

City authorities have been accused of sleeping on the job and failing to do inspection as required under the Building Control Act.

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Across Mbale City, new storeyed buildings are rapidly replacing older housing. However, Saturday's collapse of a four-storey structure, killing one person and injuring several others, has raised alarm among residents and construction experts.

The incident has prompted questions about how such projects are supervised and whether standards are being enforced to guarantee structural integrity and public safety. Many now fear that the collapsed building may be only one of several at risk.

Mr Dan Mukwana, a private practitioner in Mbale, blamed weak enforcement by city authorities. He said officials mandated to supervise construction and ensure compliance with approved plans appear to have neglected their duties.

"For instance, why would T12

Collapsed Mbale building exposes lapses in oversight

(12mm) reinforcement bars—meant for domestic bungalows—be used in load-bearing columns of a four-storey building?" Mr Mukwana asked at the scene.

He argued that T16 steel bars would have been more appropriate, warning against what he described as "copy-and-paste engineering". He added that heavy concrete slabs had been cast onto columns lacking sufficient tensile strength, leading to a sudden collapse once the load became unsustainable.

Residents in suburbs such as Naman-yonyi, Musoto, Marare, Nauyo, Maluku, Namatala and Bukonde say several buildings in their areas are similarly unsafe, accusing the council of failing to enforce regulations.

Mr Robert Kisesi, the speaker of the Northern City Division Council, described the situation as unfortunate, noting that inspections required under the Building Control Act are often not carried out.

"Inspectors must verify foundations and steel reinforcement before any concrete is poured," he said.

At a press conference, city official James Kutosi acknowledged the presence of illegal structures but denied that the council had approved the collapsed building. He said records showed no approved plan and that a stop notice had been issued in 2024.

Mr Kutosi added that an independent investigation had been launched to establish the cause of the collapse and determine whether there were breaches of building standards or negligence by responsible parties.

The structure, located in Namakwekwe, had already drawn concern from residents, who cited ongoing construction—particularly at night and at

weekends—as a sign of poor oversight. Authorities say several unsafe buildings have been earmarked for demolition.

Mbale City's planning challenges are compounded by reliance on an outdated physical development plan drafted in 2019, when the area was still a municipality. The plan covered only Wanale, Northern, and Industrial divisions, leaving newly incorporated areas such as Bukonde, Lwasso, Namabasa, and Nakaloke largely unplanned.

This mismatch between planning and expansion has raised concerns about infrastructure provision, urban growth, and regulatory enforcement.

Deputy city council speaker Abdallah Magambo warned that failure to update the city's physical plan could worsen the situation.

"People are constructing buildings everywhere, yet the government has plans to expand roads and may introduce flyovers in the future," he said.

Retired architect Cosmas Busima attributed the problem partly to politically driven expansion, which ex-

tended city boundaries into rural areas without adequate planning. He noted that much of Mbale's infrastructure still reflects colonial-era development.

Mr Ali Walusimbi, the president of the Mbale City Development Forum, said political interference has undermined technical oversight, with some developers building in restricted zones, including along River Nabuyonga.

Outgoing mayor Kasim Namugali cited limited funding as a key obstacle to developing a comprehensive master plan since Mbale attained city status in 2020. He said the city had initially set a two-year target, but financial constraints stalled progress.

The Town Clerk, Mr Assy Abireebe Tumwesigire, said the existing plan covers about 55 square miles, while the city has expanded to roughly 110 square miles, leaving large sections unregulated. He added that funds would be allocated in the upcoming budget to prepare an updated development plan covering all areas incorporated into the city.

BACKGROUND

Mbale officially began city operations on 1 July 2020, alongside Arua, Gulu, Jinja, Mbarara, Masaka and Fort Portal, with additional cities, including Soroti, Hoima, and Lira, established the following year.