

VILLAGERS WANT GOVERNMENT TO DEAL FIRMLY WITH LRA

By Phillip Mbugo William.

"Why should the international community and our government continue promising us that they will flush the LRA out of our soil?" These are the words on everybody's lips in a tiny village in South Sudan's Western Equatoria state.

According to 33 year old Mbiko Alfred who comes from Bure-angburu village in Nzara County, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) raiders have caused real fear amongst local residents to the extent that nobody sleeps at night. He says, "Last week, I was resting in my house before darkness; I heard someone scream outside my house; I also heard people's footsteps as if they were running in different directions; when I came out, I came face to face with LRA attackers; I survived death by a whisker after running into a nearby thicket," says Mbiko.

Mbiko recalls that the attack was just one amongst a series that remain sporadic and deadly. Innocent lives have been lost, children kidnapped, women raped and young men abducted, he recounts. The LRA is a

Ugandan rebel group which continues to cause havoc in South Sudan's Western Equatoria state and the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. "Lives have been lost, we do not know how we will overcome this situation as our appeals to the government to beef up security personnel have fell on deaf ears," adds Mbiko. Asenta Valerio, who also comes from the same village as Mbiko, displays scars on her legs which she got when trying to escape the wrath of LRA attackers two years ago.

Despite her moving ordeal, Asenta is proud to vividly narrate her story. She was abducted alongside her four children aged between 9 and 26 years. "We were very lucky that village boys commonly referred to as Arrow Boys mounted an immediate chase and saved us. We could not be alive today if the Arrow Boys did not rescue us", says Asenta. Sporadic attacks in this remote and small village have led to a high drop out rate among school age going children while their parents, most of them farmers, have deserted their farms and fled for fear of renewed LRA

attacks. Most of those affected by this situation have sought refuge in government administrative units situated in Yambio and Nzara county headquarters. The recurring attacks, residents say, are a clear manifestation of the government's lack of commitment to tackle the LRA menace once for all.

Justin Misikin is the coordinator of the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SSRRC), the agency that is tasked with handling issues that concern internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees.

He says that there are a huge number of IDPs who fled their homes in Bure-angburu village and are now living under trees and makeshift tarpaulin and tents across Nadari Stream, Nzara town, without access to clean water and shelter.

"Most of the IDPs who fled their homes are afraid to go back to their homes because of the fear of more attacks from the LRA and decide to stay in town for safety," confesses Misikin. ■

CHILDREN CONTINUE DYING DUE TO LACK OF MEDICAL FACILITIES IN YEI

By Poverty Alfred Taban

Alarmed by the high infant mortality rate, women in Yei River County are calling on the government to build more hospitals in the region. They are also asking that the government improves the facilities at the Yei Civic Hospital which is overwhelmed by the number of patients. The situation, they observe, has seen a rise in the number of expectant women resorting to Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) during deliveries. They now claim many mothers have lost their babies, either through miscarriages or soon after giving birth due to lack of medical attention. Speaking to the People's Voice in Yei River County, the women said expectant mothers died of complications that would be addressed if the government

builds more health centres. Betty Poni, 30, who has delivered five of her six children at home, lost three due to lack of medical intervention because she lives more than 10 km from the nearest hospital. Betty says she gave birth to her six children under the care of the TBA's who lacked essential maternal health care expertise. "My three children would probably be alive today if I had access to a hospital. Many women lose their children because there are no ante-natal clinics," she said. She added that besides building more hospitals, the government should also educate women about the importance of attending medical clinics. "Women are ignorant of what they should do while pregnant. They also realized their lives are in danger when it is too late," she said.



25 years old Emmanuel Simon, one of the villagers who escaped LRA attacks in Bangoso village

GOVERNMENT ON THE SPOT AS STREET CHILDREN CRY OUT FOR HELP

Day of the Street Child? By Agele Benson

The 12th April 2011 was the international day of the street child but, in much of South Sudan, soon to be the world's newest state, it has passed without notice or official acknowledgement, save for a local charity in Yei which organized an event to highlight the social and economic magnitude of the problem. The Network for Education and Empowerment Services (NEES) runs a centre to help street children and assembled a group of street kids who have been given a ray of hope for the future after years of coping with poverty and illiteracy. Jamila Sitima, a 17 year old girl, praised the charity for transforming her. "We are six in our family. I lost my father and then had to drop out of school. I used to wash plates in restaurants but I am now happy to be back at school, thanks to NEES," Sitima stated. Sitima's worry now is about her other two sisters who roam the streets from one end to the other, doing "dirty jobs" such as washing utensils, where they are paid SDG 3 daily, while her three brothers are out of school as well. "My brothers survive on selling used clothes on behalf of retailers". Sitima said that their problems started when, "my mother married another man and they don't care for us. Our stepfather hates us." Sitima is very bitter about the situation and cannot forgive her mother for marrying a second husband after their father died. "I call her my mother only because she gave birth to me. She has



