



14/March/2018

OPEN LETTER TO UMEME REQUESTING FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THE REPORT ON ELECTROCUTION OF THREE YOUNG PEOPLE IN RUBAGA, KAMPALA

Gov't must also deal with UMEME over its failure to deliver safe and reliable services to Uganda

Mr. Selestino Babungi,

Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) is a registered public policy research and advocacy non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to influencing energy policies and players to benefit the poor and vulnerable including women and children. Among others, AFIEGO creates public awareness on the rights to electricity, works for the protection of electricity consumer rights and plays a watchdog role over the electricity sector for the common good.

For this reason, our attention was drawn to the horrifying death of three citizens including two pupils by the names of Roselyn Ssimbwa and Kevin Kito and a housemaid only identified as Rossette in Rubaga, Kampala following electrocution on Saturday, March 1, 2018.

That young lives –the pupils were aged 12 and 19- were snuffed out because of UMEME and government's failure to ensure safety of electricity installations is negligence of the highest order.

More negligent is the fact that to date, 13 days after the death of the three, a final report of findings on the cause of the electrocution is yet to be released. This is not only a huge failure as the family that lost its loved ones has no explanation for the exact cause of the electrocution but also portends badly for the public who expect UMEME to ensure safety of electricity installations.

This is especially so because this is not the first time electrocutions are taking place in the country. To jog your memory, in December last year, eight people were electrocuted in Rukungiri district while erecting a tent in preparation for a burial. Two of them died!

In another incident in October 2017 in Kamuli district, a child was electrocuted as it played near an exposed electric cable. The child's mother run to its help after hearing the screams and she too was electrocuted.

A 2014 Uganda Police Force Crime report notes that at least 10 people die weekly due to electrocution in Uganda, with most cases in Eastern Uganda and Kampala city.

Victims of electrocutions are often criminalised with UMEME advancing the reason that illegal connections cause the deaths! However, UMEME does not make public independent and complete investigation findings showing the real causes of the electrocutions. This implies that the public never gets to find out whether the criminalised electrocution victims caused their own deaths or other factors such as UMEME's negligence did. With government institutions like the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) behaving as if they do not care about Ugandans where they praise companies such as UMEME that have for years continued to provide poor electricity services that are easily affected by little wind or rain, Ugandans remain at the mercy of money shirks.

With this letter, we demand that UMEME releases the investigations report that shows what caused the electrocution of the two pupils and housemaid that took place on Saturday, March 1, 2018 in Rubaga, Kampala.

It is noteworthy that the poor services UMEME offers to Ugandans are not only limited to failure to ensure safety of electrical installations.

Today, Uganda is experiencing rains and UMEME has taken out radio advertisements and is using social networking sites such as Twitter to warn electricity consumers that the downpours render living in Uganda dangerous as electricity installations could lead to electrocution.

Your company has also, in a message antithetical to your slogan of "Powering Uganda", assured Ugandans that electricity poles could collapse resulting in power blackouts. Year after year, UMEME issues the same warning message when the rainy seasons start.

Why is this the case when UMEME reports to have astoundingly invested in the electricity sector? Per your 2016 annual report, it is said that UMEME's total cumulative investment in Uganda amounted to \$500M.

What is UMEME investing in if your company's electricity installations cannot withstand even small downpours? Where is that investment if we consider that to date, a mere over 20% of Ugandans have access to power with over 90% still depending on biomass energy?

Ugandans should also note that unlike other electricity distributors in the country, UMEME has a monopoly of supplying power to all urban centers in Uganda and this means that you do not have to spend money on electrifying scattered homesteads. It is sad that UMEME cannot invest and ensure that the few Ugandans who have access to electricity get safe, affordable and reliable power. Further, for small rains and wind to bring the entire electricity distribution services in the country to a halt year after year, speaks volumes about the competence and commitment of the providers.

UMEME needs to tell Ugandans why \$500m cannot stabilise the small power sector we have. Why is UMEME still using uninsulated wires that get affected by whether?

This is especially so because power outages increase business costs as citizens either have to power their businesses using generators or stop work until electricity is restored. With the high fuel costs today, Ugandans who can afford generators feel the economic bite of your company's inefficiency. Those who cannot afford generators, who are the majority, are condemned to no income and consequently no food and access to other basic needs for their families when power blackouts occur.

Further, how many people including women die in hospitals due to lack of or unreliable electricity? How many children drop out of school to go and look for firewood for their families? There is evidence to show that the over 1.5 million children who drop out of school every year is a result of misery in their homes caused by poor electricity services among others. Further, the over 420 mothers who die every month due to labour complications is a result of poverty caused by poor services such as power services and others.

UMEME must remedy the state of inefficiency in the electricity sector. Government must also play its role. The following should therefore be urgently done:

- (i) An independent entity appointed by government and UMEME must make public the report showing findings from the investigations undertaken to ascertain the root causes of electrocutions across the country to deter more deaths. The report of the cause of electrocution of the pupils and housemaid who died in Rubaga, Kampala on March 1, 2018 must also be made public.
- (ii) Through its oversight powers, parliament must compel UMEME to answer for the persistent electrocution of Ugandans despite reported increased investments that should guarantee citizens safety. Parliament should do the above with the view of causing the prosecution of UMEME officials found culpable for negligence.
- (iii) Ugandans must demand for more reliable, accessible, safe and affordable electricity services from government and UMEME.

Government must also play its role by doing the following:

- (iv) ERA must undertake a thorough value for money audit to investigate the investments by UMEME to ascertain the value for money and make this report public.
- (v) The Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) must compel UMEME to invest in equipment that do not endanger citizens' lives.

- (vi) The Electricity Act should be amended to make ERA strong to deal with the 21st century electricity challenges including giving it powers to discipline companies such as UMEME.
- (vii) The amended Act should create individual liability for energy government officials who connive with power companies against the country or are found in corruption practices.
- (viii) Urgent action be taken to implement the recommendations of the 2013 Oboth-Oboth ad hoc parliamentary committee on electricity sector failures and the Salim Saleh Interim Review of Electricity Tariff Committee recommendations to terminate UMEME's contract.
- (ix) Power companies such as UMEME should be made to compensate the victims, whether its death or loss of property or business.

Thank you



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Dickens Kamugisha

Chief Executive Officer, AFIEGO

Cc

- Speaker of Parliament
- The Minister of Energy and Mineral Development
- Executive Director, Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA)
- The Auditor General

