



THE FIRST ANNUAL CONSUMER VOICES ON GOODS AND SERVICES IN UGANDA



OCTOBER, 2024



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Our partners



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Global Consumer Centre (CONSENT) appreciates Bio-Vision Foundation for the financial support towards consumer empowerment and the harvesting of consumer complaints. Furthermore, CONSENT applauds her other partners including Food Safety Coalition of Uganda, Consumers International, Uganda Communications Commission, Consumer Grassroots Association(CGA), Rikolto, Afrifood links, Gender Environment and Development Action(GEDA) and the local governments of Mbale, Kasese, Gulu, Fort Portal, Kabarole, Wakiso and Kampala for supporting consumer awareness and consumer protection efforts.

We appreciate CONSENT's staff and volunteers who were at the forefront of harvesting the consumer complaints from across the country, analyzing the data and consolidating this report. In addition, we extend our sincere thanks to the team of experts (CONSENT's think tank) who carefully and objectively reviewed this report.

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Lastly, we commend our dear respondents (consumers) who openly shared with us their complaints, insights and perspectives on the state of affairs in regards to goods and services in their respective locations.

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FOREWORD



We are honored and humbled by our milestones irrespective of the challenges that we are working in and on for pathways to advance the consumer protection and better business agendas in Uganda and beyond. We owe it to our partners who trust and have confidence in us to facilitate our services to consumers in Uganda and beyond through sharing, learnings, networking, rethinking and co-creation. We are delighted to have you on board to foster our consumer works and commit to be worthwhile and valuable partners as we yearn and quest for consumer quality of life and better business.

The trajectory and journey of small-baby steps in consumer advocacy you are witnessing today started in 1993 and witnessed millions of consumers, farmers and businesses needing a voice for those issues that do not appease the menu. The aspirations of 1993 are coming to fruition in 2024 with partnerships and resolve. The resolve to ground and grow an effective and efficient consumer agenda led to rebranding from Consumer Education Trust to Global Consumer Centre (CONSENT). The rebranding brought in new energy that has enabled us to grow with a young-youthful team that is challenging and innovative in opening new business models and pathways to reach out in the different parts of the country including: Gulu City/District, Fort Portal City/Kabarole/Kasese Districts, Mbale City/District, Kampala City/Wakiso District and beyond. The teams and partners enable CONSENT to put her ears on the ground with foot soldiers harvesting consumer complaints/concerns and eyes on the horizon to scan ways for all consumers to make informed choices, and decisions for better business. With the harvested complaints/concerns we have managed to map out approaches that are evidence based in our policy advocacy, awareness, empowerment and quality culture nurturing initiatives.

As we got grounded with milestones we celebrate partners including: UNBS since 1993 when it opened up for consumer participation in Standards work; Consumers International for accepting us to join the global federation in 2007; and others Partners accepting to serve with us including: Rikolto, Consumer Grassroots Association, and FAO Uganda since in 2022; Food Safety Coalition Uganda (FoSCU), Afrifoodlinks, Biovision Foundation and HumanistAfricaTV since 2023; in addition signing Memorandums of Understanding with the Uganda Communication Commission in 2023 although the cooperation started in 1999 and Kasese District Local Government in 2024 among others. We are proud of you for inspiring us as we commit to constantly strive to improve our services to you and consumers in Uganda.

Finally, duty-bearers – policy makers and regulators, actors – businesses and stakeholders – academia, cultural, religious, civic, civil society and media leaders use these consumer voices to unleash positive change in Uganda and beyond. That said we are honored to have worked closely and commit to continuously work with the local government teams and consumers who give us the social license to operate; partners who empower us with resources and visibility and the entire teams that grounds CONSENT to increase its reach and influence to join the local, national, regional and global circles in building a more resilient marketplace and future for consumers.

Kimera Henry,
Team Leader.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONSENT through the Consumer Advice Points (CAPs) manned by CAP officers together with a designated team of volunteers routinely harvest 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 facilitated 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 policies, 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 1,947 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, 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.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In Uganda, there is a significant disconnect between consumers and actors/stakeholders (producers, processors, distributors, marketers, regulators) across the different goods and service value chains. Quite often, the lack of direct engagement with consumers exacerbates the disparity in the quality and safety of goods and services. This is further amplified by the evolving dynamics of commodification and market sophistication.

In response to the above pressing issues, CONSENT, through the Consumer Empowerment for Sustainable Food Systems Transformation (CE4SFST) project, launched a consumer complaints' mechanism in 2023 to bolster consumer engagement through generating evidence for traceability and accountability hence creating a fair and transparent market place with better businesses and improved quality of life.

