

KCCA vendor sweep results in clearer streets, but future remains uncertain

In the wake of KCCA's recent eviction of vendors from the streets of Kampala,

ASHLEY AISHA

Aine took a stroll through the city. She observed that whereas the city looks neater, vendors are not about to give up without a fight.

By 9am on February 23, downtown Kampala looked unmistakably like itself and yet, not quite.

The city center continued to experience the familiar surge of human activity. Taxi conductors shouted destinations. Boda bodas weaved through cars. Pedestrians moved in hurried diagonals, shielding their eyes from the harsh mid-morning sun.

Where shoppers once squeezed sideways to avoid knocking over piles of jeans, a clear path stretched ahead. You could see shopfronts that had been hidden for years. The air felt lighter. Quieter. The competitive chorus of "two thousand! Sister, come see!" had fallen silent. The wooden stalls that had clung to pavements were gone. The alley, aka Kikuubo lane, became more like a pedestrian road.

On the night of February 19, the city had uncluttered. The operation had begun shortly after midnight. Street stalls erected on roads and pavements were dismantled, in line with a two-week notice previously issued to vendors to clear the streets. Those who did not comply reportedly had their goods confiscated. By morning, enforcement patrols were visibly tight, and the message was unmistakable: no more street vending.

As I moved through the cleared stretches, photographing former vending hotspots, I noticed men wearing green shirts marked with numbers. Curious, I approached one and asked what was happening. He explained that anyone found stepping into designated planting



Downtown Kampala streets without vendors

areas would be required to dig briefly as a punishment. As we spoke, several more 'culprits', men and women alike, were brought forward and instructed to dig for about three minutes each before being released.

The supervisor showed *The Observer* a few architectural plans outlining proposed green strips and beautification layouts.

"We are making the city green because we love the country," he said.

NOT EVERYONE VIEWED THE EVICTION AS A LOSS.

Near Park Enkadde Mall and Mini Price, I met one of the brokers: the middlemen who typically call pedestrians into shops.

He, when asked about the situation, acknowledged that formal traders had struggled for years under competition from people who sell on pavements. He argued that these vendors distorted customer expectations.

"In my shop, we pay about Shs3 million in rent every month," he said. "Some pay even more. There is no way to make a profit when street vendors are selling the same items cheaply outside," he noted. As I walked through Park Enkadde mall, I observed several motionless people, some leaning against columns of the building. They were not selling. They were neither shouting nor arranging goods.

"Anyone you see standing in one place for more than ten minutes and looking very annoyed is an evicted vendor," noted one of the traders. They were waiting, he said, for an opportunity to display goods or hoping enforcement might relax.

I approached one of the clusters cautiously and greeted an elderly man seated nearby. He introduced himself as Rashid Ssenkungu, 56.

Ssenkungu, who uses two crutches and has one amputated leg, said relocation to gazetted markets has not worked for him. "Usafi is very dirty," he said. "One time my crutches slipped on a polythene bag dumped on the path I slid into dirty, murky water with all my goods, and as you can imagine, no one can buy from a dirty vendor," he said.

He described the Namirembe market, designated for individuals with disabilities, as inaccessible.

At St Balikuddembe market (Owino), movement resembled a two-lane human highway. Customers moved in single-file streams in opposite directions, navigating sellers who sang clothing prices loudly enough to drown out traffic noise.

When a porter carrying a load four times his size was approaching, he whistled from one end;

pedestrians instinctively ducked or flattened themselves against stalls to avoid collision. Space was difficult to find in Owino. Each space looked occupied.

Over loudspeakers mounted throughout the market, an announcement urged traders to welcome colleagues recently evicted from the streets, reminding them that the government established the market for them and that it is free. However, the speaker also warned vendors to keep phones secure and hide money carefully, noting that new arrivals had not yet undergone proper evaluation.

At Usafi market, conditions were visibly dirtier, but space appeared

more available than in Owino. The head of the shoe section, Shaban Kibirige, explained the allocation process.

"This market was made for low earners," he said. "You bring your ID or photocopy and an LC letter to prove residence, they give you a stall. No one charges you taxes because the government excused us. We only pay for security to people we choose ourselves."

He insisted there was still sufficient space for displaced vendors.

"Now that no one is selling on the streets, more people will come to the markets. That is how it is supposed to be. Before, people did not need to come because they could

buy everything outside." A boda boda rider I interviewed Steven Mumbere, supported strict demarcation of spaces. "The road is for transportation," he said.

"If you want to buy something, go to the market. Go to the park if you want a cab. If you want a boda, go to the stage."

He argued that permanent stations create accountability and reduce crime.

All in all, Kampala is now calmer, neater and slightly organised.

However, whether it is a better city depends on whom you ask.

For now, the roads are open, the pavements are bare, and the singing is quiet.

But in the shade of verandas across downtown, displaced traders stand watching, waiting for the right moment, or perhaps a new place, to begin again.

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Telephone: +256-41-337500/337508-11

Fax: +256-31-262207/41-337595/6

E-mail: secretary@ec.or.ug/info@ec.or.ug

Ref:Adm 72/01



Plot 1-3 & 5, 7th Street Industrial Area

P. O. Box 22678 Kampala, Uganda

Website: www.ec.or.ug

Date: 14th February 2026

Press Release

Appointment of Polling Date for Sub County/Town/Municipal Division Local Government Council Elections in Electoral Areas Where Polling Was Not Conducted or Concluded: Thursday, 26th February 2026

The Electoral Commission informs political parties, candidates, voters, and the general public that **Thursday, 26th February 2026** has been appointed the polling date for Sub County/Town/Municipal Division Local Government Council Elections in electoral areas where polling was not conducted or concluded on the previously appointed date of 4th February 2026, due to various unforeseen circumstances.

This polling date is appointed in accordance with the Commission's mandate to ensure the completion of the electoral processes in all affected areas.

Accordingly, elections shall be conducted for the following unfilled positions at the affected Sub County/Town/Municipal Division level:

1. Chairpersons;
2. Directly Elected Councillors;
3. Women Councillors; and,
4. Councillors representing Special Interest Groups (Youths; Older Persons; and Persons with Disabilities - PWDs).

Polling shall take place at all polling stations within the above affected electoral areas across the country and, where applicable, at the venues for the respective electoral colleges, starting at 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Thereafter, counting of votes and declaration of results shall take place.

The Electoral Commission urges all stakeholders and voters to participate peacefully and to comply with the electoral laws and guidelines.

Justice Byabakama Mugenyi Simon
Chairperson, Electoral Commission