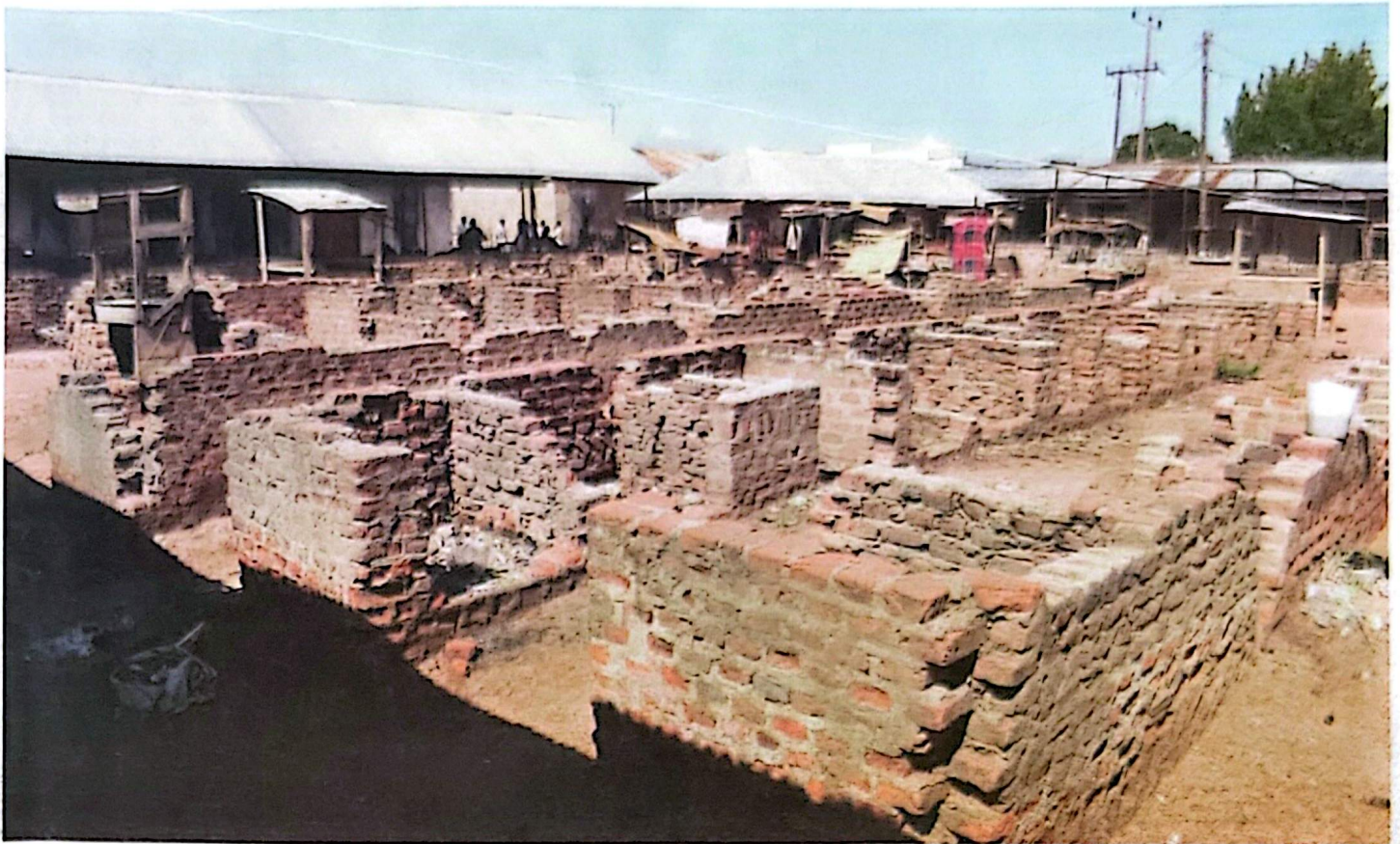




Market construction delays over lack of plan



Construction. Incomplete Namutumba central market whose construction was halted for lack of a plan. PHOTO BY RONALD SEEBE

No money. The vendors say the market construction should have started but that the authorities are slow at it. However, the authorities say the delays have been as a result of lack of funds.

