

Sometimes, the expecting mothers deliver on boats or the river-banks due to delays in crossing flooded sections of routes to health facilities, especially in the night.

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**R**ising water levels on Albert Nile have routinely cut off eight villages in Amor East Ward, Pakwach Town Council, forcing expectant mothers to risk delivering without medical assistance as they struggle to reach health facilities.

The situation has caused delays in timely health care services, increased home deliveries, and missed immunisation timelines for babies, and incidents where mothers give birth on riverbanks or on boats while seeking medical attention.

In the past, it was rare for River Nile to burst its banks due to swelling volumes of water. But nowadays, it has become an annual phenomenon. Ms Eunice Kisarac, a resident of Patwe Gudi Cell in Amor East Ward, said she was forced to give birth on a boat at midnight as her relatives tried to rush her to Pakwach Health Centre IV. Her relatives had to wait to cross a flooded section of the river banks to the health centre.

She experienced excessive bleeding during labour, and with no one available to cut the baby's umbilical cord, putting both her life and that of the newborn at risk.

"When labour pangs started and we were crossing the river using a boat, I ended up giving birth inside the boat. At that time, there was no one to cut the umbilical cord. I bled until a nurse was called to come and rescue me and the baby after some time," Ms Kisarac told *Daily Monitor* on Monday.

This route does not have a road and locals use boats to cross. It connects to Pakwach Main Market, schools, Pakwach Health Centre IV and religious institutions.

Since 2020, the Nile has experienced a sharp rise in water levels that affected human settlements, submerged houses, damaged road infrastructure, and turned areas such as Amor East Ward in Pakwach Town Council into an island. The situation has persisted to date.

"It was by God's grace that I and my

# Nile floods force pregnant women to deliver at home



A mother, a resident of Pakwach Town Council, waits to cross the flooded area so as to take her baby for immunisation. PHOTO / FELIX OGENRWOTH

## BACKGROUND

Pakwach is bordered by Lake Albert and the extension of the Albert Nile, stretching across the district's entire 85-kilometre length, from Dei Sub-county to Wadelai Sub-county. All sub-counties are connected to the water bodies except Alwi Sub-county, which is linked through a man-made lake.

The rising water levels have caused excessive flooding into human settlements, extending over 500 metres and surpassing the wetlands, river banks and lake shore regulations, 2000 under the National Environ-

ment Act (Cap 153), which set buffer zone distance requirements at 100 metres from the high-water mark and 200 metres from the low-water mark.

The District Environment Officer, Mr Denis Kwayopanga, said Pakwach's weather patterns have changed from the alternating rainy and dry seasons to prolonged periods of heavy rainfall, which is now causing flooding. He encouraged the current generation to adopt available mitigation methods to reduce the impacts of climate change.

In late 2023, the parliamentary Committee on Climate Change vi-

sited Pakwach and Bulisa districts to assess the impact of climate change, which has caused extensive losses and damage through floods, strong winds, hailstorms, and heavy rains. Committee chairperson Lawrence Biyika Songa, who is also the Ora County MP, said: "For the case of Pakwach and Bulisa, these are flood-prone areas; it is a rift valley flow, and so the Nile water is also flooding, but tributaries that originate from the highland, Zombo, and Nebbi, are also bringing a lot of water to the Nile... By now, the technical team should have mapped those flood hotspots and put a barrier there."

baby survived," Ms Kisarac said.

Another resident, Ms Teddy Atimango of Pujwang Central Cell, said she nearly died after giving birth on a boat without the assistance of a skilled health worker. She reported to Pakwach

Health Centre IV a week later and was fined Shs10,000 for delivering at home, a fee she describes as unfair to her family.

"That night, I gave birth at the river side, and labour pains started abrupt-

ly. I went to the shore to board a boat, but we did not find the boat captain because sometimes hippopotamus move a lot at night and so they fear to travel," Ms Atimango said.

Mr Denis Ocaya, a Village Health Team

member in Pujwang Central Village, said residents crossing the flooded area now pay Shs1,000 per trip.

He noted that several labour emergencies occur at night when boat operators are unavailable, and residents fear wild animals, including hippopotamus that move through the area in the night.

Mr Ocaya said as a result, some expectant mothers end up delivering on the river banks as they wait to cross and visit the health facility.

"Sometimes you may think your wife can possibly pass away. Helping these mothers to cross the river is very difficult most times because of fear of wild animals on the river," he stated.

The *Daily Monitor* found Ms Brenda Atimango from Panyagor Village taking her child for immunisation at Amor Health Centre II. We asked Ms Atimango about the difficulty in crossing on this route, she explained that she often misses immunisation schedules.

"When labour pains started, we went and woke up a boat captain, and when he refused to come, I ended up giving birth at home. After I went to the hospital, they asked me to pay Shs5,000 as fine for not delivering at the health centre," Ms Atimango said.

The officer-in-charge and Senior Medical Officer at Pakwach Health Centre IV, Dr John Bosco Oryema, said access across the river and flooded areas like Owere in Pakwach Town Council, Pakwinyo Parish in Wadelai Sub-county, and parts of Dei Sub-county, remains a major challenge since ambulances cannot access such areas.

He noted that residents depend on local stretchers and boats to transport expectant mothers, causing delays and denying them timely medical care.

"At worst, when the labour becomes complicated, they end up getting bigger challenges and you find them using local means of transport to get to the health centre to access the services," Dr Oryema explained.

He recounted cases in which two expectant mothers were rushed to Pakwach Health Centre IV on a locally made stretcher after their babies got stuck midway during delivery, and the medical team ended up saving the lives of the mothers only.