

Bududa: Cracks in Mountain

Landslides triggered by torrential rains last week killed over 500 people in Sierra Leone and another 200 in the eastern DR Congo. Bududa district on the slopes of Mt. Elgon is one of Uganda's most disaster-prone areas where mudslides buried over 300 people in 2010. **Andrew Masinde** was in the area and analyses the precarious situation

On Saturday, August 19, 8 O'clock found me in Bududa district on the south western slopes of Mount Elgon. The district is prone to landslides, especially during the rainy season. I had returned to assess Bududa's preparedness for landslides at the rains loom.

Residents living in fear
Residents claimed to have heard of cracks in one of the sub-counties. Many budaboda riders are reluctant to embark on trips in the area, just in case they get trapped by the rains while there.

"What if the cracks loosen while we are there? The roads are also impassable after the rains," one of them said.

Only after agreeing to part with sh40,000, nearly 10 times more than the ordinary fare, did Fred Wakoko, one of the budaboda riders, agree to take me there amid warnings from his colleagues to be "careful".
The bumpy ride soon came to a halt. I jumped off the bike. Wakoko abandoned his motorcycle as we scouted our way up the sharp bends and steep hill. After 45 minutes of climbing I almost gave up. However Wakoko, who was familiar with the steep slopes, kept on encouraging me to move on. This is perhaps one of the most horrid journeys I have ever made.

Site of 2010 landslides
At 12:00pm, we arrived at Nametsi village in Bukalasi sub-county, where over 300 people lost their lives on March 1, 2010.

For a visitor, it is hard to tell that this is the place where people, animals and crops were buried by the landslide in 2010.

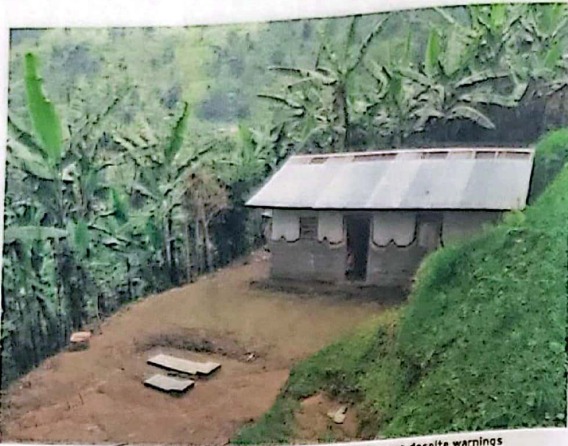
Seven years later, some of the displaced families

40,000

The number of people in Bududa district living at risk and need urgent relocation

500

The number of lives lost in Bududa district as a result of landslides over the years



A home in one of the high-risk areas. Residents continue living in the area despite warnings

"The ground echoed to every step I made, creating a hollow sound below my feet. I could feel the weak ground and sense the imminent danger of collapsing grounds."

are back and resettled in the same place that was struck by the disaster. The village, which was once deserted is now busy with human activity.

Michael Wandwasi, the LC1 chairman of Tumwasi village, Nametsi parish in Bukalasi sub-county, says many returnees re-established homes at the very spot of the March 2010 disaster.

"People are farming. They even expect a bumper harvest of maize, bananas, onions and coffee," Wandwasi says.

No education, health facilities
The major challenge here, he says, is poor access to health and education facilities.

"There is no school here for our children to attend as all schools were closed after the 2010 landslide," he says.

Wandwasi remains concerned about a looming landslide following the cracks on August 15. "I am worried of what is going to happen if it continues raining," he says.

flowing with muddy waters, followed by cracks in the ground.
"I reported the development to the county officials but I got no response," Nasili says.
He says the cracks in the ground are too wide and deep, signalling serious danger.

Leaders worried
As leaders, we are worried about what might happen as the rains continue," Wilson Waitira, the Bududa district chairperson, says.

"We have conducted surveys and discovered huge cracks that keep widening in the sub-counties of Bukalasi, Bumayoka, Bushiyi and Bushika," Waitira says.

Even areas like Naposhi and Bumushiswa in Bushika, which were not expected to experience landslides have been affected, he adds.

Waitira says in Nametsi sub-county, where the 2010 landslide wiped away lives, new cracks have developed, indicating an impending disaster.

when these cracks will come crashing down
Stephen Nasiru, the chairman of Monyi village, says the cracks developed recently following heavy rains.

"If it rains for two consecutive days, he says, "There is likely to be a heavy landslide."

He believes there are risks below the ground and fears that the more water is collected on the rocks, the higher the chances of the soil being washed away.
He recently saw a local river

Government responds

The commissioner for disaster management and preparedness, Martin Owor, says the Government is currently carrying out assessment and over 10,000 people are expected to be relocated. He notes that as part of that plan, 2,368 acres of land in Bulambuli have been purchased to resettle people.

"We already have a number we are planning to take to Bulambuli, Sironko and some parts of Bududa following a registration exercise. The plots are already demarcated and we are waiting for resources before we begin moving people," Owor says.