Jamila Sitima with her classmate

deprived us of motherly love. I know my mother is poor but I have wanted love from her, not to take another man who abhors us." Meanwhile, Onzima Saddiq, a 14 year old boy who also has lost his father, was

excited to enroll in school. Another 14 year old, Abraham Ayume, starts his day as a taxi conductor and ends it in pubs, and was not sure when he will be able to resume his studies, although he is making SDG 10 a day. "I left my father's house because he failed to pay my school fees. I want to go to school but, my father prefers drinking, and he spent the money I was making on alcohol, while my mother is poor and cannot afford to pay my school fees. I do not want to go back", he said. Ayume helps support his mother with the money he earns. Despite the grim picture he portrays about his education future, Ayume says he hopes to resume classes when he can find someone to sponsor him. However, his immediate relatives do not want to help. "My uncles say they will not help me because my father spends his money on drink instead of supporting us," explains Ayume. The number of kids

Cont. p2

TEARS AS GOVERNMENT BULLDOZERS FLATTEN HOUSES

By Yuggu Charles

Rabuk Chaplan stood bewildered and confused as bulldozers mowed down a building that has been his home and clinic for many years. He tried pleading with government officials to spare his home but his pleas fell on deaf ears. He is among hundreds of people whose houses have been targeted for demolition in Juba as the government cleans up the city in preparation for the birth of the new nation following the recent referendum.

Chaplan has been operating a clinic at the customs market since 2007. He has also been living at the same premises. But he is now homeless and risks losing his business that has helped him to feed his family. "My drugs are getting expired in the store because they are kept at a temperature that is not suitable. Now I am forced to rent another small structure which is very expensive," he stated. He said that he has migrated to Nyakuron West, but life is not easy following the demolition of the customs market. "Prices of food and

other commodities have more than doubled, making life very difficult," he said. The Central Equatorial State authorities issued a decree to demolish both un-demarcated residential and commercial buildings in the area. The warning only came via the state owned South Sudan Radio and the message urging residents of Nyakuron, Hai Nyakama, Kasaba and Gumbo to leave within seven days. Many affected people have been living in these places for the last 40 years but, compensation from the government seems unlikely because the authorities

Cont. p2

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another informative edition of the People's Voice.

In this issue, as usual, our team of professional journalists and editors has put together feature stories that represent the People's Voice's traditional, bottom-up approach to expose the day to day issues that affect the lives of ordinary people across Southern Sudan. First and foremost, the May issue takes a look into the plight of the ever increasing number of street children in most urban centres. The 12th April 2011 was the international day of the street child but, in South Sudan, this important event escaped the attention of many, save for a local charity in Yei County. Here an event was organized to highlight the social and economic magnitude of the problem. People's Voice reporter, Agele Benson Amos, was on hand to listen to the stories of street kids and investigate the worrying trend that is threatening to ruin the future of many Southern Sudanese children. April saw massive demolition of illegally constructed structures in and around Juba city. Government bulldozers mercilessly roared on people's houses and businesses leaving thousands homeless and with huge losses. We ask why were people not given more notice, why was the work done during the rainy season, and how does the government plan to compensate its citizens for their losses? Francis Lokole caught up with South Sudan's iron lady, Adelina Tito. She is the Paramount Chief of Eastern Equatoria state. Adelina's exceptional story is one of suffering and difficulty, like so many others in this war ravaged country, but also one of courage and endurance, as she rose through the ranks to reach a position where she can work to help and represent others. In Western Equatoria state we investigate the problems and fear caused by sporadic Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacks. Here there is an unwritten law, "never walk alone". One of our reporters spoke to some of the victims of LRA atrocities, in a region where most villagers have been forced to desert their farms because of the attacks, and listened to their moving tales and complaints about government inaction. Elsewhere: in Juba County, our able reporter, Charles Yuggu has looked into the skyrocketing prices of commodities in markets, and the impact this is having on people's lives; in Yei River County, we hear about the high rate of infant and mother mortality due to lack of medical facilities; and farmers in Lakes State tell us about the devastating disease that is wiping out all their cattle. I hope you find all these stories informative and enlightening! We promise to remain the voice of the voiceless and the voice of the ordinary people. ■

