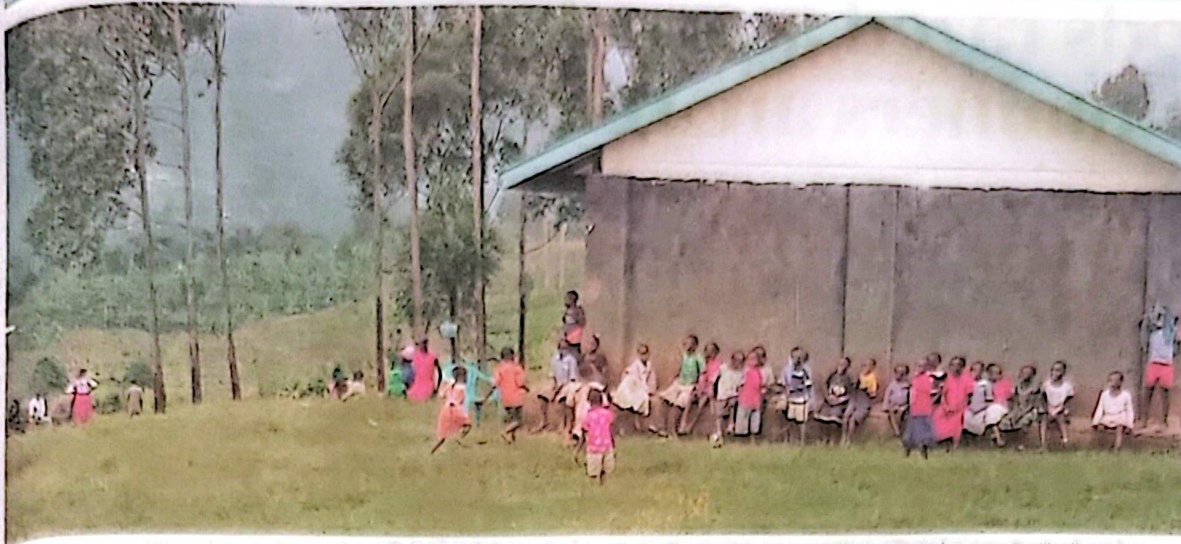




Pupils at Bumabugu Primary School in Masugu Parish, Buluganya Sub-county. Education in the area has been negatively affected as many families live in fear.
PHOTO: DERICK WENANI

Bulambuli landslide victims decry delayed resettlement

Residents have called for speedy compensation, resettlement, and repair of roads, bridges, schools, and health facilities damaged by landslides.

BY DERICK WENANI

On November 27, 2024, several sub-counties of Bulambuli District, especially in the upper belt, suffered devastating landslides, which hit the area, leading to the death of hundreds and the destruction of properties.

Daily Monitor visited some of the areas severely impacted by the disaster to evaluate the current living conditions of the residents, nearly one and a half years later.

In Masugu Parish, Buluganya Sub-county, houses were destroyed and buried in seven villages.

A few bodies were recovered for decent burial while most of the deceased remain in the rubble. The locals in this area continue to live in fear and are yet to recover from the devastation caused by the landslides.

Some remain due to the government's delayed compensation. Others have transformed portions of the land into coffee and banana gardens. However, the significant part of the land remains flat and unused, scattered with stones, with only a few houses still standing.

Bumabugu Primary School in Buluganya Sub-county is one of the few structures that survived near the heavily affected areas.

Mr Livingstone Gidongo, a teacher at the school, emphasised the significant impact of the landslides on education in the area.

He mentioned that landslides claimed the lives of five people

DISPLACED

Some of the families that were staying in disaster-prone areas in the Bugisu Sub-region were taken to the internally displaced people's resettlement camp at Bunambutye in the lower area of Bulambuli District, where they still await government action to resettle them.

This publication learnt that at the camp, the families still stay in tents. For two years now, husbands have been separated from their wives and the area experiences floods in the rainy season and semi-arid conditions in the dry season.

Last year in December, the Ministry of Finance released Shs50b to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), out of which Shs10b meant for buying land and Shs40b for compensating the survivors, with each getting Shs10m to build a house.

on November 27, 2024, burying the teachers' quarters and belongings. The tragedy also led to a decrease in pupil enrolment from over 1,000 to less than 100 learners currently.

Disrupted education

"Survivors with children were relocated to the camp and other safer areas and the teacher population reduced from 12 to eight," he said.

The school also adopted a policy to dismissing learners as soon as it threatens to rain so they can be with their families for safety during

downpours.

"Both learners and teachers are living in fear," Gidongo said.

This reporter saw a crack just below the school compound and teachers said they cannot tell when it will widen and cause a landslide.

Mr Phillip Mafabi, another teacher at the school, added that the landslides affected the school's academic performance and participation in co-curricular activities.

