

**Challenge.** The district health officer, Mr Ben Ongom, says although the government recently gave some food donations, high operational costs of the facility are a challenge.

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**OMORO.** Omoro District leaders have asked government to take over the Nodding Syndrome Care Facility in Odek Sub-county, citing financial constraints.

The care centre has since 2012 been supported by Hope for Humans, a non-governmental organisation.

Hope for Humans was providing medical and personal care, special schooling, and nutritious meals to children with nodding syndrome.

The leaders say the facility currently lacks funds to adequately take care of children and carry out outreach programmes in homes of those recovering from nodding syndrome.

A total of 29 are currently at the centre while 237, who were rehabilitated, have been reintegrated within communities.

The district chairperson, Mr Douglas Peter Okello, told *Daily Monitor* in an interview recently that managing the care centre has been complex since Hope for Humans cut their support.

#### The decision

The organisation's chief executive officer, Ms Suzanne Gazda, in a July email seen by *Daily Monitor*, noted that board of directors had made a 'difficult decision' to dissolve the organisation and transition the children into the care of Ugandan government.

According to Mr Okello, the lives of the children are at a risk since they are not receiving adequate food ration and special care.

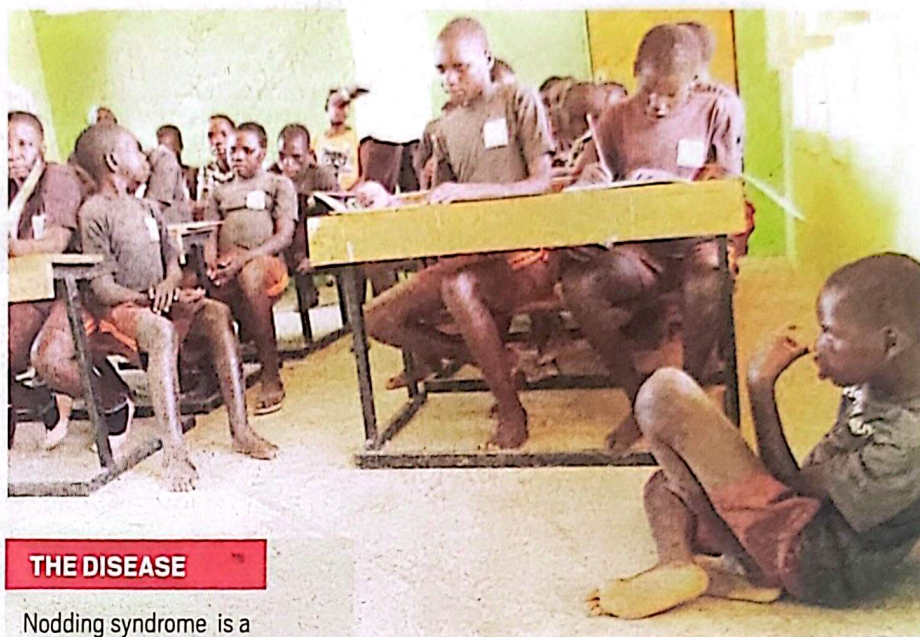
"We have many children who had shown signs of recovery but they are now relapsing because of lack specialised care and treatment," Mr Okello said.

He revealed that many parents of the affected children are poor peasant farmers.

However, Mr Okello also suggested that government should expand the centre into a special needs school to cater for special needs children.

The district health officer, Mr Ben Ongom, said although the government through Office of the Prime

# Donor cuts funding for nodding syndrome centre



**Affected.** Children suffering from nodding syndrome attend a special class at facility in Omoro District recently.  
PHOTO BY OKELLO STEPHEN

## THE DISEASE

Nodding syndrome is a mentally and physically disabling condition that only affects children of ages between five and 15. Its symptoms include involuntary uncontrollable nodding of the head, epileptic seizures, saliva dripping, degenerated cognitive abilities, stunted growth among others.

Minister [OPM] recently gave some food donations, the high operational cost of the facility still remain a big challenge.

He said the district health department cannot afford to support the budget and activities of the facility since they too are cash strapped.

"Our proposal to government is that they should extend more support to the centre so that it operates normally. We are unsure of how the centre will operate next year without adequate funding," Mr Ongom said.

Mr Caesar Okot, the programme manager Hope for Humans, acknowl-

edged the financial cut.

"Our donor had initially intended to stop funding the centre by August but after a series of engagements, the donor accepted to extend support to December 31. What we are receiving currently is a minimum support," Mr Okot said.

He noted that they have made proposals in consultation with the district leaders seeking government's intervention before they completely run out of funding.

## 3,000

**Affected.** Number of children in northern Uganda that have been affected by the nodding syndrome condition since 2009.

Ms Grace Kwiycwiny, the State Minister for Northern Uganda, however, said government through the Ministry of Health has been supporting the centre for the past years.

"Every quarter, the government has been giving financial support to the centre. The problem could be arising from how the district leadership are drawing their budget to use the money; government is supporting the centre...." Ms Kwiycwiny said in a telephone interview on Monday.

She, however, did not specify how much the centre has been receiving quarterly from the government.

But information this newspaper obtained contradicts the minister's statement that government has been supporting the care centre.

According to a source at the district, government only released Shs10 million in the last financial year when Omoro had just gained a district status to enhance outreach programmes.

An estimated 3,000 children mainly in Kitgum, Gulu, Pader and Lamwo districts in Acholi Sub-region were affected by the strange since 2009 when its outbreak was first reported.