

Tororo vendors protest high taxes, rental fees

BY JOSEPH OMOLLO

TORORO. Traders at Tororo Central Market have protested against what they describe as high taxes and rental rates imposed by municipal authorities.

The traders, who locked the market and stormed the municipal offices at the weekend, said officials have turned a deaf ear to their calls for a meeting to harmonise taxes and rental fees.

Mr David Musana, the vendors' chairperson, accused the municipal council of imposing exorbitant charges on lock-up shops and stalls, alongside multiple taxes on their businesses.

He added that compared with the neighbouring markets, Tororo Municipal Council charges Shs15,000 for a stall, while lock-up shops range between Shs100,000 and Shs150,000.

"We have moved to nearby markets such as Busia and Mbale, where the rates are very low, and we do not understand why Tororo Municipal Council is overcharging," Mr Musana said at the weekend.

The vendors also accused the council of failing to evict traders operating on the streets and outside the central market.

Mr Juma Magona Jamagara, a trader, said it was unfair for market vendors to be subjected to multiple taxes in the form of market dues and rental fees, while those operating on the streets and selling similar products pay nothing taxes.

"There is unfair competition because, at times, we are forced to reduce the prices of our merchandise to match those of hawkers and vendors who sell their goods at cheaper prices," he said.

Unfair competition

Mr Richard Onyango Jimmy, another trader, accused the council of failing to levy taxes on hawkers and vendors operating outside the market.

"We cannot stop traders from working outside the market if they also pay licences and other taxes to the municipal council," he said, adding that the current taxes are likely to force some traders out of business if they are not reviewed.

Mr Ocho Mukulu, who operates a restaurant in the market, said the working environment was not conducive to business.

The Resident District Commissioner, Mr Sadik Bategana, directed the council authorities to convene an urgent meeting to address the vendors' grievances.

"My office is in total agreement with you [vendors], and I am directing the council speaker to call an urgent council meeting to handle your issues," he said.

Town leadership

However, the town mayor, Mr Kennedy Orono Nyapidi, in an interview with this newspaper, stated that the vendors had participated in setting the very rental rates they are contesting.

"Before coming up with the rental rates, we held meetings with sector heads who guided us on what to levy, so I am wondering why they are now challenging a decision they helped to shape," he said.

Mr Nyapidi added that the council was not shaken by the protest, saying that traders who feel the rates are too high are free to leave and allow the municipal council to source other tenants.