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300,000 locals at risk of landslides in Elgon region - OPM official

MBALE. More than 300,000 residents of Elgon sub-region are at risk of landslides and need to be relocated to safer zones to avert a looming disaster, a senior officer from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has revealed.

Mr Solomon Elugant, a senior disaster preparedness officer, said the locals in landslide-prone villages in the five districts that form Elgon sub-region should urgently be relocated.

Only last week, environmentalists and leaders also warned that more than 150,000 people in Bugisu sub-region are living in landslide-prone areas and should be relocated immediately.

They also said at least 10 villages in Bududa District are at a risk of landslides that are currently ravaging the

Bugisu sub-region. They cited the villages of Bumayemba East, Bumayoka, Bumalaka, Nabusatsi, and Bulucheke.

Mr Elugant told participants at a one-day training on climate change and disaster risk reduction for Bugisu sub-region in Mbale Town that the ministry's national policy for disaster preparedness and management 2010 was put in place but there was no law to enforce it.

The training attracted district council chairpersons, resident district commissioners, environment officers, community development officers, civil society organisations, and chief administrative officers from the districts of Manafwa, Bududa, Mbale, Sironko, Namisindwa and Bulambuli.

"The challenges being faced now

are partly due to lack of a Bill to create an effective framework through which disaster preparedness and management is entrenched in development process, focusing on saving lives and livelihood. The Bill is in an advanced stage," Mr Elugant said.

Measures

He said the Bill is to establish disaster preparedness and management institutions at all levels and also equip them in order to ensure that the country is prepared at all times to cope with disasters and integrate disaster preparedness into development processes.

Mr Bob Natifu, the principal climate change officer, said the climate change department at the Ministry

of Water and Environment has been spearheading the formulation of the approved strategic programme for climate Resilience Investment Plan for Uganda. They are supported by the Climate Investment Fund preparatory grant under the pilot programme me on climate resilience through the African Development Bank.

Mr Natifu said the main objective of the programme is to assist developing countries, including Uganda, mainstream climate resilience into core development planning for transformation and complementing other development initiatives.

Mr Natifu said part of the grant is to strengthen capacity of local government in responding to climate change-related disasters through training and

practical modules that can help them plan to respond to climate change.

"The level of disasters occurrences in the region is increasing and this is attributed to changing weather and climate coupled with human," he said.

State minister for Environment, Dr Mary Goretta Kitutu, said the Elgon sub-region forest cover has been degraded and its hills have been left bare and have contributed to the increasing cases of landslides.

Ms Kitutu said the relocation of people to risky areas shouldn't be forceful but through dialogue and compensation and must be done in a phased manner. She called upon the OPM to improve on their response intervention.