WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2017
Daily Monitor
www.monitor.co.ug

Promise Tracker

New special report. The ***Promise Tracker*** is Daily Monitor's weekly special feature that will track the promises made by leaders of all categories as well as public agencies to the people. The aim is to cause accountability, show status and analyse whether it was a realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.

What happened to relocation plan of people from landslide areas?



Impassable. A man helps stranded passengers carry their luggage on the Mbale–Lwakhakha Road following mudslides that occurred in the area late last month. PHOTO BY FRED WAMBEDE

BY ISAAC MUFUMBA & FRED WAMBEDE
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

THE PROMISE:

On June 29, 2010, President Museveni directed that all people living in high risk areas along the slopes of Mt Elgon, especially the mudslide prone Bududa District, be unconditionally relocated to other parts of the country.

The directive was issued through the then Prime Minister and Secretary General of the ruling NRM, Mr Amama Mbabazi.

The directive came after landslides occurred on June 25 2010 and buried two villages in Buluchekе Sub-county in Bududa District, claiming the lives of an unspecified number of people.

Whereas government put the number of the dead at 18, locals said the number was well above 100.

The rationale behind Mr Museveni's directive was to avert a recurrence of what was fast proving to be an annual, albeit fatal occurrence, raining destruction and death.

It is estimated that more than 1,000 people have lost lives in the area since March 2010 when landslides occurred in Nametsi village, killing an estimated 350 people and displacing thousands of others.

Some of the high-risk areas were named as Bumwalukani, Bunanyuma, Shalo, Buwali, Nametsi, Mabono, Bushiyi hills in Bududa and Kato, Butoto, Buwabwala, Bumbo, Tsekululu and Sono hills in Manafwa District.

Others are Masaba, Bufupa, Bumasifwa, Bumasobo, Zesui and Bukyabo hills, in the entire upper Bulambuli where soils are said to be very highly shifty.

In ordering the relocating of people living in the high risk areas, Mr Museveni suggested that government would construct urban settlements within which the people, who would have been relocated, would be resettled.

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) subsequently formed an inter-ministerial committee comprised of the ministries of Works and Housing, Local Government, Internal Affairs and Trade and Industry.

However, the committee did not make much progress in the period between its formation and the middle of 2012.

As a result, more mudslides occurred in 2011 and killed 28 people in Bulambuli District and again in Bududa District in June 2012.

Probably jolted by the death of about 20 people, the committee then announced that it had finalised plans to relocate these people to avert further disasters and also to preserve the mountain, which is essential for tourism and preservation of the ecosystem, but nothing ever happened.

Landslides have continued to occur. In August 2013, another 24 lives were lost in Bududa and smaller mudslides have continued to occur alongside the big ones. Though most of these never make to the newspaper pages and television screens, they too have been equally lethal.

As we inched towards the end of last month, disaster struck again. Mudslides occurred in Bufupa parish in Masaba Sub-county in Sironko District, killing at least nine people, but that too seems not to have jolted the concerned authorities into doing much to implement Mr Museveni's directive to evacuate people living in high risk areas on the slopes on the mountain.

Every time disaster has struck, it seems to catch government, especially officials from the OPM and the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, unawares.

Responses, be it in terms of improving infrastructure to allow for delivery of relief items, the process of delivery of items and management of post disaster situations in the disaster areas has always proved wanting.

Last week, delivery of relief items was delayed due to rains that washed away roads and made them impassible.

The road to the disaster area is part of the 44.5km Mbale–Bubulo–Lwakhakha road, which President Museveni and the ruling NRM have been promising to fix since 1986 when they shot their way into power.

Though the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) and officials of a Chinese firm, China State Construction Engineering Corporation, signed a contract on September 26, 2016 to have the road upgraded from gravel to tarmac, work has never begun due to alleged UNRA's failure to pay out compensation to Project Affected Persons.

It is difficult to establish exactly why Mr Museveni's directive has never been implemented and why people in the area continue to hang in there despite the obvious danger to which they are exposed whenever the rains come.

It is true that government's move to renege on an earlier promise to avail each of the households that had been relocated 2.5 acres of arable land contributed to the reluctance of more of their counterparts to embrace the relocation, but developments since 2010 would suggest that political shenanigans and perennial lack of funds on the part of government have continued to undermine the plan.

Investigations carried out by *Daily Monitor* in 2013 revealed that some politicians, including elected leaders, had been campaigning against the plan to relocate people to other areas for fear that it would result in a transfer of either their supporters or mobilisers, which would end their political careers.

The handwork of the politicians has manifested itself in various ways, some seemingly genuine concerns.

For example, sections of those who had been lined up for relocation to Kiryandongo District declined to

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leave on grounds that the land in Bunyoro sub-region is not as fertile as that in Bugisu sub-region.

At the same time, the resource envelope did not seem to be allowing for government to follow it through.