CONSENT leverages on the consumer complaints mechanisms to inclusively engage consumers, offering them a platform to voice their concerns which in turn informs consumer-led advocacy, strengthens community trust, confidence and drives meaningful improvements in consumer protection policies. Furthermore, the amplification of consumer concerns is expected to trigger the responsible authorities/regulators to take appropriate action to safeguard consumers and improve the business environment.

The exercise of complaints' harvesting is undertaken primarily by CONSENT's team comprising of Consumer Advice Point (CAP) officers who closely work with CAP volunteers based mainly in CONSENT's projects' operational areas including Gulu City/District, Fort Portal City, Kabarole District, Kampala City, Kasese Municipality/District, Mbale City/District and Wakiso District. Whereas the complaints are chiefly harvested in CONSENT's operational areas, the consumer complaints mechanism is open to all consumers across the country as long as they have access to CONSENT's enumerator.

The field team of officers and volunteers are technically supported by the Research and Knowledge Management Officer, who is mandated to oversee development of data collection tools, data collection processes, storage, data quality assurance, analysis, reporting and dissemination in line with Personal Data Protection Office Guidelines (PDPOG) as a registered entity.

This report presents the key findings and recommendations from the consumer complaints' harvesting activities for the period October 2023 to October 2024.

1.2. Objectives of Consumer Complaints Harvesting

The following were the objectives of the complaints harvesting exercise;

- ✿ To obtain consumer perspectives on the goods and services in their localities.
- ✿ To generate consumer complaints on the existing goods and services.
- ✿ To provide relevant stakeholders with real time and evidence-based consumer feedback on goods and services for sustainable solutions.

1.3. Justification

Harvesting consumer complaints provided an opportunity to have a wider understanding of consumer perspectives, concerns, challenges and complaints regarding the status quo of goods and services. This is a core step in informing evidence based advocacy and programming for more tailored consumer protection interventions.

The information attained from this exercise further provides a basis for developing relevant legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks that support the consumer protection agenda. In addition, the insights from consumers provide a wider view of the existing gaps in service delivery and hence the recommendations point a direction for improvements towards quality and safety of the goods and services that shall in the long run bolster quality culture and business development.

1.4. Scope

The consumer harvesting exercise was more dominant in locations where CONSENT is currently running her projects including Gulu City/District, Mbale City/District, Fort Portal City, Kampala City, Wakiso District, Kasese district/ Municipality and Kabarole District. However, since consumer issues have no boundaries, CONSENT was flexible to also harvest complaints beyond the project territories as long as the consumers were willing to freely lodge their complaints and are of age 18 years and above irrespective of their gender, culture, religion, education status, political affiliation and any other social-cultural differences.

Other locations from which complaints were harvested included;

Mukono, Lira, Kotido, Agago, Moyo, Soroti, Buikwe, Mpigi, Apac, Kayunga, Kalangala, Buvuma, Mbarara, Jinja, Adjumani, Oyam, Arua, Apach, Masaka, Hoima, Omoro, Nwoya, Lamwo, Kitgum, Kabale, Bududa, Alebtong, Yumbe, Pader, Mubende, Moroto, Mayuge, Luweero, Kole, Kisoro, Kiryandongo, Kaabong, Dokolo, Bukwo, Amuru, Amuria, Amolatar, Shema, Pakwach, Obongi, Ntoroko, Nebbi, Nakaseke, Mityana, Luwero, Kwanja, Koboko, Kassanda, Kapchorwa, Kamuli, Kalungu, Kalaki, Kaberamaido, Iganga, Butambala, Bushenyi and Bunyangabu.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study design

The entire consumer complaints' harvesting exercise employed a cross-sectional study design where respondents were able to submit their complaints at a specified point in time and no further deliberate follow-up of respondents was undertaken.

2.2. Target population

This exercise primarily targeted all consumers living in Uganda aged 18 years and above, freely willing to lodge their complaints and are able to get in contact with any of the CONSENT's research team members.

2.3. Sampling and sample size determination

The exercise was free and open to all consumers that met the inclusion criteria. Literally, all consumers that wanted to lodge their complaints at any one point during the course of the reporting period ably participated in the exercise.

2.4. Data collection methods and tools

This section presents the data collection methods and tools used during the consumer complaints harvesting exercise.

2.4.1. Preparation for data collection

In order to ensure real time data collection, online data collection tools including a questionnaire was developed, reviewed and approved by the technical teams (internal and external) and administration at CONSENT.

The data collection teams consisting of five (5) CAP officers and nine (9) CAP volunteers were inaugurated in the different project operational areas and initially trained on the tools and the dynamics of the activity for a period of two days. During the course of the period, the team was continuously retooled in complaints' harvesting processes including the methodology/ approach, ethical considerations, inclusion and exclusion criteria, advisory and resolution approaches as well as data collection tools.

