

Architects Blame Corruption and Lack of Regulation for Building Collapse

NAIROBI —

Kenyan architects have blamed corruption and unregulated construction for the collapse of a six-story building Monday that killed five people, including two children and injured scores of others.

The Monday tragedy at Kirigiti in Kenya's Kiambu County is the latest such fatal accident. Dozens of people have died in building collapses in Kenya, including at least 3 people in 2019 and 49 in a 2016 disaster.

Kenya's architects say the construction industry has been marred with unscrupulous dealings that are compromising the quality of buildings.

"The framework is there to ensure that does not happen, so we have a very big gap, especially at the enforcement level, whereby the scrutiny of who is involved in the project at the design stage and execution is not being done well," said Wilson Mugambi, president of the architectural association of Kenya.

The French news agency reports that Kenya is undergoing a construction boom but corruption has allowed developers to cut corners or bypass laws. Mugambi said it's because costs are very high.

"A single block of flats can cost you maybe 30 million. The cost of engaging professionals through out the scope of the project is 10% of that, the average cost which is spread out from design up to the handover of the project, so technically looking at someone willing to spend 30 million or 20 million on project spending 2-3 million on consultancy should not be a problem but we have people who think they know better," Mugambi said.

Kenya's construction approval process is long. The law demands that a developer obtain approvals from a county government, national environment authority and the national construction authority. It's a procedure that takes at least 6 months. Architect experts like Christopher Otieno said some are not willing to pay that price.

"Because most people have done it without professionals and some buildings somehow have stood, people have this tendency that give me the person. You refer me to the person who helped you build it, so you find people referring quacks and the circle continues," said Otieno.

Some owners of collapsed buildings in Kenya have been arrested and charged in the past, but experts say until professionalism is put at the helm of construction, the problem may not be solved.