

Assent to disaster risk management Bill, EALA tells regional leaders

By James Karuhanga

MEMBERS of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) have urged Heads of State to assent to the Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Bill, 2013, which was passed in March to mitigate the danger of natural disasters in a more coordinated way.

This appeal was made this week as the Assembly offered its condolences and sympathies to the Government of Tanzania and the victims of the earthquake following the disaster that shattered Kagera region on September 10.

MP Nancy Abisai (Kenya) said: "The House passed a Bill on Disaster Risk Management and this should prepare us for the future. Awareness and disaster preparedness is necessary."

By and large, MPs asked the region's leaders to build early warning systems to detect disasters before they happen as is done in developed countries. The Bill, lawmakers say, offers an important foundation for requisite collective effort, combined action and coordinated response mechanisms of a regional dimension.

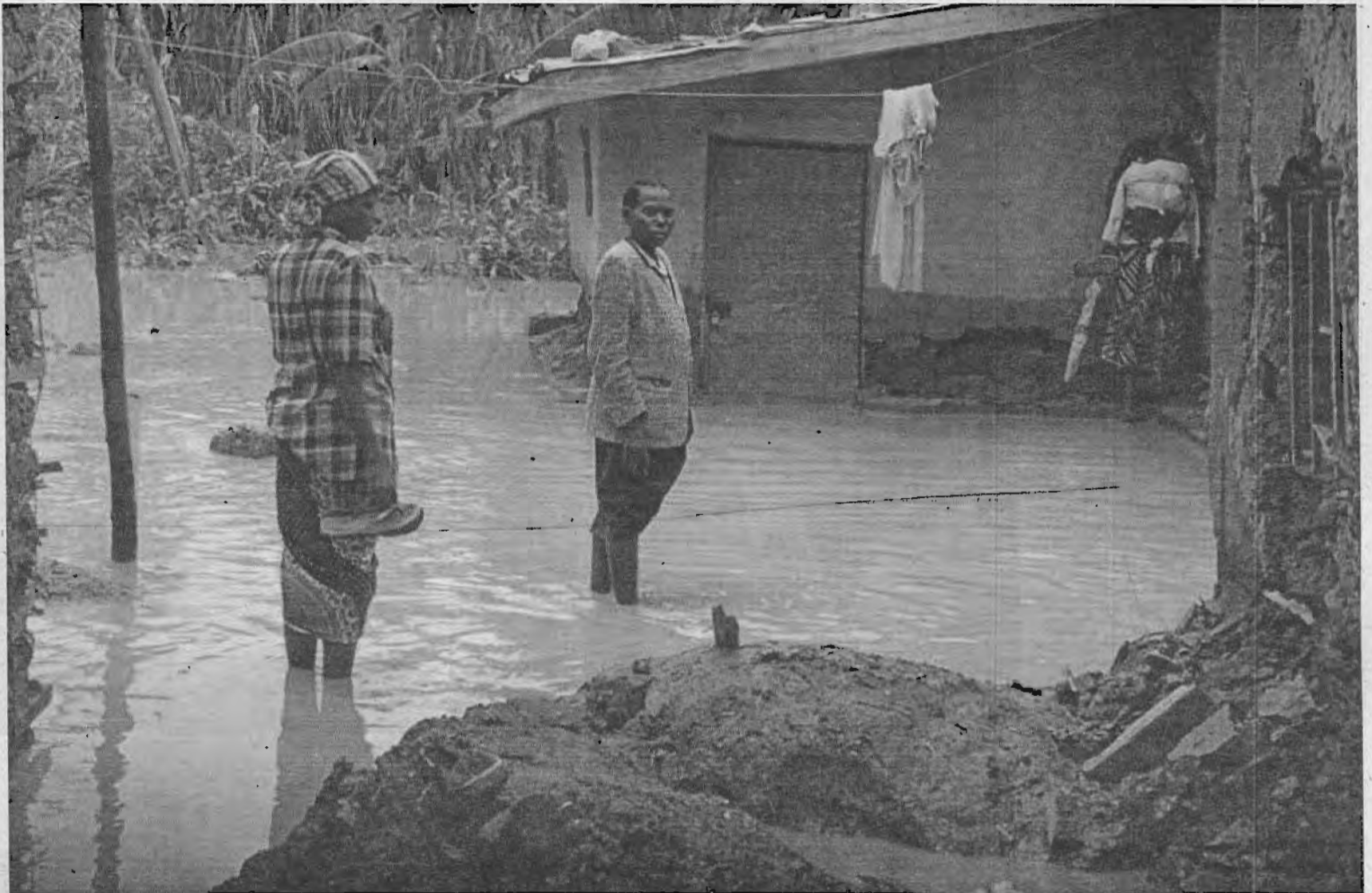
MP Patricia Hajabakiga (Rwanda) who moved the Bill in 2013 said: "Earthquakes can be detected; as to when they are going to happen. That's why we talk about an early warning system which needs to be established. It is an aspect in the law."

