Letters

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Access to water is a right, not a privilege

Access to safe and reliable water is not a privilege; it is a basic human right and a public service obligation. The National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) was established to fulfil this mandate for Ugandans.

However, for many residents of Nebbi Municipality, access to water has increasingly come with an absence of dependable and satisfactory service delivery.

This open letter is written not to portray NWSC as a bad institution, but to present the lived realities of customers served by the Nebbi Branch and to call for urgent corrective action based on observable facts and everyday experiences.

Over time, customer satisfaction with NWSC services in Nebbi has steadily declined. This decline is not driven by unrealistic expectations, but by persistent service failures, unresolved complaints, and a growing perception among consumers that their concerns are neither prioritised nor adequately addressed.

Across the municipality, residents continue to experience prolonged water outages, irregular supply schedules, and consistently low water pressure.

In Nyangam Lower Village in Thatha Division, where I come from, residents last accessed piped water in October 2025. Even then, the water only flowed between two and three o'clock in the morning. Expecting households to wake up in the middle of the night to fetch water is neither practical nor humane.

Water services should be designed around normal human living conditions, not force communities to reorganise their lives around unpredictable supply patterns.

Despite these prolonged interruptions, billing continues without consideration of actual service delivery. Bills are issued whether water flows or not.

Many customers have also reported excessive charges, double billing, and meter readings that do not reflect real consumption. Attempts to resolve these billing issues are often slow and frustrating, further eroding public trust in the service provider.

In addition, customers have repeatedly raised concerns about persistent leakages that remain unattended for long periods. In several cases, water is visibly wasted through broken pipes while surrounding households remain without supply. This situation reflects not only operational inefficiency but also weak resource management at a time when water scarcity is an increasing national concern.

Communication and administration present another major challenge. In a functional service delivery environment, administrators are expected to proactively inform customers about service interruptions, maintenance works, or system challenges. In Nebbi, however, customers are often left uninformed. The branch administration established a WhatsApp platform to address customer grievances, an indication that the problems were recognised.

Unfortunately, the platform has instead become characterised by repeated complaints, frustration, and occasional altercations, largely due to delayed responses and unresolved issues. These challenges point to weaknesses in leadership and administration rather than the absence of systems or structures. Effective leadership should translate policy into practice, promote accountability, and place customer welfare at the centre of operations. Where this does not happen, even well-established institutions struggle to deliver on their mandate.

The impact of poor water service delivery goes far beyond inconvenience. It affects hygiene, sanitation, health outcomes, and household dignity. Women and children are disproportionately affected, often walking long distances in search of alternative water sources, exposing families to unsafe water and preventable diseases.

NWSC Nebbi Branch must take deliberate steps to restore public confidence by ensuring reliable and predictable water supply. Customer communication should be timely, transparent, and respectful, especially during service interruptions. Billing must reflect actual consumption, with disputes handled fairly and promptly. Leakages and infrastructure faults should be addressed without delay. Above all, leadership and administration must prioritise accountability and customer welfare.

NWSC remains a critical institution in Uganda's development journey, and its successes in other towns demonstrate that effective service delivery is achievable. However, credibility at branch level depends on responsiveness, accountability, and respect for the communities served. Access to water must go hand in hand with dependable service. The people of Nebbi are not asking for favours. They are asking for a service that works.

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