"Uganda Has the Power. What It Needs Is the Courage to Speak Plainly."

Uganda's energy sector has a communication problem. The installed capacity reached 2,098 megawatts in 2025, from hydropower (Uganda Broadcasting Corporation [UBC], 2025), and the regulator says tariffs for October to December 2026 are unchanged (Nile Post, 2026), yet many consumers believe prices keep climbing.

Under the lifeline tariff, a household pays Shs250 for its first 15 units; later units cost far more (Uganda Business News, 2025). A second threshold varies by customer, and the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited (UEDCL) must tell each one where theirs falls (Nile Post, 2026). Few households know this, and fewer know whom to ask. A bill nobody can read causes suspicion.

UEDCL took over distribution after Umeme's concession ended in 2025, and ERA has approved targeted investment to rebuild the network (Energy News Network, 2026). Faults during a rebuild are understandable and customers should learn what failed, where, and when power returns before they must ask. Vandalism and unpaid bills, which ERA names as key challenges (Charmar News, 2025), are a threat.

The 2024 census found that nine in ten households still cook with firewood or charcoal which slows clean cooking and the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC, 2025a) reports that charcoal is the main fuel for 70.6% of Kampala households. The Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) introduced a cooking tariff to change this, yet households cooking with electricity rose only from 1.4 to 1.7% in three years (EPRC, 2025b). Biomass still supplies 87 percent of the country's final energy (Makerere University Business School [MUBS], 2026).

In this case, every receipt and SMS should show units bought, the rate applied and each charge, in understandable language since once customers understand the bills, there are never rumors.

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development should take electric cooking to markets and radio stations, with neighbors who have switched stating what a week of meals costs.

Never announce a restriction without an alternative. The 2023 charcoal ban in northern Uganda raised prices and left traders unsure of their future (Global Press Journal, 2024). A rule without an option reads as punishment, and punishment invites evasion.

The Ministry sets a policy, ERA approves tariffs and UEDCL bills customers; when a consumer complains, each can point to another. ERA already reviews tariffs every quarter, weighing exchange rates, inflation, the generation mix and fuel prices (UG Business, 2026). A clear note explaining each review, with planned shutdowns would cost little and end the guessing.

My attention has been drawn to communication as ERA's public hearings are welcome (Charmar News, 2025), as well as the use of toll-free lines and ward level meetings.

By: Nampala Gloria

MBA student at MUBS|

References

Charmar News. (2025). Vandalism, unpaid bills highlighted as key challenges in 2026 tariff review. https://charmarnews.com/vandalism-unpaid-bills-highlighted-as-key-challenges-in-2026-tariff-review/

Economic Policy Research Centre. (2025a). Charcoal reliance chokes energy transition goals. https://eprcug.org/eprc-in-the-news/charcoal-reliance-chokes-energy-transition-goals/

Economic Policy Research Centre. (2025b). How a smarter electricity tariff can ignite Uganda's clean-cooking revolution. https://eprcug.org/blog/how-a-smarter-electricity-tariff-can-ignite-ugandas-clean-cooking-revolution/

Energy News Network. (2026, September 2). Uganda electricity distribution rebuilds its network a year after Umeme's concession ended. https://energy-news-network.com/?p=18837

Global Press Journal. (2024). Uganda's charcoal and firewood ban in the north. https://globalpressjournal.com/?p=10068343

International Energy Agency. (2023). Uganda energy transition plan: Executive summary. https://www.iea.org/reports/uganda-energy-transition-plan/executive-summary

Makerere University Business School. (2026). Uganda energy at a crossroads [Policy brief]. https://bams.mak.ac.ug/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Uganda_Energy_at_cross_road_Brief_2026.pdf

Nile Post. (2026). ERA dismisses electricity tariff hike claims. https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/era-dismisses-electricity-tariff-hike-claims.2483768/

UG Business. (2026, April). Stable power tariffs extend into second quarter amid balanced pressures. https://ugbusiness.com/2026/04/energy-oil-gas/stable-power-tariffs-extend-into-second-quarter-amid-balanced-pressures

Uganda Broadcasting Corporation. (2025). https://ubc.go.ug/?p=21391

Uganda Business News. (2025, November). Understanding your electricity bill: How power tariffs for domestic consumers work. https://ugbusiness.com/2025/11/energy-oil-gas/understanding-your-electricity-bill-how-domestic-power-tariffs-work