EDITORIAL TEAM

- Santino Okanyi
Project Supervisor
 - Oliver Modi
UJOSS Chairperson
 - Paul Jimbo
Project Coordinator/
Chief Editor
 - Lily Michael
Finance Secretary
 - Andy Abong'o
Designing and Arts
- Contact: Tel: +249 (0)924875595

GOVERNMENT ON THE SPOT AS STREET CHILDREN CRY OUT FOR HELP

living on the streets has mushroomed in the past five years of the peace agreement due to the two decades of war and unprecedented economic decline which has impacted negatively on families. There is no official count on the number of children who are currently on the streets but the Programme Director for the Christian Youth Development Agency (CYDA), Gismala Bernard, said the population is swelling every day. Apart from decades of war and economic hardship, Mr. Bernard also attributed the increasing number of kids on the street to lack of care for orphans, people having too many children and polygamy. To overturn the tide, Bernard called on the government to offer free education and free feeding in schools. According to the Programme Coordinator for NEES, Dilli Emmanuel, there are 155 street kids in their centre alone, ranging from 7 to 17 years. The NEES Programme Manager, Esther Amuna, stated they are struggling to cope and cannot feed and educate the children adequately. Esther and Dilli urged the government to do more to help street children, if the future of the fledgling country is to be bright. ■

TEARS AS GOVERNMENT BULLDOZERS FLATTEN HOUSES

only issued seven days warning for everyone to leave the areas without any mention of compensation. The operation started at Hai Nyakama, opposite Garang's Mausoleum. The State authorities however said that the exercise was meant to improve Juba by allowing better town planning but, residents complained of the short notice given. Women, children and the elderly have borne the brunt of the demolition work, as many of them have been forced to sleep in the open or take shelter under shades. One victim, Margret Jojo, 28, a mother of two, said she will continue to sleep in the open at the site of her former house. "I have nowhere to go. I will continue to live under this tree shade until the government comes to my rescue," she said as she nursed her one year old daughter. Many children who were enrolled in the nearby schools for the academic year 2011 are finding it difficult to go and attend lessons. Alice Jokudu Kenyi a mother of two says of the demolition, "The tragedy is that the demolitions have happened during the rainy season. We were rained on and my household belongings have been damaged by the rain." Kenyi said she has been living in Nyakuron since 1981 and was surprised to be given notification to leave the area in only seven days. "Life is now very harsh. The price of 50 kilograms of maize flour meal has almost doubled. Water is also scarce and we trek long distances to get it." Another victim is Nyeko Justin, a business man. He imports fish from neighboring Uganda to Juba and is now considering closing down altogether after he lost his business premises and many of his customers. I lost fish worth 3000 Sudanese pounds. I was away in Uganda when the bulldozers destroyed my house and business. My customers do not know how to reach me now." Kadoro Mary, another person displaced by the demolition work, had been living in the Nyakuron residential area since 1990 and now has nowhere to go. "The government should have given us an alternative. This is very cruel," she said. ■

NO RESPITE FOR FARMERS AS MORE CATTLE DIE IN LAKES STATE

By Abraham Machuor Lum

Kuok Malek Kuok stared at his empty cowshed, locally referred to as kraal and shook his head in disgust. Two months ago he had 55 heads of cattle. Today, he has only five remaining after a deadly cattle disease, currently sweeping through parts of Southern Sudan, wiped out his stock. He is among farmers who have lost over 30,000 cows in Rumbek village, Lakes state. Over the last few months cattle farmers in Lakes state have tirelessly continued counting their losses to a mysterious disease suspected to be an Anthrax outbreak. Last year the strange disease claimed thousands of livestock in the state before the government intervened. However, the intervention brought only temporary relief as barely four months later, the disease is back killing livestock as if with vengeance and impunity. Farmers who spoke to this reporter had sad stories. They said close to 1000 cattle were dying every day. Kuok Malek Kuok, a victim, said that the disease, locally known in the native Dinka language as Anyia, kills cows within a very short period

of time. "The symptoms include bloody diarrhoea and a swollen body, loss of weight and a lot of rashes on the animal's body," said Kuok. He added: "I used to have fifty five cows and fifty died of the disease recently. I even have no hope on the remaining five. They too look sick." Another farmer, Thon Malok Majok, said the death of so much livestock has caused a shortage of milk in the region. "Young children who used to rely on milk are now malnourished because they are being forced on to solid food," said Malok who has three wives and several children. He said he has lost 100 cattle to the disease. A young man who identified himself as Marik Lueth Achiekgi revealed that he has lost 81 cattle and 32 goats to the disease. "Livestock was the only asset and source of revenue I had. Now I don't know how I will earn a living," he said. He added: "I hold the government accountable for the death of our cattle. They have done nothing to stop the spread of the disease." In

a sad twist of events, Marik says his plans to marry before the end of this year had now been ruined. "Where will I get cows to pay the dowry," he asked. The Director General in the Ministry of Animal Resources in Lakes State, Paul Maker Degol, confirmed the outbreak of the disease in the region. He claims a shortage of vaccine is affecting the campaign to combat the disease. But he also blamed some farmers in Rumbek North County who he said had refused to have their cows vaccinated claimed the vaccines would kill them. He said that besides Anthrax, the cows were also suffering from pneumonia. ■