"Learners have been traumatised by the landslides. Some of us have tried asking for transfers but our requests have not been granted," he said.

Mr Mafabi revealed that their school playgrounds were filled with mud and big stones.

"We tried to ask for help from the district to level it to no avail," he said.

The state of roads in some sub-counties like Simu and Buluganya is also worrying.

Poor transport

Mr James Songo, a resident of Mabiya Village, Nataba Parish in Buluganya Sub-county, expressed frustration over the lack of action to repair the bridges and roads affected by the landslides.

He said most of the bridges linking the upper sub-counties were swept away and since then, many have not been reconstructed.

For instance, the Marama Bridge on River Simu was swept away by the floods in November 2024.

However, it has not been repaired and locals have devised a makeshift wooden bridge, which can only be used by motorcycles riders and pedestrians.

The other bridges along the Buyaga-Buluganya Road, which is the shortest link from Simu, Bumabugu, Buluganya, Sooti, and Nabivutulu sub-counties to the tarmac road at Buyaga Town Council remain impassable.

"Even most of our roads were blocked by big stones and mud but all have not been removed. We have taken it upon our selves to open some portion using hoes where we can pass with motorcycles and bicycles," Songo said.

He decried the longer alternative routes, saying it has led to transport cost hikes.

He highlighted the economic challenges faced by farmers due to the inaccessibility of markets and increased transport cost.

"Since then, all our farm produce lacks a proper market because there is no way of transporting it. Things that were transported for Shs5,000 are now at Shs15,000 to Shs20,000 to reach Mbale City," Mr Songo said.

Mr Michael Magona, a boda boda rider and resident of Elgon constituency, urged the authorities to repair the roads and bridges.

He added: "They have not yet compensated the people to leave the risky areas and have also failed to repair the infrastructure to support life," Magona said, expressing worry about what they may experience during this year's rainy season.

In Simu Sub-county, Bugibologoto Health Centre III, which was newly constructed, was destroyed and the health workers' quarters were completely buried in the ground.

The health centre has been relocated to a building at Simu Sub-county headquarters where residents decried congestion and poor service due to the limited space.

The destroyed health centre is next to Bugibologoto Primary School, formerly known as Gowa Primary School. Deep cracks are seen in several classrooms where lessons are still being conducted.

One of the teachers of the school, who sought anonymity, told our reporter that the school also has

less than 100 learners. He attributed the small population of learners to the disasters that have occurred in the area.

"Some parents decided to take their children to schools they feel are safer than here. Others changed their places of residence following the landslides that destroyed the health facility. The school survived narrowly," he said.

Mr Richard Nakoko, a resident of Nabinyinya Village, Kidega Parish, Simu Sub-county in Bulambuli District, accused local leaders of not treating their complaints with urgency.

Nakoko, who lives in a house with cracks on all sides including on the verandah, said they have been promised relocation for nearly two years without action.

"Our local leaders headed by the LCS don't care about us. We have spent about two years in this situation, moving, eating and sleeping poorly," he said.

Some of the families that were staying in disaster-prone areas in the Bugisu sub-region were taken to the internally displaced people's resettlement camp at Bunambutye in the lower area of Bulambuli District, where they still await government action to resettle them.

This publication has learnt that at the camp, the families still stay in tents. For two years now, husbands have been separated from their wives and the area experiences floods in the rainy season and semi-arid conditions in the dry season.

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Mr Twala Aramathan, the Bulambuli District senior assistant chief administrative officer and the district disaster focal person, said the camp currently holds 1,228 households, with the majority from Bulambuli District.

"There are 55 households from Bududa, 18 from Manafwa and the rest of them are from Bulambuli. The OPM has finally planned to have some of the families resettled," he said.

He said the government has acquired 1,300 acres of land in Kiriki Sub-county in Kween District.

"It is not enough for all of them but we are still identifying more land," said Twala, adding that the process of clearing and surveying the land is underway.

He added: "Each household is to be given 10 metres by two acres of land. They are currently clearing the bush and the surveyors are to start doing the demarcations to permanently resettle the victims. With rains threatening to return, we are requesting those who are still in disaster-prone areas to vacate," he said.

The government has been resettling households at high risk of landslides in the Elgon Sub-region in Bunambutye Sub-county, Bulambuli District where it acquired about 2,800 acres of land in 2013.

Close to 300 families, of more than 5,000 people were resettled in the first phases and allocated constructed houses plus two acres of land to each household, but leaders say the resettlement is too slow.

Costly transport.
Since the landslides destroyed the bridges, all our farm produce lacks a proper market because there is no way of transporting it. Things that were transported for Shs5,000 are now at Shs15,000 to Shs20,000 to reach Mbale City.
Mr James Songo, a resident of Mabiya Village, Nataba Parish in Buluganya Sub-county