Umeme disconnects Mbale market over Shs3.5m debt

Losses. The vendors complained that they have registered big losses since the power and water supply to market was disconnected.

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MBALE. Mbale Central Market has experienced a power blackout for the last two weeks, paralysing business at the newly constructed market.

This has left more than 2,800 traders whose businesses depend majorly on power counting losses as a result of the power shortage.

Umeme late last month cut off electricity supply to the market over non-payment of bills amounting to about Shs 3.5m, leaving hundreds of market vendors stranded.

This is the second time since the beginning of this year where traders are experiencing a power outage over non-payment of bills.

The Mbale Central market spokesperson, Mr Abubakari Nabende confirmed the disconnections.

He told *Daily Monitor* that the most affected vendors are barber shops, those dealing in soft drinks and groundnut millers.

"We are now operating in darkness and we are now forced to close as early as 6pm. I appeal to vendors to collect the money and we clear the bill," said Mr Nabendeh.

He blamed the current power outage affecting the market on the vendors who have failed to meet their obligations of paying the power bills to the power distributor Umeme.

The chairperson of Mbale Central Market, Mr Ayubu Madoi, said Umeme is demanding Shs 3.5m in bills.

"As vendors, we have started collecting the money to clear the bills," he said.

The Mbale branch Umeme manager, Mr Paul Ssempira also confirmed having disconnected the market after vendors defaulted.

"Yes we disconnected them after failing to clear the bill. But if they clear, we shall connect them back," said Mr Ssempira. He, however, declined to reveal the exact money they are demanding from the market vendors, saying this is confidential. The market was constructed under Markets and Agricultural Trade Improvement Programme (MATIP) at cost of Shs26.9b from the African Development Bank.

The vendors have blamed the problem on the market management.

Mr Moses Mafabi, a salon operator, told this newspaper that this is the third time in less than one year when electricity is disconnected from the market.

He said the blackout has plunged them into serious losses as they are forced to close at the peak of their sales.

"I have lost enough money in less than two weeks. I am now jobless," said Mr Mafabi.

Last year, the President's press secretary, Ms Linda Nabusayi posted on her Facebook page blaming the mess on Mbale Municipal Council officials.



Stranded. Some of the vendors outside Mbale Central Market. The market has experienced a power blackout for the last two weeks.
PHOTO BY YAHUD KITUNZI

" We pay the money for electricity and water but the management misuses the money and at the end of the day it's we to suffer,"
VENDOR

Shs26.9b
THE AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT WAS USED TO CONSTRUCT MBALE CENTRAL MARKET

"The market built by government at a cost of Shs26.9b under MATIP but is being killed off by Mbale Municipal Council officials," she posted.

According to the market officials, vendors pay for water and electricity bills directly to the council but the council does not remit this money to NWSC and Umeme," said Ms Nabusayi.

She explained her disappointment that the money is still in the 'system' between the council and these institutions.

Ms Nabusayi further said despite the fact that the market has no power; the water system is clogged because council has no plumber and the electricity bill has now shot up from Shs3m to more than Shs10m in four months.

The Mbale Municipal Council spokesperson, Mr James Kutosi declined to comment on the matter

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