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NAMUTUMBA. The vendors at Namutumba central market, Namutumba District will have to wait longer before they can have a modern structure to operate under. This is because the construction has stalled mainly due to lack of an approved structural plan.

The market has been operational under makeshift shelters and stalls for the last 11 years.

The market has since been characterised by rope pulling between the vendors and the town council authorities.

The vendors are now accusing the authorities of denying them a chance to benefit from the ongoing upgrading of such markets in some parts of the country to a modern market.

With the incomplete structures, vendors say they brave the sunshine to sell their merchandise. They, however, say they cannot stand the leaking roofs when it rains.

They say the rainy season greatly affects business because they scabble for better space on verandas to sell their goods.

The vendors say they have been making losses because sometimes the merchandise is spoilt by rain, something that leads them to losses as bank loan interests always accumulating.

"We are happy during the dry season but when it comes to the rainy season, we shift from the market and operate from verandas," one of the vendors says.

The construction work on the incomplete structures was started in 2010 with Shs10m that was raised from the vendors.

However, vendors' efforts to build a market on their own turned hopeless when Namutumba town council authorities in 2014 queried the project on technical grounds over lack of a construction plan.

Shs10m

AMOUNT OF MONEY RAISED FROM VENDORS TO START THE MARKET CONSTRUCTION

It has since turned into a game of counter-accusations between the two worrying parties with the vendors saying the urban centre authorities are not giving an alternative to their fund-raising efforts.

The chairperson of the Namutumba Market Vendors' Association, Mr George Kibwika, says the poor state of the market is forcing the vendors to invade the taxi park which is accessible and conducive to the customers.

He explained that vendors are operating from makeshift structures and that the sanitary conditions in the market are horrible with a stench from cow dung in the incomplete market.

"Our leaders do not want us to talk about the stalled market construction. We suspect something might be wrong and authorities want to grab our plots of land by delaying the plan," Mr Kibwika says.

Ms Aisha Maganda, a banana vendor, says the thieves use the incomplete market as a night hideout to terrorise people in town.

"We cannot be convinced that for all those years, the town council has failed to get a plan for the market yet we have a physical planner. That is laxity of the authorities," Ms Maganda says.

Ms Harriet Namutamba, another vendor dealing in tomatoes, suggests that since authorities have failed to construct a modern market for them, the Shs1,000 market dues paid every Tuesday should be lowered to Shs500.

"We pay revenue expecting good services but we are not getting them

from the town council," she says.

Tensions between the vendors and the town council authorities have been on since 2006 when a roadside market on the Iganga-Mbale road was closed.

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AISHA MAGANDA, VENDOR

Some vendors claim that at a certain stage of their misunderstandings, they contributed Shs36,000 per stall to allow the town council authorities begin the construction of a new market.

They now want the authorities to use part of the money to construct a good market and also refund at least Shs33,000 to each.

When contacted recently, Mr Henry Nabye, the district planner, wondered why the town council authorities have failed to construct the market for all those years leading to revenue loss.

The physical planner for Namutumba Town Council, Mr Andrew Othino Nyeko, says the plan for the market was adopted in 2012 and was supposed to be effective

since its adoption.

He adds that it is being delayed by lack of funding.

"We would have started construction of the modern market in 2012 if the resources were available. However, vendors should remain calm and know that we are working hard and mobilising funds from the Central Government and Non-Governmental Organisations [NGOs] to see that the market is constructed," Mr Othino says.

Without quoting figures, Mr Othino says revenue from the market has dropped by 10 per cent since 2015. He attributes the drop to inactivity at the market even when they have been relying on it to fulfill a forecast of 10 per cent growth of local revenue.

The town clerk, Mr Samuel Kabakubya, dismisses vendors' allegations of being charged Shs36,000 per stall, saying the money has been budgeted for.

"We are aware of the poor sanitation and the condition of the market, but I want to urge the vendors to remain calm. The money they complain to be paying is used in construction of stalls," he says.

Mr Godfrey Mwebembe, the town council chairperson, says they are looking for a suitable plan for the market, which will suit the level of municipality since plans to elevate Namutumba Town Council to a municipality are underway.