

Disaster. According to Uganda Red Cross, flash floods flattened at least 91 houses, displacing thousands, and drowned dozens of livestock.

BY MONITOR TEAM
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Floods cut off tourism roads, wreak havoc across country

COUNTRYWIDE. Unrelenting torrential rains pounding different parts of the country have washed away half a dozen bridges, cut off communities, killed livestock and inundated farmlands to pose risk of food insecurity.

In south-western Uganda, sector investors are panicking following increased cancellation of mountain gorilla tracking bookings by tourists due to impassable roads to Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga national parks.

Tourism is a top foreign exchange earner and Uganda last year raked in \$1.4b (Shs5 trillion) from the sector, according to government statistics.

"Tourism roads should be given first priority because the tourism industry contributes a lot to Uganda's economy," Mr Bashir Hangi, the Uganda Wildlife Authority communications manager, said.

From Karamoja in the north-east to Kigezi Sub-region in south-western Uganda, and from Adjumani in West Nile to Butaleja in the east, residents and leaders voiced distress and despair.

For instance, in Kagadi where River Nguse burst its banks, washing away Kisaigi Bridge linking Kakumiro to the district, farmers and patients have to row in canoes to access markets and health facilities.

By Monday last week, motorists plying the Moroto-Soroti route in eastern Uganda were diverted through Nakapiripirit and Mbale, which is 225 kilometres longer than the direct Moroto-to-Soroti stretch.

Transport operators have increased fares there by Shs20,000 to cater for increased fuel and repair costs, leaving many would-be travellers with modest means stranded.

A rapid mapping by Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) shows heavy rains over the past six weeks leaving trails of destruction, including of farmlands and mudslides, in more than 50 villages in 10 districts.

The humanitarian organisation reported that flash floods flattened at least 91 houses, displacing thousands, and drowned dozens of livestock.

There were no reported loss of human life. Two students that lightning struck on April 20 received treatment at Kahunde Health Centre while a cyclist washed down a stream in Malaba was rescued.

"Presently, the districts so far affected and assessed are Kasese, Kabarole, Kabale, Rubanda, Rukiga, Mbarara, Mbale, Bundibugyo, Adjumani and Kibale," reads part of the report that URCS spokesperson Irene Nakasiita shared with *Daily Monitor* yesterday.

In Kampala, bureaucrats, including those in the Disaster Preparedness ministry, appeared caught off-guard to respond.

A couple of days ago, government issued a statement, cautioning travellers not to risk crossing submerged roads and wait for at least 15 minutes to let flash floods peter out.

The State Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Mr Musa Ekwere, said they have compiled particulars of many victims, among them, owners of damaged crop fields, livestock and houses.



Trapped. One of the homes flooded in Tindi Village, Himutu Sub-county, Butaleja District, on Tuesday. PHOTO BY YAHUDI KITUNZI



Stranded. Residents clear Kabale-Lake Bunyonyi road at Kiyora Village, Kabale District, after a landslide. PHOTO BY ROBERT MUHERZA

"What we need to do is everyone to do his part; do not settle in wetlands. People have built in wetlands and these are natural water (pathways)... water will always find its way and that is why we are experiencing flooding across the country," Mr Ekwere said.

Uganda National Meteorological Authority earlier warned of heavy rains from March to May, which it noted was likely to cause mudslides and vast infrastructure damage as it has happened.

It is not only the government blaming the floods on invasion of ecologically fragile places. The abuse

last Sunday caught the attention of Kigezi Diocese Bishop George Bagamuhunda, who while confirming 95 youth at St Mark Runoni in Rukiga District, told residents to stop environmental degradation so as to avert human-induced disasters.

In Kampala, ministry of Works spokesperson Susan Kataike said they had sent out engineers across the country to assess the extent of road infrastructure ruin, adding that the teams have one month to submit a report that will inform subsequent decisions.

"Where funds can be got, we are go-

ing to expedite the works...it is now a crisis," Ms Kataike said, indicating that cost overruns of contracted works will necessitate supplementary budget.

Asked whether the meteorological department did not alert other government arms, including Works ministry, about its forecast of abundant rains to inform a contingency plan, Ms Kataike referred the question to the weathermen.

She said the ministry has culverts to give out to stricken districts. It is help too little, too late, according to various interviewees, considering the

scale and immediacy required to fix broken infrastructure.

Tororo

In Tororo, at least four major bridges connecting to neighbouring districts have been swept away in the past week.

Mr Andrew Asaya, the district superintendent of Works, said: "We are facing a big problem due to floods."

Mr Joseph Njoroge, a resident, said transportation of their produce to the market has become difficult and costly.

"We cannot access market whenever it rains. It has terribly affected us; traders," he said.

Motorists were last Sunday left stranded after floods cut off Malab Kampala highway at Agro Bridge some four kilometres from the border, holding up delivery of imports and exports.

Butaleja

In Butaleja District, at least 1,500 people have been displaced by floods according to local officials.

Some residents and traders remained stranded after main roads including the Nabumali-Kachony Butaleja-Busolwe-Namutumba road flooded.

Traders are counting losses as trucks hauling perishable foodstuffs are wedged in soggy stretches.

Some pupils have abandoned term to school, which are administered end-of-second term examinations for fear of drowning.

Bududa

In the mountainous Bududa District, where a mudslide in May 2010 buried more than 300 residents in three hamlets, numerous bridges have been washed away, rendering