

By Rachael Nabisiubi
and Juliet Waiswa

Transport fares rise ahead of Xmas

The Christmas season and end of year period is a time of sharing, having fun and relaxing. Yet for businesses, it is a busy time that brings in more cash as people buy gifts and necessities for family and friends.

However, a number of people have observed that this is a period in which shoppers are ripped off by greedy and unscrupulous businessmen.

One of the areas, where cheating takes place with abandon is the transportation service. Some of those in the sector acknowledge that wanton cheating takes place.

Transport

William Katumba, the head of Awakula Ennume Bus Industry and once a Uganda Taxi Operator Driver Association (UTODA) member, says it has become a habit for transport service providers to cheat passengers during the festive season.

"Starting with the close of the school third term up to the Christmas season, taxi operators tend to increase fares," Katumba says.

He advised that the works and transport ministry should intervene by bringing up a law to help standardise fares.

He says many people are not aware that any increase in transportation costs



A Mbale-bound bus leaves the park. Photo by Rachael Nabisiubi

pushes up the prices of commodities, yet workers' pay is not increased accordingly.

At one time, he says fares to Kabale and parts of northern Uganda rose from sh30,000 to sh90,000.

"This is not practical. It is exploitation. People should

be worried and the practice should stop," Katumba says.

Mustapha Muwanga, the Awakula Ennume Nakawa/Entebbe co-ordinator, concurs, saying this exploits people who may also be in a desperate situation.

However, he says, sometimes that happens due

to an increase in fuel prices or economic slowdown.

During a meeting early this month, transporters and the Police agreed that fares should not be increased.

However, the decision to not increase transport fares seems to have fallen by the wayside as is shown

"Many people are not aware that any increase in transport costs pushes up the prices of commodities,"

Katumba

by the charges to different destinations. For example, from Kampala to Mbale, only one bus service was charging the usual sh15,000, but the rest were charging sh20,000.

The companies charging the standard fare had their buses filled faster and the people who had bought tickets found sold them for up to sh30,000 to desperate travellers.

But transportators are not the only ones making goods and services expensive.

A mini survey of the shops and businesses in and around Kampala also found that gift hampers cost more.

Corporate gifts

Barbara Wataka, the director of Steun Uganda Ltd, which deals in organic dried fruits and gift hampers, says the prices are varied with the type of commodities and their market prices, quantities and delivery.

For example, a gift hamper for corporates can cost sh200,000, yet ordinarily, it could be around sh150,000.

Corporate hampers usually contain company products such as calendars, bags and classy diaries. Extra items would range from red wine, chocolates, dried fruits, pack of vanilla, cookies and coffee.

Derrick Ssendijja, a businessman in Kikuubo, Kampala says prices keep increasing as we get closer to Christmas.

This time round, Ssendijja says, people seem to be wary of the increasing prices and are not buying as much as they should.

"We cannot compare this season to the previous one. Same time last year, commodities were out of stock, but this year, we still have stock and customers are not buying. We pray that in the remaining days people will come and purchase these items," Ssendijja said.