He says this is part of the Government's 10-year plan to relocate 500 to 1,000 people each year to safer places.

"We are aware of the cracks, they have been there, only that they are widening. We will not rest until people are resettled," Owor said, adding that there are more than 100,000 people who need relocation.



Soils on very steep slopes have already started giving way

Elgon threaten 40,000

FACT FILE

Landslides since 1933

- **1933:** 25 killed while celebrating a harvest
- **1964:** 18 people killed
- **1970:** 60 people killed during a circumcision ritual
- **1997:** 48 people killed and 10,000 displaced.
- **2010:** 365 people killed

Residents cry out

Sylvia Nabutsale, Monyi resident
I am worried about the safety of my family and neighbours. If we are not helped to find a safe place, we will die in the landslides.



Fred Masaba, Monyi resident
This is the only place I have known as home. I fear that we might lose our home during a heavy downpour and subsequent landslide. My family is ready to relocate if the Government gets for us a safe place.



Several homes dotted on the mountain slopes and valley. Residents say they are waiting for the Government to resettle them

Broken promises

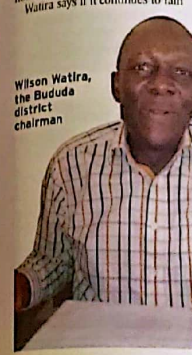
Waitira says while the Government has done a commendable job resettling some of the 2010 landslide victims in Kiryandongo, a lot more needs to be done.

"Out of the 2,000 households targeted for relocation, only 586 were resettled in Kiryandongo, leaving 1,414 stranded in risky areas."

"In 2012, the Government also promised to relocate people following a similar disaster in 2012. Nothing has been done since," he says.

In 2015, there was another promise by the Government to resettle people in Bunamhuyite sub-county, Bulambuli district, but nothing has been done to date.

"All I heard was that the Government had purchased land worth sh8b for this process, but nothing has happened," he says.
Waitira says if it continues to rain



Wilson Waitira, the Bududa district chairman



Prime Minister (OPM) requesting the Government to expedite the process of relocation and resettlement of the people who are at risk.

Areas at risk
The areas indicated by the Government that covers the whole district, a number of villages and parishes are at a high risk of experiencing a landslide.

The areas indicated for resettlement, but there has been no response from the authorities.

According to Samson Natsambwa, the principal assistant secretary in the office of the district chief administrative officer, surveys have been carried out and three disaster sections demarcated into high-risk,

moderate and low-risk areas.

"In the high-risk categories, all sub-counties along the Elgon National Park, are affected. These include Bukalasi, Bumayoka, Bulukyeke, Bushiyi, Nakaso, Bushika and Buwali. This puts all the people in this area at a high risk," he notes.

Natsambwa adds that the total population that needs urgent relocation is about 40,000 and the Government needs to act fast.

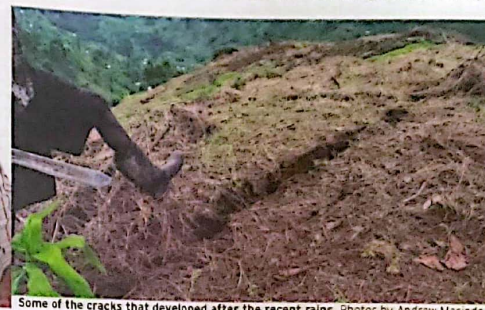
However, he says not all places are hotspots in the above sub-counties, apart from Nabulalo, Nametsi, Matwa, Bumoyi, Bufusa and Bumushiswa parishes.

District leaders helpless

"The district cannot do much because disaster management is controlled by the central government. All we can do is report to the office of the Prime Minister, which we have done and are still awaiting a response. Maybe they are waiting for people to die to act," he says.

As district leaders, Natsambwa says some temporary areas in town have been gazetted to act as camping

for another week, there will be a disaster in the district.
In a letter dated May 9, 2017, Waitira wrote to the Office of the



Some of the cracks that developed after the recent rains. Photos by Andrew Masinde

sites in case of disaster happen. This is what is within their limited means.
"We do not have a budget for disasters, apart from donations from well-wishers. The district is at God's mercy," he says.

Cause of landslides

Waitira attributes landslides in this area to continued cultivation on the mountain slopes, which compromises the capacity of the ground to hold soil.

He says a mass destruction of trees in the early 1980s and 1990s also affected the terrain. Undercutting of slopes for construction of houses and roads has also left the slope weak and the terrain susceptible to landslides.

Solutions

Natsambwa says farmers need to be involved in landslide hazard management.

There is also need to develop an early warning system as a cheaper means of reducing and avoiding the risk and loss from landslides.

He also recommends strengthening of youth training programmes to provide the young people with alternative sources of employment and reduce the pressure on land.

Owor calls for promotion of intensive agro-forestry on the slopes.
"People should avoid settling in high-risk areas," he advises.

Waitira says there is need for protection of river banks.
"Government also needs to enforce by-laws in the management of the mountainous area," he adds.