

CSOs push for affordable electricity: Call on parliament to bridge access gap



From left: Pascal Muhangi, Economist at CSBAG, and Oscord Otile, Researcher at ACODE, presenting the CSO paper to the Parliament's Committee on Public Service and Local Government on 27/03/2025. (Photo: CSBAG)

Despite a 5.2% cut in electricity costs, the cost per unit remains high, averaging UGX 500 for domestic consumption and UGX 396 for commercial use. This is prohibitive for vulnerable populations, who earn meager wages and must prioritize essential needs like education, food, healthcare, and water.

Planners in the Civil Society realm have urged Parliament's committee on Public Service and Local Government Committee to ensure that sufficient funding is available to largely neglected concerns that are capable curing wide-spread imbalances in Uganda. This was call delivered by Mr Pascal Muhangi and Mr Oscord Otile as the interfaced with the committee that is currently scrutinizing the Ministerial Policy Statement (MPS) of the Public Service Ministry and that Local government on Thursday (March 27th, 2025).

Cure education disparities

Lawmakers were asked to address funding shortage and insufficient teachers in local government systems that eventually cripple education sector. The Civil Society Organisation (CSO) members are that the few teachers that are poorly remunerated are strained with the explosive number of learners that they have to teach.

In one of the pronounced examples fleshed out from West Nile region, Mr Otile highlighted that "there is a disparity in the teacher staffing gap among Zombo, Madi-okollo and Arua district schools yet their neighboring Districts causing an inequity in education."

He went to note that "the average teacher-pupil ratio stands at 1:97 and 1:231 in Zombo and Madi-Okollo district respectively which was far above the recommended ratio of 1 teacher to 53 pupils affecting the effective delivery of education services."

As a way of pointing damaging effect the above tendency comes with on the learners, Mr Otile stated that "this could perpetuate cycles of inequality and limit future opportunities for students."

To cure this disparity, the committee was urged to push for "increased government financing toward addressing staffing shortages, improving infrastructure, and ensuring that students have access to adequate resources for their learning."

The CSOs also advocated an "increased uptake and provision of all requisite resources that enable extension workers ably execute their mandate in the agricultural sector across the country."

Increase support for extension workers

Members of Parliament were pointed to this need because it is through "agricultural extension services that the economy will be able to attain the desired output that meets quality requirements, and therefore maximize on returns from exports." In a bid to highlight the gravity of the concern on the matter, Mr Otile referenced the 2023/24 Auditor General's report which showed that "Out of the 5,874 required extension staff positions in 135 local governments, 2,561 (44%) have been filled leading to a shortfall of 3,324 (57%)."

Worse still, the same report authored by Attorney General Mr Edward Akol showed that "1,035 out of the 2,561 existing extension workers in 135 Local Governments did not have motorcycles." He added "inadequate extension services constrain the implementation of PDM activities and has led to a low level of adoption of improved agricultural technologies."

They are equally noted that government's "proposed allocation of Shs11.671billion, of which 8.7 is non-wage, is not sufficient to significantly bridge the existing coverage gap of agricultural extension workers and to support their operations."

Expand electricity supply

Lawmakers were also pointed to the low electricity access bogged by the high financial charges subjected on users. Non-government entities therefore warned that such a trend largely obstructs development programs that are propelled by electricity, such as industrialization. "Despite an increase in access to electricity regional disparities still exist which affect equity and its unaffordability by households," Mr Otile noted.

He added "despite the cuts on the cost of electricity by 5.2% the cost per unit of electricity remains high, averaging Shs500 per unit consumed domestically and Shs396 for commercial consumption."

The challenges Ugandans encounter in accessing electricity therefore impedes the progress of government's poverty eradication schemes such as the Parish Development Model. "This is prohibitive for the vulnerable population, who earn meagre wages and must prioritize essential needs such as education, food, healthcare, and water among others," Mr Otile stated.

He added "for commercial users this is a significant cost of production that hinders value-addition efforts and the advancement of government interventions such as the Parish Development Model (PDM), Emyooga among others."

It was therefore recommended that the government "should scale up access to electricity in the underserved regions to at least an average of 10 per cent across all regions. Stability in connectivity should be prioritized especially in rural areas."

In the same way, Mr Otile asked legislators to rally Parliament towards ensuring that "the unit cost of electricity for domestic consumption should be gradually reduced to at least Shs300 per unit then Shs100 for commercial consumption." In reaction, a vast majority of the lawmakers that attended the committee session that was held in the Parliament's South Committee Room credited the CSO fraternity for what was termed as "well researched presentation."

The presentation submitted to parliament was jointly prepared by ACODE, UDN, NAFOPHANU, AGHA, WECISNET, NEBBI District NGO Forum, and KWID