

in friends, including trusted Kisamba Mugerwa, people who encouraged me and wrote brilliant projections of how this middle heaven was going to happen; these people are now insinuating that I could have been taking my people for a

the NRM government.

The September 12 government-owned *New Vision* carried a story of how the National Genetic Resources Centre and Data Bank (NAGRC & DB) bought eight exotic bulls from South Af-



rica before constructing the shelters where they would be kept!

Museveni's television interview; which suggests that a retired leader can be more relevant to a troubled continent.

Mr Tacca is a novelist, socio-political commentator. altaccaone@gmail.com.



## Harold Acemah > The Might of Ideas

# Water is life, not luxury for goodness sake!

Two weeks ago, an official from National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) delivered an invoice for water at my country residence for the month ending September 4. It took me by surprise because it was over and above the monthly bill I have been paying for some time which prompted me to ask him whether there was a mistake in reading the water metre or not.

The NSW official told me in reply that, with effect from September 2017, the unit price of water had been increased by the company by Shs605, from Shs2,716 to Shs3,300.

As a long-standing customer of good standing, I felt strongly that the company should have given its customers advance notice to this effect, either directly via email or by SMS or a public announcement. None of this was done which makes one speculate and conclude that NWSC does not care about its customers or takes them for granted which would be unacceptable.

My water bill included service charge of Shs1,500 and Shs6,814 as VAT which is 18% of the invoice.

NWSC was established in 1972 by decree No 34 to initially serve Kampala, Entebbe and Jinja and this was done by the Idi Amin regime.

### Water is a necessity for life

Clean water and sanitation is Goal 6 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were adopted by the 70th regular session of the UN General Assembly in 2015. The purpose of

Goal 6 is to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030 at the latest, but preferably earlier.

The first three of eight targets of Goal 6 are as follows: "By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all." Second, "by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations."

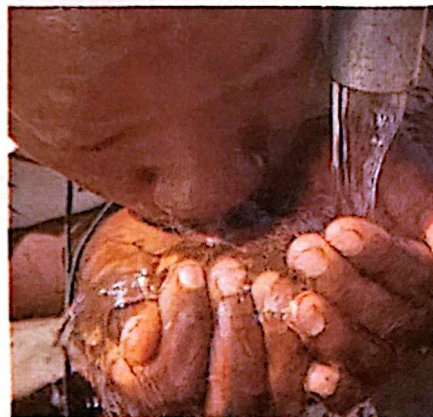
Third, "by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe re-use globally."

UN experts have argued that without progress on Goal 6, the other SDGs and targets are not achievable, especially Goal 1 (no poverty); Goal 2 (zero hunger); Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth); Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production).

Clean and safe drinking water and hygienic toilets protect people, especially children, from a large number of waterborne diseases caused by harmful bacteria and hence enable students to attend school without disruption and permit workers to be productive. A healthy population is a productive population.

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**Water is a necessity and an essential commodity, not a luxury and must be readily available to all citizens of Uganda at affordable rates not at an exorbitant cost, as is the case in Uganda today. Why should government charge VAT on water and medicine? In Canada and the US there is no tax on water, medicines and children's items which obviously makes sense.**



all citizens of Uganda at affordable rates not at an exorbitant cost, as is the case in Uganda today. Why should government charge VAT on water and medicine?

In Canada and the US there is no tax on water, medicines and children's items which obviously

makes sense. I fear the ruling clique may soon impose VAT on the air we breathe since we are told oil and everything in Uganda belongs to you know who.

When I joined Uganda civil service and began to live on my own in Kampala in 1972, the bill for domestic water was fixed at a flat rate of Shs10 or \$1.50 per month per household. The quality of water so good that Ugandans used to drink tap water without any fear and mineral water was unheard of.

Come to think about it, the first time I consumed bottled mineral water was in 1971 when I was Third Secretary at the Embassy of Uganda in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The popular Ethiopian brand of mineral water was called "Ambo" which in my Lugbara language means big or huge. Well, water is big business in Uganda today.

The only country I know where tap water is still safe to drink is Switzerland. No wonder during the 1950s the British colonial authorities promoted Uganda as the pearl of Africa and the Switzerland of the continent which is sadly no longer the case, courtesy of some corrupt leaders who have destroyed the environment and plundered the resources of Uganda with impunity.

Uganda is blessed and endowed with abundant supply of natural fresh water which is increasingly a scare commodity elsewhere in the world.

Fresh water in Uganda comes, inter alia, from Lakes Victoria, Albert, Kyoga, George and the River Nile after which my home region derives its name. There is absolutely no good reason why all citizens of Uganda and visitors to our country should not have access to clean and fresh water in the 21st Century.

I request the minister of Water to urgently table appropriate legislation in Parliament to remove of all taxes on water for domestic use so that wananchi can have access to clean water at affordable rates without any further delay.

Mr Acemah is a political scientist, consultant and a retired career diplomat. hacemah@gmail.com

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