

LETTER OF THE DAY

Here is how Umeme can curb power theft

People who steal electricity have different reasons for doing so. Some of them steal power because they cannot afford the high electricity charges. Others because they are just ignorant about the procedures of getting connected legally, others because of delay by Umeme to install meters even after customer's completion of payment. But most of them claim that Umeme surveyors ask for bribes during the inspection for the installation works.

Let me reveal something wrong I found with Umeme and I propose it is rectified earlier if the *Wuuyo* campaign is to yield good results.

About two weeks ago, I went to my village, Maluku, in Mbale town where power theft is also very evident. I wanted my parents' house supplied with power. The procedure to get connected is very clear: Pay inspection fee Shs41,300 plus poll service fee Shs326,000 summing up to Shs 367,000. I made the payments promptly. According to the banner in Umeme offices, one can get connected within a period of one week once all the payments are made. This was the best idea considering that the house would receive power by Christmas.

However, five days later, I waited for the connection in vain.

So I travelled to the Umeme office to find out why the process was taking long. While there, I was stunned by the district manager when he confidently told me that they don't have poles in stock then and that I should go back home, relax and wait again until an unknown date when they will procure the poles. But do I know when that will be? And remember what the banner in their office reads. Besides, there are many other customers applying for the same service and who knows whether they are like me (lured by the banner)?

Let me put my suggestion about ending power theft in Bugisu region plainly. I think, authorities at Umeme



need to come up with a scheme that allows slum dwellers to pay an average, affordable amount for connection to the grid like it is in Kenya where a total of 1.14 million low income customers living in informal settlements such as Kibera, Mathare and Makuru have been connected at an affordable amount of 1,160 Kenya shilling (equivalent to Shs 34,800) through a grant from the World Bank. Umeme should also sensitise people regularly about the benefits of connecting power legally as the company also sorts its employees who ask for bribes during inspection works. The delays should be communicated earlier to the customers who have made full payments for the service since some of these customers travel long distances to reach Umeme offices.

Otherwise I support the campaign to end power theft in Bugisu.

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