

Regional News

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Commentators warn that without inclusive planning, such evictions may deepen urban poverty. They argue that informal traders remain important for the urban economy.

BY MONITOR TEAM

It is a bright Monday morning, but the usual bustle of business across the blossoming cities and towns in Uganda is missing.

Where voices once competed with the clatter of weighing scales and the bargaining cries of customers, there is now an edgy silence.

Piles of empty wooden stalls still lie broken, some reduced to splinters. For many traders, this is not just the loss of a workplace – it is the collapse of their hood.

While authorities argue that the trade order policy is necessary for urban planning and sanitation, the toll on livelihoods is becoming increasingly visible.

"Since my kiosk was dismantled on April 9, I have remained stuck. I don't know where to start from," says Milly Oyenya, who used to sell produce on the Arua-Nebbi road in Arua City.

"My life has never been the same. I used to get money from the sales for feeding my family, paying school fees, rent and for meeting extra needs. It is no more. It is like they have cut a vein that transports blood in my body," she says with a heavy voice.

She has since taken her merchandise home because relocation to another place is expensive.

"I would earn at least between Shs30,000 and Shs60,000 in a day. This income has been reduced to zero," Oyenya says.

Across towns and cities in the country, the story is no different. Dozens of traders who once depended on small stalls were pushed out in recent eviction exercises aimed at decongesting the cities and enforcing the trade order.

This situation is also encountered by Ms Susan Nagobi, who operated a kiosk selling soft drinks and food in Jinja City. She was also forced to pack her stock at her home in Bugembe Town Council.

At Nebbi Market Square, Ms Maureen Acan, a salon operator, says: "There is limited space where we are told to shift our kiosks to accommodate all of us. Besides, the location has no electricity connection, rendering the place unsuitable for salon business."

Acan says many salon operators who were affected by the evictions have abandoned the trade and moved to other enterprises.

"The municipal authorities have reduced many to beggars. The enforcement was rushed because many people here are low-income earners. This was a misplaced policy," she says.

The bitterness left

For many families, the eviction that came with the trade order has triggered a chain reaction. Without income, paying school fees has become a nightmare, rent arrears are piling up, meals are being skipped, and healthcare has become a far cry.

Local leaders acknowledge the dilemma, but say they are now planning for the idle land within the

Trade order: What next for the heartbroken informal traders?



Men remove kiosks on the Arua-Nebbi road. Dozens of traders who once depended on small stalls were pushed out in recent evictions aimed at decongesting the cities and enforcing the trade order. PHOTO/FELIX WAROM OKELLO

town centres following the evictions.

The senior law enforcement officer in Nebbi Municipality, Mr Adris Cakuru, says: "Now that we are done with the removal of kiosks within the business town centre, the next step is to deal with the idle land within Nebbi main business town centre. We have given the affected people up to December 31 to start developing their land."

In Namutumba Town Council, vendors say they now operate in open spaces without shelters, leaving their merchandise exposed to rain.

Faizo Kayongo, the chairperson of the vendors at Namutumba Central Market, says the space allocated to them at the taxi park is too small to adequately accommodate all traders.

Ms Justine Nairuba, a vendor who relocated to the taxi park three weeks ago, says she now makes about Shs30,000 in a week.

"I used to make about Shs1 million in a month on the street. Now I am only making Shs30,000 in a week, yet I have a loan of Shs8 million. How am I going to repay it and also pay school fees when I am earning so little?" she wonders.

Turned beggars?

Mr Ismail Mpigi, who previously dealt in spare parts on Obote Way in Jinja City, says he was forced to turn to begging on the street after his kiosk was demolished during the enforcement of the trade order.

He is now worried about the future of his marriage.

"My wife and I argue all the time about how to feed and care for the family," Mr Mpigi says.

"Sometimes we sleep without eating. We are always thinking about tomorrow. I am not sure of my marriage now."

Some families are beginning to rethink their dependence on a single income source.

