

National News

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One miner suffocates, three injured at Kassanda mine

Residents said an unspecified number of miners was still trapped in the gold mine.

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The Police Fire Prevention and Rescue Services has retrieved one of the bodies of artisanal gold miners who got trapped in a deep mine pit in Kassanda District.

The miners were trapped in a pit at Kagaba mining site, Bukuya Sub-county in Kassanda District on Tuesday morning.

The officers also rescued three other miners and rushed them to nearby health centres. The injured miners are in critical condition.

A late Tuesday statement by the Police Mineral Protection Unit identified the deceased miner as Yokana Manishimwe, who alongside 17 others got trapped in the mine. They entered the mine at around 7am.

According to eyewitnesses, an unspecified number of miners was still trapped in the killer pit.

"By noon, [Tuesday], voices of affected miners were still being heard from underground, crying for help," Mr Daniel Ssekyanzi, a resident, said yesterday.

One of the survivors who preferred anonymity for fear of reprimand, recalls hearing the sound of a big heap of



Artisanal miners in Lujingi D Village, Kassanda District inspect a gold mine that collapsed, killing one of their colleagues on September 10, 2019. PHOTO/JOSEPHINE NNABBALE

soil that collapsed on them while inside the pit.

"We signed on a list which had over 20 names before entering the pit. Five of us were removed from the pit alive before

security authorities suspended the exercise and chased away all locals from the scene who were trying to take pictures using their smartphones," the survivor said.

Another resident, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, accused police of conniving with owners of mines to block locals who offered to help in rescuing victims from the pit.

PAST INCIDENTS

In the last decade, a number of people have died in Kassanda's gold mines. In April 2015, two artisanal miners, Aluberi Ndyayisaba, 27, and Dan Asimwe, 18, died of suffocation at Kapyia gold mining site in Kitumbi Sub-county.

This occurred a few weeks after a similar incident had occurred in the same sub-county, killing two miners.

In April 2020, two artisanal gold miners got trapped in a 300-feet gold pit in Kitumbi Sub-county and died.

The bodies were retrieved by members of Police Fire Prevention and Rescue Services after nine days.

"They removed the body that was near the surface but we fear more dead bodies may be still trapped in the pit, maybe they will remove them at night. Some owners of the mines usually conceal information about deaths in fear of having their mines closed," a resident, who declined to reveal his identity, said.

By press time, the total number of those still trapped underground and the cause of the collapse were yet to be established.

Wamala Regional Police Spokesperson Lameck Kigozi told *Daily Monitor* that he was yet to get details about the incident.

Kassanda District has four gold mines in Kitumbi, Bukuya and Kalwana sub-counties that have witnessed emergence of small townships populated by labourers and traders seeking to eke out a living at the mines and from auxiliary businesses. The gold mines are operated by artisanal miners.