



An excavator stuck in mud in Lusalanje Village, Masaba Sub-county in Sironko District. It was hired by police to search for missing people who were buried alive by mudslides.

PHOTO BY YAHUDA KITUNZI

Sironko mudslide victims still buried in muck nine days later

Discontent. Relatives of those buried in the rubble accuse government of failing to retrieve their loved ones. But government says the weather is still a challenge.

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SIRONKO. Bodies of at least nine people who are feared to have been buried alive by a mudslide in Bufupa Parish in Masaba Sub-county in Sironko District have not been excavated, nine days after the incident took place.

Relatives of those buried in the mud have accused the government of not doing enough to excavate their loved ones so that they are accorded a decent burial.

However, the government has attributed the delays in the excavation exercise to the heavy rains in Mt Elgon region.

Mr Martin Owori, the commissioner for disaster management in the Office of the Prime Minister, said they have halted the exercise until the weather is favourable.

"The place is too wet. We cannot do much when it's raining because we don't want to lose more lives," Mr Owori said.

Mr Owori, however, said they have two graders on the site to retrieve the bodies trapped in the mud.

The State Minister for Environment, Ms Goretti Kitutu, said they halted the excavation process because there are huge rocks hanging up, which might trigger more landslides if rushed.

"They are on site but they are working concisely because of poor weather conditions. We must avoid losing more lives," she said.

One of the deceased whose body was retrieved was identified as Topista Wanyenze, 45, a resident of Rusave Village in Bufupa Parish.

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.

There were reports on Saturday that the graders ran out of fuel while digging through the mud in search of missing bodies.

The Sironko Resident District Commissioner, Mr Moses Wamote Kigayi, confirmed that the machines

got stuck in the soils but denied that they ran out of fuel.

"We cannot run out of fuel. The machines got stuck for some time," Mr Wamote said.

However, a senior police officer, who preferred anonymity, told *Daily Monitor* that the tractors are too weak to do the job.

"That machine cannot do anything here and we shall not recover any bodies unless we get a strong machine," he said.

The Elgon region police spokesperson, Mr Suwedi Mansur, said they will carry on with the search until they recover the missing bodies.

"We will work until we recover the

bodies. We have enough manpower," he said.

Ms Harriet Wegosasa, 32, a resident of Lusabe village, Bufupa parish, Masaba Sub-county, who lost her son in the landslides, said the government should use all avenues to recover the missing bodies.

"We thought government is responsible for combating disasters. How come they have abandoned us since last week. We have not received any assistance," Ms Agnes Nabukonde, another resident, said.

Some of the relatives and friends of those feared buried alive have resorted to using hoes to dig through the rubble and mud in frantic efforts to locate the bodies.

The OPM spokesperson, Mr Julius Mucunguzi, however, dismissed allegations that government had abandoned them.

"We first sent some relief items and our disaster experts went there to assess the situation before excavation could be started," he said.

Ms Marion Namono, the Bududa District environment officer, blamed the continuous occurrence of landslides on massive destruction of environment, especially in the hilly areas.

RISKY AREAS

Leaders and environmentalists have warned that more than 300,000 people in Bugisu sub-region are living in landslide-prone areas and are at risk of losing lives or displacement if not relocated. Ms Marion Namono, the Bududa District environment officer, said Bulucheke, Masaba, Bumayoka, Bushiyi, Bushika, Bukalasi and Busita sub-counties are at a higher risk of being hit by the landslides.

briefly

Body dumped by roadside

NAMUTUMBA. Police are investigating circumstances under which a man, whose body was on Sunday morning found lying in a pool of blood, met his fate. The body of Bwanika Mugoya, 43, a resident of Nalukelo Village, Bulange Sub-county, was found dumped by the roadside in Ntalinga Village, Nawansagwa Parish, Namutumba Sub-county. He was reportedly killed by a mob for allegedly stealing hens. The village chairperson, Mr Dan Nalugoda, said the deceased was found with a deep cut on the head. The Busoga East police spokesperson, Mr James Mubi, said they are yet to find the cause of the death. [Ronald Seebe]

Bishop tips leaders

BUYENDE. The Catholic Bishop of Jinja Charles Wamika has urged leaders in Buyende District to seek victory from the right sources, be accountable to the people and appreciate their victories. In a speech delivered for him by Wesunire Parish priest, Rev Fr Jude Tadeo Misango, last Sunday, Bishop Wamika said leadership comes from God. He congratulated Buyende Woman MP Veronica Babiye Kadogo, upon her election petition victory. Ms Kadogo said following her Catholic upbringing, values and principles, she forgave all her enemies, rivals and asked them to join her to serve the people, community. [Sam Caleb Opolo]

Relatives demand govt to retrieve loved ones

Voices

"We want our beloved ones recovered buried in a descent way. Government must help us and we recover them,"
HARRIET WEGOSASA,
32, RESIDENT OF
LUSABE VILLAGE,
BUDUDA PARISH

"They [graders] are on site but they are working concisely because of poor weather conditions. We must avoid losing more lives,"
GORETTI KITUTU,
STATE MINISTER FOR
ENVIRONMENT

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"The environment has been encroached on through cultivation and indiscriminate cutting down of trees," she said.

In Bududa, the landslide hit three villages, including Marobo and Shikhuyu in Buluchecke Sub-county and Nabutsasi in Bumayoka Sub-county. It also left at least 200 people displaced and acres of crops and livestock destroyed.

Mr Vincent Waboyo, the MP for Budadiri East, says Bugisu is a mountainous region and as such, the number of people at risk of natural calamities is high.

"The government and we [local leaders] should embark on massive sensitisation to create awareness on growing need for the residents living in landslide prone areas to move to lower areas or be settled elsewhere in order to avert more disasters," he said.

The LC5 chairperson, Mr Wilson Watila, said government must act very fast to resettle the people residing in wetlands.

In 2010, the government acquired about 2,800 acres of land worth Shs8b in Bunambutye Sub-county in Bulambuli District to resettle landslide victims but the plan has not yet materialised.

He said as district leadership, they have written to the OPM on several occasions informing them about people's willingness to relocate but nothing has yielded results.

"The best government has done is to send people to pretend to be registering victims but no feedback has been given on when the relocation will be effected," Mr Watila said.

He, however, said they have urged people to seek refuge in safer places.

In 2010, landslides flattened villages in Nametsi Parish, burying an estimated 350 residents.

In 2011 a mudslide in Bulambuli killed about 28 people. In March 2012, mudslides killed six people in Sironko District and in June 2012, another mudslide buried 18 people in Bududa District.

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