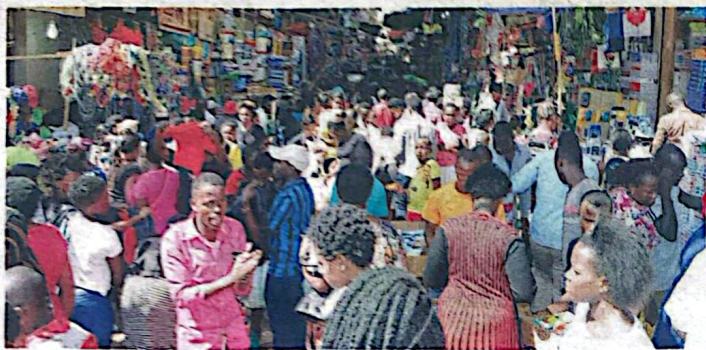




People shopping for Christmas in downtown Kampala. Photo by Ashraf Kasirye

Christmas: Traders decry low sales

By Martin Kitubi

Ezra Kaye is a trader dealing in matooke at Nakasero Market in Kampala.

When *New Vision* reporter strolled through the city centre

yesterday, Kaye was sleeping on his stock of matooke in the market.

"We have the worst Christmas season ever, buyers are broke," Kaye reacted as he woke up to attend to a client.

Kaye said despite the high turn-up of travellers in the city, few of them are buying which does not reflect economic benefits to traders.

"I do not know what is wrong. The season has attracted many people in the city, but few of them are buying," he said, stressing that traders have not increased food prices because of the tough economic times.

Prices of foodstuffs at Nakasero Market have remained constant, with a bunch of matooke at Kaye's stall ranging from sh20,000 to sh30,000, depending on the size, a fee charged similarly by his colleagues in the market.

He added that buyers have instead opted for Irish potatoes which are relatively cheaper than bananas.

"A bucket of Irish potatoes goes for sh7,000," he said.

Similar challenges were raised by Hussein Kyembe, a shoe dealer on Market Street in Kampala. The *New Vision* reporter found Kyembe attending to a client who was buying shoes for his children.

However, the deal did not go well as the client wanted to buy at lower than Kyembe's reserve price.

"My reserve price for a pair of secondhand shoes for children is sh20,000, but customers want to buy at sh10,000," he said.

Several shoe vendors on Market Street were seen running away with their merchandise to corridors and shopping plazas, in fear of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) enforcement officers who were patrolling several streets in Kampala.

Expert reacts

Dr Fred Muhumuza, a researcher and an economics lecturer at Makerere University, attributed low sales to under payment of workers by both the Government and private employers.

He explained that improved pay employees stimulates spending during such seasons, adding that: "The more the liquidity of money, the more people spend on luxuries. However, in this case, people are preparing for school in February and, therefore, they will spend sparingly."

He called for a wage ceiling and increase of civil servants' salaries to boost the amount of money spent on luxuries that would contribute to revenue collection.

However, other businesses such as beauty parlours, barbershops and salons are thriving, as many women, especially at Gazaland and Galilaya shopping malls, were seen filled with clients.

Beauty parlours have also deployed agents at all entrances of the two shopping malls, a move intended to direct and win clients for their respective business.

Janet Najjuma, a vendor of braids and wigs at the entrance of Gazaland on Ben Kiwanuka Street said: "The turn-up of buyers has increased compared to what it was last year and we expect it to be bigger even on the eve of Christmas."

Transport

Several travellers were seen stranded at the Old and New taxi parks, Qualicel Bus Terminal in Kampala as they waited for taxis and buses to travel upcountry.

The transport fares for different upcountry trips have increased.

Alex Kasule, a taxi operator at the Iganga stage in the Old Taxi Park, said: "We have increased the transport fare from sh8,000 to sh10,000 and now sh15,000."

This is the same for other transport operators. For example from Kampala to Mbale, only one bus service company was charging the usual sh15,000. The rate had already increased to sh20,000.

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