For example, out of the initial Shs8b that had been budgeted for the relocation exercise, government had by August 2013 allocated only Shs2b. The money was simply not enough to move people from Bududa to Kiryandongo, where they were initially meant to have been resettled and to also help put in place infrastructure such as schools.

According to Ms Rose Nakabugo, an official attached to the disaster preparedness desk in the OPM, besides the move to Kiryandongo, government also intended to resettle another 5,000 families in the lower lying areas of Bugisu sub-region.

To that end, late in 2013 government secured 2,828 acres of land in Bunambutye Sub-county in Bulambuli District with a view of allocating each family at least 2.5 acres of land on which to resettle, but like the Kiryandongo move before it, that move has never really amounted to much.

IMPACT

Failure to implement the planned evacuation exercises have meant that lives continue to be lost as some of the people in the high risk areas simply will not move.

Besides, cynicism seems to be on the rise around the Elgon sub-region, as entire sections of the populace have either developed serious doubts in government's ability to guide and protect the populace and even come good on its promises. That is best captured in the comments of the LCV Chairman of Bududa District, Mr Wilson Watila.

"The government has always said they have identified places within the country, but relocating the people has taken ages and there has been little progress," he says.



Stuck. A truck stuck on Masaba- Sironko Road after a recent downpour. PHOTO BY YAHUDU KITUNZI

VOICES



"Every time mudslides occur they not only result in death, but also leave so many people traumatised and hopeless. I am saying so because I know about it all. I am one of the few mudslides survivors here. Government needs to speed up the resettlement plan in order to save people from all that torture."

AGNES NANDUDU, SIRONKO LANDSLIDES' SURVIVOR.



"It is a bit shameful that government has continuously delayed the relocation of people to safer areas, which has continued to expose them to danger and in the process caused loss of lives. Why does it seem to have suddenly become impotent? I think it should pay very heavily for the loss of lives and property."

ALEX NABENDE, MASABA DISTRICT COUNCILOR TO SIRONKO LCV COUNCIL.



"There are so many fresh cracks that have developed. The cracks are visible in Bushlyi, Nametsi and Bumwalukani. The soils in those areas are still moving and more mudslides are likely to occur anytime. We are sitting on the time bomb yet residents have stubbornly refused to relocate to safer areas."

JOHN NAMBESHE, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR MAJIYA COUNTY, BUDUDA DISTRICT.



"The government has failed to relocate people to safer areas for seven years now. They keep making political statements but nothing is implemented. as a leadership, we demand that government explains the failed resettlement plans and also takes responsibility for the lives lost whenever fresh landslides occur in the region."

WILSON WATILA, LCV CHAIRMAN BUDUDA.



Death scene. Residents at one of the sites where landslides occurred, leaving houses, livestock and crops destroyed. PHOTO BY FRED WAMBEDE

1000

Death. It is estimated that more than 1,000 people have lost lives in high risk areas along the slopes of Mt Elgon, especially the mudslides prone Bududa District, since March 2010 when landslides occurred in Nametsi village, killing an estimated 350 people and displacing thousands of others.

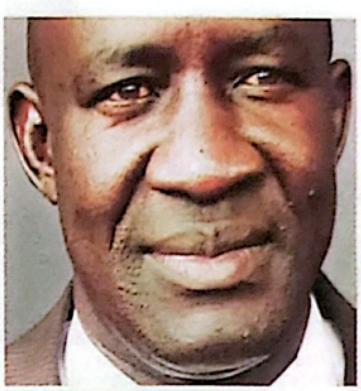
MONITOR'S POSITION

Mudslides have been occurring in the Mount Elgon area and indeed in other mountainous parts of the country for more than 50 years now. It is, however, surprising that government seems to be bereft of ideas when it comes to dealing with them.

Despite having put in place a ministry for disaster preparedness, government has never been ready to deal with disasters whenever and wherever they occur. Interventions are not always knee jerk in nature and inadequate.

Relief items are never readily available or adequate and there are often no earth moving equipment to help with recovery operations. As the most recent mudslides showed, people are often left to resort to rudimentary tools such as the hand hoe, which cannot do much. This scenario contradicts the notion of preparedness.

Government needs to constitute a crisis management committee, which envisages different disaster case scenarios and makes adequate preparations in terms of management and resource allocation.



OFFICIAL EXPLANATION

The Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Mr Musa Ecweru, who was in Bududa District to oversee relief operations, said government is still intent on evacuating people from mudslides prone areas. He said 1,605 families are at risk and must be relocated to avoid a repeat of disasters such as had occurred at the time.

The minister, who was speaking at Bufupa Primary School where he addressed members of families of those who had perished during the late August mudslides, however, seemed to suggest that government has had a change of mind on implementing relocations such as that which saw some of the affected persons relocated to Kiryandongo District.

"The government wants to relocate you to safer areas but you can still use this land for farming," he said.

VERDICT

Promise was Realistic ☐ Promise was Unrealistic ☐ Promise was Empty ☐ Promise is Overdue ☑

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