Light is coming. Tell Ugandans when.

Families who applied for power deserve to know their place in the queue.

By Paul Ssekitto

Picture a mother who paid for a power connection before Umeme left. Every evening, she passes the pole at her gate, lights a lantern for her children's homework, and wonders if anyone remembers her. Next door, a young welder waits to open his workshop. They have plenty of company. Parliament's natural resources committee found that 232,586 applicants who had paid in full were still waiting at the end of July. One MP described poles "rotting without wires". Often the grid is already close. Afrobarometer found in 2024 that 62 percent of Ugandans live in areas served by the national grid, yet only 28 percent are connected to it. The pole is at the gate; the power is not. The National Energy Compact promises electricity to 85 percent of Ugandans by 2030, up from about 60 percent in 2025, counting solar home systems. That target becomes real only at the household switch. Wakiso Woman MP Betty Naluyima named the deeper pain: since Umeme's WhatsApp channel ended, the public does not know where to report problems. Families can endure a wait; silence breaks their trust.

UEDCL is moving. In early November, its acting commercial chief, Isaac Katewanga, said the company had connected about 80,000 customers in two months, has enough meters, and aims for 50,000 connections a month by December. Even at that pace, a waiting list, the size of July's would take nearly five months to clear. State Minister for Energy Sidronius Okaasai Opolot told Parliament in August that connections were slower than anticipated, blaming local suppliers of connection materials. Now extend that candor to every applicant. Online applicants already receive a tracking number. Give every applicant one, checkable by short code as easily as a balance of mobile money and send an SMS at four moments: inspection passed, meter allocated, installation booked, power on. When a date slips, send the reason and a new date. Post each area's queue by tracking number, not name, at sub-county offices and online. A visible queue rewards patience and leaves no room for middlemen. Restore a WhatsApp line, with one toll-free number, that issues case numbers and replies within a week.

Accountability needs the same light. The Energy Ministry should publish a monthly scoreboard for every district showing applications, connections, and average waiting time. The Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) should verify the figures. Parliament should review them every quarter. ERA's service standards already supply the yardstick: 10 working days from payment to connect a customer needing no pole, 15 where poles are needed. Publish how often UEDCL meets them. Good communication starts before anyone applies. Under the World Bank-funded Electricity Access Scale-up Project, a home within 90 meters of a low-voltage pole that needs no more than one new pole qualifies for a free connection. Applicants must have the house wired and pay a Shs23,600 inspection fee. Spread that message in local languages through community radio, LC1 chairpersons, and certified wiremen, and let radio stations celebrate each village that switches on. Neighbors believe neighbors. Readers can act this month: if a pole stands near your home, apply on UEDCL's self-service portal, keep your tracking number, and help a fellow do the same. Uganda has built dams, strung lines, and planted poles. One simple promise from UEDCL completes the work. Bring the powerline. Tell people when to get connected. Then keep your word.

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