

Survivor of landslide talks about ordeal

SIRONKO: One of the survivors of the landslides in the mountainous district of Sironko last Monday cannot believe that she is still alive. As she wipes tears off her face, Agnes Nabukonde, 42, a resident of Rusave village, Bufupa parish, Masaba Sub County in Sironko District, reveals that by the time of the landslide she was in the kitchen preparing evening tea for her family.

BY YAHUDU KITUNZI.

At 5pm last Monday, Agnes Nabukonde and her family were about to take evening tea as usual when they heard the neighbours scream.

"Landslide has killed us," she recalls them shouting.

She believes the incident was a result of heavy rain in the mountainous area. She adds that when the landslide started, she saw a wave of mud and rocks inching closer.

"We first heard rain at around 1pm and shortly when the rain stopped, I heard a sound like a bullet. However, as soon I opened the door of the kitchen, I saw that the landslide had buried some people.

She narrates how she saw rocks and mud rolling to her side; how that mud and rocks slammed people in the face and buried them.

Nabukonde explains that the rolling mud and rocks started submerging her compound, forcing her to start running away to safety. On her way, she first held onto a big stone and floated through the rain-triggered mudslides.

Nabukonde whose plot is in the middle of the area where the landslides occurred, says she is still wondering how she survived the disaster that buried people, homesteads, crops and cattle.

"I think God still loves me and my family," said Nabukonde who looks desperate now.

The mother of 11 was caught alone when the landslide happened. Her husband Fred Wanyenya was not around at the time. She had accepted the fate that awaited her and the children. She thought they would surely die since there was no one to save them. She narrates how she ran like a mad person looking for her children as she could not tell what

each was doing at that time.

She first ran away before recalling that she had left her children crying helpless. "When I came back to pick the children, I found them in the house. They had locked themselves inside. I cried for assistance as I picked them but no one could help me at that time and I decided to start running away," she said.

There were many people who had rushed to the scene to see what was happening. But I did not know any of them. I became desperate, thinking that my children might have died already. My eyes were closed but I could still hear the rocks and mudslide roaring," she said.

Nabukonde who lost cows, chicken, goats, clothes and food, among other items, says she will never forget what she went through that day. Although she ran away to save her life, little did she know that the landslide had buried her relatives, friends and neighbours.

She only got news that some people had died in the landslides at around 6pm when she heard some people crying. She says since that day she has had bad dreams.

Since the incident

"I am not myself up to now. I dream about a lot of things which is bad in our culture. But I know it is as a result of that disaster which I witnessed burying people," she says, adding that since then she has got a heart problem. "My heart beats faster these days and I am worried that I might get some complications."

Nabukonde who confirmed that she no longer wants to stay in the area said she does not sleep these days. She lost her immediate neighbour and a relative in the mudslide that buried about 10 people.

"Whenever I think about her, I feel sad. That day, we had lunch together and she told me she was going to fetch water but shortly afterwards, I heard different news," says Nabukonde, recalling her neighbour's death.

Nabukonde and her family are now surviving on handouts from well-wishers. She said even her children lost everything in the landslides. She expressed fear that the children might not report for third term when school reopens.

She is thankful to God that

she did not lose her children in the disaster although some of them were injured in the scuffle of pushing them to safety. Nabukonde and her family have now taken refuge in the neighbourhood which is also at risk.

The landslide that was triggered by a heavy rainstorm buried Lusalanje village. More than 10 people are feared dead and many are still missing.

The body of a woman identified as Topista Wanyenze, 45 years, a mother of eight and resident of Rusave village, Bufupa parish, Masaba sub county in Sironko District was retrieved from the rubble and debris by residents who rushed to the scene of the landslide.

However, people are losing hope of recovering their loved ones who are still missing. The excavator which was hired by Uganda Police Force to search for the nine people buried in the mountainous village got stuck in the mud.

LANDSLIDES IN THE NEWS

In the last two weeks, landslides have been reported in Bududa District in the Mount Elgon area as well as neighbouring Sironko, destroying homes and property, and displacing hundreds of residents.

Deputy police spokesperson, Polly Namaye, confirmed that one person died in Sironko. She added that search and rescue operations were underway for those reported missing. The landslide in Sironko came a day after another destroyed three villages in Bududa.

According to local leaders and security officials, several homes were destroyed, livestock buried and at least 200 people displaced. -The East African