A resolution condoling with the victims of the tragedy was moved by MP Shyrose Bhanji (Tanzania) who noted that the earthquake led to the loss of 17 lives, injury of 440 persons and displacement of thousands of people, as well as massive destruction of properties and livelihoods in Tanzania "it is estimated the reconstruction and renovation of the schools alone shall cost no less than 40 Billion Tanzania Shillings."

"Many people came forward to help but more support is still needed in order to bring life to normal in Kagera region," Bhanji said.

The earthquake was felt in many parts of East Africa but most harm was done in Tanzania.

While MP Fred Mbidde urged for a substantive geological study of the entire region so that citizens in are better informed of geological changes likely to ensue so as to inform the region's planning process, MP Abubakar



EALA legislators have asked the region's leaders to build early warning systems to detect disasters. *File*



EALA Rwanda Chapter chairperson Patricia Hajabakiga. *File*

Zein stressed that he believes that the future is also in introducing in each national and regional curricula, the subject of disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction.

The Chairperson of the Council of Ministers, Dr. Susan Kolimba, however assured the House that the Act was before the Heads of State for assent.

There is hope that all EAC leaders will assent to the Bill during the next summit scheduled next month.

In January, lawmakers had

stressed that it was not healthy to delay the legislation after debate on the Bill was adjourned when Dr. Kolimba moved a motion indicating that more time was necessary to conclude consultations on the Bill as per the relevant provisions of the EAC Treaty and the Protocol on Peace and Security.

At the time, she requested the House for debate to be pushed until August 2016 but most lawmakers opposed her motion and cited the urgent need to dispose off with the Bill, stating, that di-

sasters did not wait for time.

But in March, after nearly two years of work during which time lawmakers consistently advocated for it, the Assembly finally passed the Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Bill, 2013, paving way for the Community to take necessary disaster preparedness, management, protection and mitigation measures as well as in handling disasters in a more coordinated way.

By and large, the objective of the Bill is to provide a legal framework at regional and national level for timely intervention in disaster situations and to protect the people and the natural environment affected by disaster through comprehensive disaster risk reduction and management.

MP Martin Ngoga said: "We need it. We need it because we are a disaster prone region. We need it because we want to approach these situations together as a family in a more coordinated way."

The idea of the legislation was born nearly six years ago when in December 2010, EALA's Committee on Agriculture Tourism and Natural Resources held discussions with a delegation from

the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) to raise awareness within the legislature on the importance of disaster risk reduction as an instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Assembly and UNISDR then agreed to collaborate to develop a model legislation which can be used to support the efforts of EAC Partner States in building disaster resilience.

If assented to, it is believed that the legislation will ably serve as a key legal and policy instrument to accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, in EAC Partner States.

The Sendai Framework is a 15-year, voluntary, non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, and the private sector.

It is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.