...ma Musiɔika in Kigwere Village, ...ked to domestic violence.

...laws have contributed to the trend by failing to deter offenders. "This trend of mob justice is due to the ... People get fed up and decide to take matters into their own hands," said Samuel Mwidu, a local leader.

Will new trade order bear fruits in Mbale City?

BY YAHUDU KITUNZI

MBALE CITY. The leadership of Mbale City has intensified an enforcement operation aimed at evicting street vendors and removing illegal structures in a move intended to restore order. Officials say this will strengthen the collection of local revenue collection.

The operation, spearheaded by city authorities together with law enforcement agencies, including the Uganda Police Force and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), targets vendors operating along streets, road reserves, and pedestrian walkways contrary to city regulations.

For years, informal street vending, unauthorised taxi stages, and boda boda riders operating in unregulated spaces have dominated major streets in Mbale City.

While this informal economy provides livelihoods for thousands, city leaders argue it has also undermined revenue mobilisation efforts.

The Town Clerk for the Industrial City Division, Mr Geoffrey Mugisa, said the informal nature of street trade has made it difficult to track and collect revenue.

"Many vendors operating along road reserves and pavements reportedly do not pay daily market dues, trading licence fees or operational permits. Because they operate outside designated markets, revenue officers often struggle to assess their businesses or enforce compliance," Mr Mugisa said.

According to him, the trade order is directly linked to revenue collection. "If traders operate from gazetted markets, it becomes easier to register them, assess what they owe and ensure accountability," he said.

An enforcement team from Mbale City demolish a butcher shop on Bugwere Road Market in Industrial City Division last week. The authorities claim the structures were constructed illegally. PHOTO/YAHUDU KITUNZI

Essential services

Local governments depend on internally generated revenue to fund essential services such as road maintenance, waste management, market sanitation and public lighting. When collections fall short, service delivery suffers.

Now, with enforcement teams patrolling the central business district and traders being directed to gazetted markets such as Mbale Central Market, Kumi Road Market, Bugwere Road Market, and Kikindu Market, a critical question emerges: will the new trade order translate into increased local revenue, or will it disrupt fragile urban livelihoods without delivering financial gains?

Mr Ivan Okech, an economist, said Uganda's urban workforce is heavily dependent on the informal sector.

"Street vending, small retail trade and transport services absorb large numbers of youth and women who lack access to formal employment," he said.

Mr Okech added that enforcement alone is insufficient, noting that successful revenue growth depends on long-term planning, adequate market infrastructure, transparency in collections and trust between traders and authorities.

Public order and investment drive

The Elgon Regional Police Spokesperson, Mr Rogers Taitika, maintained that the operation is necessary not only for revenue but also for public order, security and investment attraction.

Mr Tom Wambi, a trader in Bugwere Road Market, warned that aggressive enforcement may affect vulnerable groups, particularly women, youth and single parents, who depend on daily earnings.

"Without structured transition support, including affordable market stalls, sanitation facilities, storage space and access to microfinance, displaced traders may struggle to rebuild their businesses," Mr Wambi said.

The Deputy Resident City Commissioner in charge of the Northern City Division in Mbale City, Mr Yahaya Were, said: "The operation is not meant to punish traders but to ensure that business activities are conducted in designated areas."

Mr Michael Wakou, the Mbale City head of enforcement, added that the exercise will continue until all streets are cleared of illegal trading activities.

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