Livelihoods razed as roadside kiosks, containers are removed

The Ministry of Local Government wants trade order in urban areas, removal of all campaign posters, a clean-up of marketplaces and painting of buildings, among others.

BY MONITOR TEAM

A number of livelihoods across the country are at stake after the local authorities launched a nationwide demolition of makeshift roadside structures used by low-income earners to trade.

The roadside stalls, booths, and containers that are common feature across cities, municipalities, towns and trading centres, are used by small traders to vend small merchandise, food, groceries, and do mobile money transactions, among others.

The tearing down and removal of these structures follows a directive by the Local Government minister aimed at enforcing trade order across the urban centres.

On Wednesday, tension gripped parts of Mukono Municipality as law enforcement officers, supported by the army, carried out a forceful eviction of street vendors.

The operation, which involved the use of a grader, began in Mukono Town and extended to Nasuti, Wantoni, and other surrounding streets in the municipality.

The authorities said the enforcement followed a recent directive that gave vendors a few days to vacate the streets.

Ms Harriet Nansubuga, who operated a phone repair shop on Nasuti Street, said the eviction has left her devastated.

A March 10 letter issued by Mr Ben Kumamanya, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Local Government, demanded trade order in urban areas, removal of all campaign posters, a clean-up of marketplaces after every market day, clean trading spaces, and painting of buildings.

The order also empowered the cities and other local governments to streamline public transport operations.

Ms Sarah Ndawula, the Mbarara City South Division town clerk, said: "This will benefit legal traders because they need it most. We need to put our city in order to let everyone do what they are supposed to do."

Mr Allan Buhanda, the Mbarara City Commercial Officer, said: "We started late last year to sensitise our traders on what they should do but as you know compliance is always minimal."

Traders cry out

Mr Gabriel Esiku, one of the evicted persons on Soroti-Mbale Road, said from the time they were forced off the roadside by the Soroti Secondary School fence, he has been struggling to find where to relocate his container, merchandise, and business, a source of his livelihood.

He said the enforcement of the order to vacate has killed not only his livelihood but of dozens other petty traders whose source of livelihood was derived from operating business in the makeshift containers, grocery stalls and phone booths.

Mr Esiku said with the creation of cities, property owners in Soroti City hiked rent for business promises from Shs300,000 to as high as Shs1 million.

"That high rent suffocated many people who had to resort to operating from containers, but now that the containers are demolished, we are left in dilemma," he added.

In Kumi Municipality, the enforcement by the municipality officials ended in running battles until the exercise was called off earlier this week, with Mayor Richard Ochom saying it was a gross abuse of the rights of the urban poor who had only containers and can't rent to do business.

But Mr Emmanuel Okaje, the town clerk, said they were only enforcing an order from the Local Government ministry that was ratified by the Cabinet.

In Lira City, northern Uganda, the traders are counting losses following the demolition of their kiosks, with hundreds of illegal stalls in the city's road reserves demolished in an operation that started two weeks ago.

The affected traders in both Kabale Municipality and Kabale District, earlier this week expressed a need for stakeholder engagement to decide on where to relocate the vendors.

The vendors were ordered off the streets on March 28, but are calling for an engagement with the city authorities, but Mr Jamirlu Kasajja, the town clerk, said the grace period has ended.

The evictions that began in Gulu City last week have left dozens of containers on the city streets destroyed.

Ms Florence Amono, a container owner and trader, said she had relied on her business to support her family. "Through these containers, I have been able to provide food and take care of my children," she said.

Mr James Okello, a chapatti vendor who has operated on the city walkways for the past two years, said his business depends heavily on foot traffic.

"This is where my customers find me, especially boda boda riders and office workers, so sending us to a place like the main market is not practical," he said.

In Mayuge District, the traders chased Ms Joyce Namayanja, a senior assistant town clerk for Mayuge Town Council, whom they accused of cheating them. She had gone to discuss a way forward on trade order.

Mr Richard Gulume, the Jinja resident city commissioner, said: "We need an organised town with an environment that can promote tourism and present a clean city for the visitors, not sights of slum structures.

Ms Milly Oyenya, a resident of Arua City, said she is already feeling the financial pinch after her container was demolished.

Several temporary structures have been razed by the Arua City Council the enforcement team.

While traders have accused the authorities of denying them livelihood by chasing them off the streets, other locals say the eviction has brought sanity on the usually congested streets.

Mr Ahmed Miria, the chairperson of the Owino market traders in Arua, said they were not informed and vowed to reconstruct the makeshift structures.

Claims of bribery

In Wakiso District, the leadership through council speaker Nasif Najja have called on the government to halt the ongoing trade order enforcement pending the construction of markets.

In other areas like Makindye Salaama Road, Ms Sharifah Nanyanzi, a councillor from Makindye Ssabagabo Municipality, claimed corruption has dominated the enforcement exercise, with some people spared after bribing the town agents. "A town agent came and took Shs200,000 from a vendor, and she was spared. But when another officer came, they also demanded money," she said.

Compiled by Simon Peter Emwamu, Bill Oketch, Santo Ojok, Patrick Ebong, Robert Muhereza, Emmanuel Arineitwe, Teddy Dokotho, Felix Warom Okello, Clement Aluma, Denis Edema, Abubaker Kirunda, Noeline Nabukenya, Cosline Nakahiira & Jessica Sabano



Some of the makeshift shelters that were demolished by the enforcement team to ensure trade order in Arua City. PHOTO/CLEMENT ALUMA



A kiosk is removed in Ceford area, Arua City, at the weekend.

Makeshift structures are demolished in Jinja City (below). PHOTOS/ FELIX WAROM OKELLO/ DENIS EDEMA



They say...



James Okello, chapatti vendor

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Sharifah Nanyanzi, leader

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