can no longer be used," he adds.

Mr Kalemba reveals that there are other 3,600 buildings which were reported to have developed serious cracks and many have since collapsed.

He further noted that during the registration and assessment of the affected families, many non-affected individuals were included on the list at the expense of the victims, an allegation *Daily Monitor* could not independently verify.

Delivery of the said materials also faced setbacks after the creation of a new district (Kyotera) which left out leaders who were closely following up the matter since the



Risky. Mr Joseph Kamyia, the head teacher of St John Mary Mzee SS Bigadda, shows cracks in a school pit-latrine caused by the earthquake which hit the area in September last year.
PHOTO BY IVAN KIMBOWA

KEY ISSUES

Toll. A total of 3,186 houses including schools structures, also developed cracks after the earthquake. The disaster forced more than 4,000 people in the villages of Kifamba, Kanabulemu, Kibanda, Kyebe, Minziro, Kasensero and Gwanda to abandon their homes and seek shelter under trees and banana plantations.

Allegations. that during the registration and assessment of the affected families, many non-affected individuals were included on the list at the expense of the victims, an allegation *Daily Monitor* could not independently verify.

Govt response. Mr Martin Owori, the commissioner of Disaster preparedness in the Office of the Prime Minister, says the loss and damage assessment of each building had been planned to be carried soon. He maintains it is in the government's work plan to give each household building materials to reconstruct their houses as the president pledged.

Sensitisation. Mr Paul Zaake, the coordinator Rakai Environmental Conservation Programme says although residents want building materials to reconstruct their houses, government should hold the programme and first sensitise the victims on how best they can build earthquake resistant houses.

Disaster preparedness in the Office of the Prime Minister, says although the impact assessment was done after the devastating earthquake, a second assessment was to be carried out before the victims receive assistance from government.

Mr Owori notes that the loss and damage assessment of each building had been planned to be done soon. He maintains it is in the government's work plan to give each household building materials to reconstruct their houses as the President pledged.

The State Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Mr Musa Eweru, says the Ministry had to supply relief to the earthquake victims and other victims in Bundibugyo but the hunger that hit most parts of the country prompted them to divert the resources.

"We had little funds which were all diverted to help out the hunger-stricken areas. This was an emergency," Mr Eweru says, adding: "The ministry currently has other emergencies to handle in the districts of Sironko and Bududa which were affected by floods and landslides respectively."

The minister, however, notes that after handling the emergencies, the ministry will turn to supplying building materials to Kyotera earthquake victims though he is hesitant to give the time frame when this will be fulfilled.

Neglected

Residents in Minziro and Kyebe Sub-Counties, who were the most affected by the natural disaster, claim that the government might have left them to suffer yet their counter parts in Tanzania received relief just a few days after the disaster.

Accordingly, Mr Museveni donated about Shs700 million to the earthquake victims in Kagera Region in Tanzania before considering Ugandans.

This was justified by the fact that Tanzanians near the border had the worst experience of the earthquake than their colleagues on the Ugandan side as nearly 16 people were killed in Bukoba, which was the epicentre.

"The rich were able to rebuild their houses, the poor whose only hope was in government, are still in a miserable state," lamented one of the residents during one of the rallies held in the area during the recent election campaigns in Kyotera District.

A few days after the earthquake, government through the Office of the Prime Minister, dispatched 10,000kg of maize flour, 5,000kg of beans, 1,000 tarpaulins and 200 blankets to the affected sub-counties, but some residents rejected the relief, saying they were in dire need of building materials, not food.

The leaders say the act of rejecting government food relief was a sign of anger before calling upon government to fulfil the victims' demands.

Mr Paul Zaake, the coordinator Rakai Environmental Conservation Programme says although residents want building materials to reconstruct their houses, government should hold the programme and first sensitise the victims on how best they can build earthquake-resistant houses.

biggest number of victims are in Kyotera.

When contacted, Ms Juliet Kyinyamatama, the Rakai District Woman MP, said she cannot take on the matter as the affected households are no longer under her jurisdiction.

"Unfortunately, the district was divided and now that area is no longer in my jurisdiction. I hope that the current leadership will do the needful and help their people. Luckily enough, there is a directly elected MP (Kalemba) who has been following the issues," Ms Kyinyamatama says.

However, the Rakai Residential District Commissioner, Mr Charles Mubiru, says even though Kyotera became a district in July, he will ensure that he follows up the matter until the victims get helped.

"We are still working closely with the Office of the Prime Minister and we are sure that anytime our people will get help as promised by the President," Mr Mubiru says.

He further says the process was delayed by the assessments which were done twice because some victims had been left out in the first assessment exercise.

He however, says government is committed to fulfill its pledge, hence asking residents to remain patient.

Mr Martin Owori, the commissioner of