

# Budalangi Floods: Kenyan Journalists On A Mission

September 23, 2023



*Starting Off The Journey*

**By Okong'o Oduya**

**Budalangi, Kenya:** Journalists have been at the forefront of telling untold stories and giving detailed accounts of events as they unravel in their stories, but this time around the tables turned.

A group of Journalists based in Busia County decided to offer a helping hand to the floods-stricken community in the Budalang'i villages of Sginga and Sango in Busia County.

More than 20 Journalists partnered with the Kenya Red Cross, the Media Council of Kenya, and the Busia County government to distribute food and toiletries to more than 70 flood-affected people of Sginga and Sango villages in Budalangi.



*Budalangi Scribes*

## The Initiative

The initiative was arrived at after Busia-based scribes were trained on how to respond to an emergency in the event they encounter a situation that requires them to save a life.

The Red Cross team named us the first responders in case of any disaster. This was after undergoing training as first aiders.

Hold tight as we give you a blow-to-blow account of our adventurous story as we distributed food to families affected by floods in Budalangi.

The convoy started out in Busia Town and made its first stopover at Sginga village where Journalists distributed food and other basic needs to 34 households that were affected by the floods in the previous years benefiting roughly 200 people.

The event lasted for not more than one hour since we knew the task ahead of us was tough and dangerous. It involved traveling using boats through the vast river Nzoia from Sginga village to Sango village.



## Boarding The Boats

The journalists boarded three different boats to Sango village and sailed through the wide river Nzoia at its mouth from Sginga village to Sango village along the shores of river Nozzle.

For the first-timers, I included sailing through river Nzoia, it was horrifying. With dwindling boats sailing through the strong river current, it was not as adventurous as we imagined when we were leaving Busia in the morning. It took at least 30 minutes

to reach our destination from Sininga village. Thirty minutes on the water with a strong current on a flooded river is not for the faint-hearted.

The rains spared us despite showing signs that it could pour any minute, though we came to learn later on that it rained in Port Victoria town less than one kilometer from Sininga village, sparing us 'travelers'.

Before boarding the boats, it was fun. It was more of a field trip. I remember at some point buying and chewing sugar cane to increase our sugar levels and others for fun, along the river bank, contributing to the economy of the place. Little did we know that the time would come when almost everyone would be praying to get out of the water safely.



As we sailed downstream, we saw banana plantations and trees immersed in water, locals say those were once homesteads but because of floods, they had to move to the raised place abandoning what they once called their home.

Thirty minutes later we arrived at our destination safely. A small village with not more than 20 structures, that provide shelter to the residents, mostly fishermen.

The village has no shop to buy anything. Those who want to buy anything must arrange for travel plans to sail upstream, through river Nzoia to Sikinga, and proceed to Port Victoria town or use an alternative route to the lake and then to Marenga beach to Port Victoria which is long and time-consuming to go around. For you to leave the village you must sail downstream or upstream.

I am told that every child born in the village, upon reaching the age-going school, they are moved to the mainland, since it is not possible to attend classes daily using the boat.

According to the residents, due to frequent floods, there is nothing meaningful they can do. The village is surrounded by two major rivers, river Nzoia on the west and River Yala on the Eastern Side. In a nutshell, the village is within the Yala swamp.

From the little farming that is going on in the village and those few places abandoned by the residents, you can tell how fertile the place is.

Bananas, vegetables mostly kales aka *Sukuma wiki*, beans, and maize look really healthy and it is not that they apply fertilizer, an indication that the place is good for farming when the floods are not ravaging the place.

It is hard to tell whether the village is an island or not. The larger part of it is swampy with a small area that is dry to allow settlement.

I could tell sanitation was a problem, with a high chance that residents use the swampy bushes.



## Sail Of Hell

Our business at the village did not last long. It took us less than one hour to distribute the gifts we had and before too long, three boats we had hired were already battling the strong current upstream heading to the mainland at Sisinga, where we started our journey again.

The journey upstream took a bit short time despite going against the current. The secret was, the boat I boarded used a shortcut.

The locals call it '*Khumwalo*', a less than 10-second stretch sail that can save you 15 minutes if you decide to go around, but is a very dangerous stretch, it requires the best and most courageous sailor and also a good boat. A 10-second '*sail of hell*' for the new passengers.

At some point within the said period, I thought the boat was toppling over.

It was a relief after going through it. The sailor managed to sail through the stretch safely, though against our wishes. We had been warned against using the shortcut.

After making it through safely, we were ahead of the rest by 15 minutes despite our boat leaving last.

The boat struggled to sail upstream encountering a strong current. On three different occasions, the engine stopped peddling the boat due to some mechanic problem, but the sailor managed to address the problem on time on all occasions, it is like he understood it very well his vessel whenever it behaved that way he could handle it with ease and we managed to safely get to where we left our bus to ferry us back to Busia.

The Mission was accomplished successfully and with unforgettable experiences of responders in the making.