Those with some extra money are now adding mobile money services, selling from home compounds and

DOES THE SUSPENSION OFFER ANY HOPE?

The State Minister of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, Mr David Bahati last week announced before Parliament the suspension of the trade order to pave the way for further consultations.

The minister said the suspension would allow a more orderly transition of traders into formal markets.

"We have listened to the concerns of the people and their representatives in this House," Bahati told MPs.

However, many traders and those

affected continue to question the legality and fairness of the enforcement, especially following reports that the government had halted further implementation of the trade order.

"We heard the minister announcing the suspension. Does that mean what was being done was illegal? We have already lost our goods. Will the government compensate us? There should have been consultations before enforcing the directive," Mr Herbert Twesige, a clothes vendor in Fort Portal City, says.

concerns about the sustainability of the trade order enforcement exercise.

Despite the city authorities' directive, some street vendors dealing in clothes, mobile money services, and transport operations have since returned to their former locations. Areas such as roundabouts and major roads largely remain clear during the day, but are busy in the evenings.

Mr Didas Muhanguzi, the Central Division clerk, explains that before the eviction exercise commenced, designated relocation areas were identified.

The Kabale municipality deputy town clerk, Mr Eric Sunday, says: "We have advised the affected traders to get working space in the central market, Owino market, Bugongi market and Mwanjari Business Centre."

The Kisoro Municipal Council mayor, Mr Richard Ndyana, says they have not implemented the trade order because they are still sensitising the traders and consulting other stakeholders.

"We thought it wise to strengthen sensitisation and thorough consultations with all the stakeholders before implementation," he says.

Return to the streets?

In Fort Portal City, the evicted traders are slowly finding their way back into some of the restricted areas, raising

Any relocation plans?

Ms Justine Barekye, the Mbarara City Clerk, says: "Most of those who were evicted from the streets came to the city commercial office, got letters and were allocated spaces in some of the markets around. Some went to central market, Lugazi market, Kakoba, Kiyanja, Ruti and Biharwe."

Kaliro Assistant Resident District Commissioner, Mr Rogers Kiduma, says part of the Mayor's Gardens has been secured to resettle the evicted traders.

He says the decision was reached after consultations with officials from the offices of the town clerk, the Chief Administrative Officer, and the Resident District Commissioner, noting that vendors are an important source of revenue for the town council.

"We realised that these vendors are still needed by the council because they pay taxes that fund local projects. So, we decided to find an alternative place for them," Mr Kiduma says.

The Gulu City Clerk, Mr Innocent Ahimbisibwe, says there are designated markets and business spaces available for the affected traders.

He notes that the trade order received support from political leaders and property owners, many of whom expect the exercise to spur urban development and attract formal business investments.

To prevent a return of illegal street vending, the city plans to recruit at least 20 additional law enforcement officers who will be deployed for continuous surveillance.

"We must ensure people do not bring back these kiosks and containers," Ahimbisibwe stresses.

The Jinja Central Market Traders Association chairperson, Mr Henry Mujimba, says they had expected that all traders who previously operated kiosks on the streets would occupy the empty stalls in the market, but many of those stalls remain unoccupied.

"We have many stalls in the market, but most of the evicted traders are now operating outside Jinja Central Market, which was constructed by the government," he says.

Background

According to a March 10 letter issued by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government, Mr Ben Kumamanya, the trade order included removal of all campaign posters displayed in local governments, cleaning marketplaces and trading spaces, painting buildings, paving frontages, as well as providing security and dustbins.

The order also empowers the cities and local governments to streamline public transport operations.

But for now, uncertainty reigns, with many families continuing to nurse the scars of the evictions — caught between policy and survival, hope and hardship.

Reported by Felix Warom Okello, Clement Aluma, Patrick Okaba, Tausi Nakato, Ronald Seebe, Denis Edema, Abubaker Kirunda, Julius Byamukama, Felix Ainebyonyo, Hillary Twinamatsiko, Tobbias Jolly Owinyi, Alex Ashaba, Robert Muhereza & Naume Biru.