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UMEME, ERA MUST NOT BE PART OF METRE VERIFICATION EXERCISE BY UNBS FOR FAIR & ACCURATE FINDINGS

Electricity distributors must also compensate customers for inaccurate metres

If Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) is to give Ugandans credible, accurate and useful results during the ongoing electricity metres testing exercise, UMEME and the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) must not be part of the metre testing exercise, Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) has said.

Last week, UNBS, ERA and UMEME embarked on a countrywide exercise to verify electricity metres installed in customers' premises (in-service metres). The exercise followed the testing of 6,500 metres by UNBS between June and December 2017 of which 6,000 were found to be faulty. These metres had not yet been installed in customers' premises.

Following an outcry by AFIEGO, citizens empowered by AFIEGO and others over concerns of in-service metres, UNBS reiterated its promise to test in-service metres. However, with ERA and UMEME being part of the ongoing testing, the findings of the verification exercise will not be credible and will be useless to electricity consumers. This is because ERA has previously shown bias and self-interest while UMEME has intimidated UNBS.

“When UNBS released the results that showed that 6,000 out of the 6,500 metres it tested between June and December 2017 were faulty, UMEME intimidated and dismissed the UNBS results through the media. ERA was also defensive, as opposed to being the independent and impartial regulator that promotes customers' interests that it is supposed to be.

How can UMEME, a company with vested interests, be part of the verification exercise and Ugandans are expected to believe that the findings of that exercise will be accurate and free of bias?

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More so, how can ERA which failed to defend customers and promote their interests when UNBS released the aforementioned results be expected to work with UNBS this time round and accurate and credible results are produced?

UNBS is an independent entity and as such, the organisation must independently conduct the metre verification exercise without any undue interference from ERA and UMEME,” Mr Dickens Kamugisha, AFIEGO’s CEO, says.

AFIEGO is also calling on UNBS to test 50% of the in-service metres as opposed to testing only 10,000 metres countrywide.

“UMEME alone has over 1.1 million customers and testing 10,000 metres means that only 0.9% metres belonging to UMEME customers will be tested. Yet other electricity distributors such as WENRECo, Kilembe Investments Limited (KIL), Kalangala Infrastructural Services (KIS) and others also have customers whose metres must be tested.

UNBS must therefore test 50% of the in-service metres to give a true picture of the extent of metres giving inaccurate readings. This will provide the evidence that is required to stop the cheating of customers who are paying for more electricity than they are consuming,” Mr Kamugisha says.

AFIEGO also calls on UNBS to ensure that the geographical scope of the verification exercise is representative.

“For instance, in Kampala, metres from all the divisions in Kampala should form part of the tested samples. In the same vein, metres from varying sub-counties and parishes across the country should be tested.

If the geographical area in which metres are tested is not varied, customers will not be satisfied with information showing that metres in a certain area meet the required standards while none in their area was tested.

Further, UNBS must use random sampling to avoid distribution companies influencing which metres should be tested in their own interests,” Mr Kamugisha says.

AFIEGO is also calling on UNBS to ensure that in addition to determining the accuracy of in-service metres as it is doing, the body should also test for the quality of metres that are in-service. UNBS should also determine whether Yaka! metres installed on electricity poles as opposed to sites more accessible to customers give more inaccurate readings than those that are accessible and are therefore used to cheat customers.

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Customers whose metres are found to have been giving inaccurate readings and have been cheated through paying for more electricity than they consume should be compensated by UMEME.

“Customers who steal power are punished with through fines among others. In the same vein, UMEME and other electricity distributors should be penalised and must compensate customers found with inaccurate metres supplied by the electricity distributors,” Mr Kamugisha says.

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