



THE ANNUAL CONSUMER VOICES ON GOODS AND SERVICE IN UGANDA:

A CASE FOR THE ELECTRICITY SERVICE SECTOR

OCTOBER, 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONSENT through the Consumer Advice Points (CAPs) manned by CAP officers together with a designated team of volunteers routinely harvests consumer complaints from across CONSENT's operational areas including Gulu City/District, Fort Portal City, Kabarole District, Kampala City, Kasese Municipality/District, Mbale City/District and Wakiso District respectively. However, the team also flexibly harvested other consumer complaints from beyond the operational areas across the country.

CONSENT's outreach and engagement with communities facilitates harvesting and documentation of consumer perspectives on the goods and services in their localities, generating consumer complaints on the available products (goods & services). This enables CONSENT to provide relevant stakeholders with real time and evidence-based consumer feedback on goods and services to inform programming, strengthen advocacy, consumer awareness and foster enactment and or enforcement of appropriate laws, standards and regulations to guarantee the quality of goods and services.

This report primarily presents the first annual consumer voices and complaints harvested from October 2023 to October 2024. During this reporting period, a total of 11,154 consumer complaints were collectively recorded of which 7,112 were specifically on services, 2,085 on goods while 1947 were on both goods and services respectively.

Demographically, 69% (n=7692) of respondents who registered their complaints were between the age of 18-35 years while 31% (n=3462) were above the age of 35 years. In addition, 44% (n=4862) of complainants were females while 56% (n=6292) were males. Major complaints on services were on transport (31%), communication (30%), electricity (29%), agro-food systems (25%), trade/markets (25%), health and environment (24%), water and sanitation (23%), education systems (20%) and finance (17%).

Consumers were asked about their preferred options to resolve their complaints, 35% of the respondents preferred replacements, 34% highlighted a preference for an apology, 27% opted for a refund, 8% were unsure of their preferred resolution while 37% preferred other forms of resolution such as improved service delivery, response to community needs and implementation of policy frameworks and actions.

The plight of consumers as represented by the respondents in their complaints requires the government to invest in enactment and enforcement of policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks that are geared towards advancing the consumer protection agenda and a healthy economy. Both public and private entities should invest in quality infrastructure and compliance to policies, standards and regulations so as to guarantee quality of service delivery.

Consumers should spearhead consumer-led advocacy through speaking out and up on any form of anomalies on goods and services and market distortions. Government, CSOs, development actors and businesses should partner to improve the overall quality and safety of goods and services while prioritizing consumer awareness and empowerment.

CONSENT remains committed to fostering consumer-centric practices, better business, quality culture and quality of life through continuously engaging with duty-bearers, actors and stakeholders to better understand and address the consumer needs and concerns effectively.

CONSUMER VOICES ON THE ELECTRICITY SERVICE SECTOR

This particular publication provides a snap short of the consumer voices and issues specific to the electricity service sector



Figure 2 : CONSENT's volunteers harvesting a consumer complaint on electricity

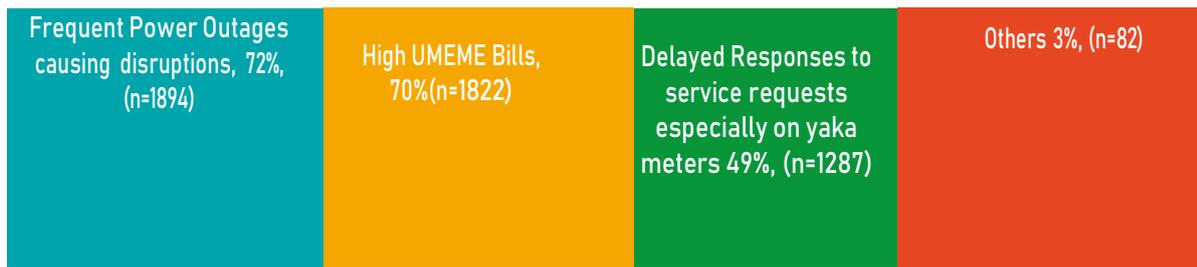
In regards to the electricity service sector, a total of 2620 complaints were registered. Of these complaints, 72%(n=1894) were on frequent electricity outages, 70%(n=1822) were associated with high costs of electricity while 49%(n=1287) were related to delayed responses to service requests especially on the yaka meters.

Other significant complaints lodged on electricity included; variations in token units for the same amount/price, limited/no access to electricity in peri-urban and rural areas, old and sometimes rotten electricity poles which would be life threatening, delays in token delivery after payments and unstable currency. According to some consumers, when power is restored after an outage, it is consistently dim.

The above cases were noted to consequently disrupt businesses, social functions and household operations. Additionally, the circumstances were highlighted to hinder or deter some consumers from establishing particular businesses that require constant supply of electricity since in the long run they end up being expensive to sustain.

Consumers also indicated how power outages grossly affect communication as they are unable to charge their cell phones but also affect internet connectivity. The figure below provides a summary of the major complaints on electricity;

Major Complaints in the Electricity subsector



Some of the key consumer voices captured on electricity are outlined in the table below;

- *“Whenever power goes off, the internet either goes off or it becomes very slow “.*
- *“Some of us who sell perishable foods like meat and milk, in situations we have no constant electricity, we end up with no option than using other methods which are of course unsafe such as using formalin to preserve the food stuffs so that we don’t make loses”*
- *“The power outbreaks/inconsistences in electricity supply and the high cost of electricity has thrown some of us out of business, imagine me who runs a saloon and then electricity disappears for two days or more, how am I expected to run my business. This simply means that I must buy a generator that I have to keep fueling to run the business and in the long run, this is too expensive for me. Hence not making a business sense.*
- *“Just imagine us who erect and run towers and masts that are the sole infrastructure for network. We are faced with a challenge in some places where power goes off for a whole day or even more. This means we have to ensure we run a generator or a solar to ensure that network remains stable. Unfortunately, this is extremely costly and we end up not making a business case as compared to our counter parts in other countries”.*
- *“When power is off, we are unable to charge our phones hence cutting us completely from communicating via calls or even social media. This is even worse if we have to respond to an emergency in a household or a community. As if that is not enough, we are even unable to watch news; therefore, UMEME by all means must ensure that we have full time supply of affordable electricity”.*
- *“Many times I purchase electricity using mobile money but it takes me very long to receive the token from UMEME. Sometime when I receive the token, it further fails to be activated on loading it and thus I have to keep calling UMEME to address it which is so inconveniencing. In the worst case scenarios even UMEME fails to address the matter and so I have to wait for more 24 hours or more to successfully load a token”.*