Kuok Malek

The Power of the Woman: A tale of one tough Sudanese woman chief

It is 6.30 am and all is quiet in Torit County of Eastern Equatorial State, Southern Sudan. But, as villagers continue to enjoy the warmth of their beds, one homestead is already abuzz with activity. Unlike in other homes, small children are already awake, sipping tea as they tease each other. Next to them are three men conversing in their mother tongue as they wait to be assigned their work for the day. As we arrive at the vast homestead, a tall, lightly built woman emerges still dressed in her brown night gown and speaking softly to someone over her mobile phone. "Yes. I am the Principal Chief here. Can I help you?" she says, her soft voice almost a betrayal to her authority. Meet Adelina Tito, the Paramount Chief of Eastern Equatorial State. Adelina exhibits confidence and authority but, it is also laced with a great deal of humility. Living in a country that has experienced conflict for many years and now grappling with a myriad of problems, Adelina is not only an inspiration to the women of Southern Sudan where gender equality is still a mirage but, she also has a loaded agenda to restore law and order in a region torn by civil war. When she was appointed to the position, many men dismissed it as a joke.



Paramount Chief in Torit

two sons, she has managed to overcome cultural barriers and the challenges of conflict to rise through the ranks, becoming the only female Paramount Chief of Eastern Equatorial State. She is in-charge of 397 chiefs, all male. She is a beacon of hope to the young girls of Southern Sudan where the education of girls has been relegated to the back seat due to social and cultural beliefs that only boys should be educated. She is using her position in society to champion the empowerment of women through education of girls. "Many women tell me my appointment has made them proud and proof that even women can hold senior administrative jobs in the government," she says. Born 50 years ago in Lopa County, Adelina came from a privileged royal background where her grandfather was a rainmaker and chief. Her family was determined to see her get a good education. She attended Torit Primary School but, the language used in schools being Arabic, she found it difficult to cope as she was not from an Arabic speaking community. Her difficult studies came to an abrupt end when the civil war broke out in 1955 and her father was killed. She married in 1975, aged 16. Her husband did not win the admiration of her family because he could not pay her dowry. "In our society, a man is respected by the way he is able to pay dowry. As a result my marriage was not good because my husband was poor," she says. They got married all the same. Her husband was later executed on suspicion that he was a member of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Juba. "It is at this point that I had to fend for myself and children. I joined the police force and became a powerful police woman," she stated. Determined, Adelina used her position in the police to play a crucial role in the war and demonstrate that she was a leader able to deliver on the demands placed on her. While working as a prison officer, she organized the release of hundreds of young Sudanese soldiers, who later escaped to Uganda. "It is this type of work that propelled me into the position of leadership," she

explains. By then, Torit was one of the epicentres of the war, making it difficult for her and her community to reside there. The many years she served as a professional policewoman and the understanding of the law she developed have helped her to execute her functions as chief well, something that has been difficult for other chiefs who lack such experience. "I began to start listening to cases and solving matters including punishing the offenders," she says. It was only after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005 and peace returned to the troubled region that she relocated from Juba to execute her functions within Torit Country. She was later promoted to the rank of Paramount Chief. As a female chief, Adelina is liked by many people for her interpersonal communication skills. Many consider her as a fair and just arbiter when it comes to conflicts or interpretations of the law. For her, the Affirmative Action principle will ensure she remains in a leadership position in the next general election. Her only challenge is winning the first ever election that will be conducted for SPLM chiefs to select one head chief as a representative to the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS). "It is a tall order since am the only woman who is going to vie for the position," she says smiling. Besides fighting for political prominence, she is also working to see more women follow in her footsteps. "I have already identified three women with good leadership qualities and encouraged them to vie for elections for chiefs during the coming elections in Langiro, Kudo and Chukdum Payams within Equatorial State," she says. Adelina has also been touring around preaching and educating women on income generating initiatives. Although Adelina admits there has been progress since 2005, she states that there is still much to be done as Sudanese women face a lot of obstacles such as access to information, education and cultural barriers, among other issues. "The sky is the limit for Southern Sudanese women," she says with a grin. ■