

Mbale market fire traced to illegal power connection

Razed. According to Mr Moses Musayi, 500 stalls have been destroyed.

BY FRED WAMBEDE
& LEONARD MUKOOLI

editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

MBALE. The second largest and busiest market in Mbale Town has been burnt to ashes, leaving more than 600 traders stranded.

According to police, the fire, which razed Bugwere Market in Industrial Division yesterday, was caused by illegal connections.

"The investigation has found that the fire was caused by an illegal connection in one of the shops, where it started from and spread rapidly to other stalls," the Elgon police spokesperson, Mr Suwed Manshur, said.

Established in 1990 and later in 2014 refurbished and expanded, the market has been one of the sources of livelihood to many but mostly women and youth, who have been operating small-scale businesses including second hand clothes, shoes, electronics, salons, groceries, restaurants and stores for rice, maize and beans, among others.

The market has also been a source of local revenue for Mbale Municipal Council, where they collect more than Sh1 million per month.

The chairperson of the mar-



Burnt. Residents stare at what remains of their stalls yesterday. PHOTO BY LEONARD MUKOOLI.

ket, Mr Moses Musayi, said the tragedy left at least more than 500 vendors with nothing.

Shs800m

Lost. The amount of money lost in the market fire

"This is the first time we are experiencing this but the fact remains it has been too destructive. The affected vendors had nothing to recover, everything was burnt," he said.

"Merchandise worth Shs800m has been burnt to ashes after the

fire swept through the market. It has left us in pain because this is our livelihood," Mr Musayi said.

A section of vendors who witnessed their merchandise go up in flames blamed police Fire Brigade for failure to respond in time.

The fire fighters, who reported one hour after the fire started, faced a rough time putting out the inferno.

"We alerted them earlier but they arrived a bit late after part of the market had been burnt. This is very unfortunate," Mr Manshur Nazeba, one of the vendors dealing in food stuffs,

said. Ms Janet Nandudu, another vendor, said government should intervene.

"We have nowhere to start now. We need financial help because some of us have loans. It is indeed a painful moment," she said.

Mr Abubaker Gidudu, another vendor and leader, said they are organising a meeting to see how to rebuild the market.

Mr Yasin Wabomba, the council deputy speaker, describing it as unfortunate, said many youth have been rendered unemployed, adding that as council leaders, they will stand with the vendors.