Following the training of the teams, the tools were pre-tested in the different locations to ascertain whether they would be understood by respondents and if they would be used to provide the relevant data. During the pretesting exercise, some gaps in the tool were identified and immediately addressed making the tool more appropriate to the intended purpose. Subsequently, the final tool was uploaded to Kobo Toolbox to facilitate real-time cloud-based data collection.

2.4.2. Field data collection

The complaints harvesting teams collected data from the different locations on a daily basis. The respondents were randomly selected from markets, places of worship and hospitals, health facilities, streets, meetings/workshops, social gatherings and institutions of learning. Only complaints from consumers who were free and willing to share and lodge their complaints were captured as required by the ethical considerations.

Prior to the interviews, the data collector explained to the respondent the objectives of the interview and what the data shall be used for also highlighting that the interview is optional. Once the respondent understood the terms, the data collector sought a formal consent from the respondent to start the interview.

Data was primarily collected using a questionnaire that was uploaded on Kobo Toolbox and accessed by the data collector via an online link.

2.4.3. Inclusion criteria

Consumers aged 18 years and above and freely willing to lodge a complaint were included. In addition, only individuals who consented to participate fully in the exercise were considered. Disabled individuals with the ability to speak and those unable to speak but with interpreters were included in the exercise as long as they consented.

2.4.4. Exclusion criteria

Participants who got disrupted by any circumstance that did not allow them to complete the exercise were excluded. Individuals who could not speak, hear and see and had no interpreters were also excluded. Additionally, all minors were excluded from the exercise.

2.4.5. Ethical considerations

Prior to starting the exercise, CONSENT registered with the Personal Data Protection Office (PDPO) that requires compliance to personal data protection regulations. These regulations and principles stipulated by the PDPO were followed during the course of data collection. None of the information regarding complainants were shared with any third parties. All participants consented to participate in the exercise prior to the interviews.

2.5. Data management

This section presents how the quality of the data was guaranteed and the process of data analysis.

2.5.1. Data quality control

To ensure quality of data, the complaints harvesting team collected data using online tools which were submitted to a central server instantly once the interview was completed. The tools also captured the time of the day and coordinates where the interview was being conducted. On submitting the data to the server, the research and knowledge management

officer downloaded the data in Excel for data cleaning and validation before analysis could be undertaken.

2.5.2. Data Analysis

Prior to data analysis, the raw data was downloaded from the Kobo Toolbox into Excel where data cleaning and validation was done. Later data was exported to the R-Statistical package for comprehensive analysis. The analysis aimed to identify significant trends, patterns and insights to inform our advocacy efforts and improve consumer satisfaction.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS/RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the key results from the comprehensive data analysis of the different consumer complaints.

3.1. Characteristics of Respondents

During the reporting period (October 2023 to October 2024), 11154 individuals lodged their complaints. Whereas the preliminary statistics from the National Population and Housing Census(NPHC) of 2024 showed that Uganda has 49% of its population being Male and 51% being Female, this complaints' report indicates that more Males (56%) freely lodged their complaints as compared to their Female counterparts (44%) as indicated in table 1 below;

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of respondents

Respondents' characteristics	Total Number	Percentage
Respondents Gender (n=11,154)		
Males	6,292	56%
Females	4,862	44%
Respondents age categorization (n=11,154)		
Respondents below 35 years of age	7,692	69%
Respondents above 35 years of age	3,462	31

During the complaints' harvesting, it was observed that males were more accessible and freer to lodge complaints as compared to their female counterparts. There is a need for all stakeholders to continuously empower women so that they can freely and actively engage in productive discourses and enjoy their right of expression and representation among other rights.

In addition, this report highlights that majority of the respondents (69%) were below the age of 35 years while 31% were aged 35 and above years respectively. This is in conformity with Uganda's statistics indicating the country's population being dominated by young people and youth at about 78 % (UBOS, 2024). Having more youth lodge complaints is also related to their accessibility and willingness to complain as compared to the older persons.

During the interaction with the youth, it was clear that they are still optimistic about the potential to improve the status quo of the quality of goods and services. Additionally, the youth are more inquisitive on the state of affairs in the country due to their exposure to information from the different digital platforms as compared to the older population. Conversely, the young

generation suppose that government and service providers have a responsibility to account to consumers for what is not going on well.

On the contrary, while speaking to the older consumers, they reported having no hope of any faster changes in service delivery across the country due to high prevalence of corruption, limited or no enforcement of legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks as well as limited prioritization of consumer protection hence their limited willingness to register their complaints.

3. 2. Types of complaints

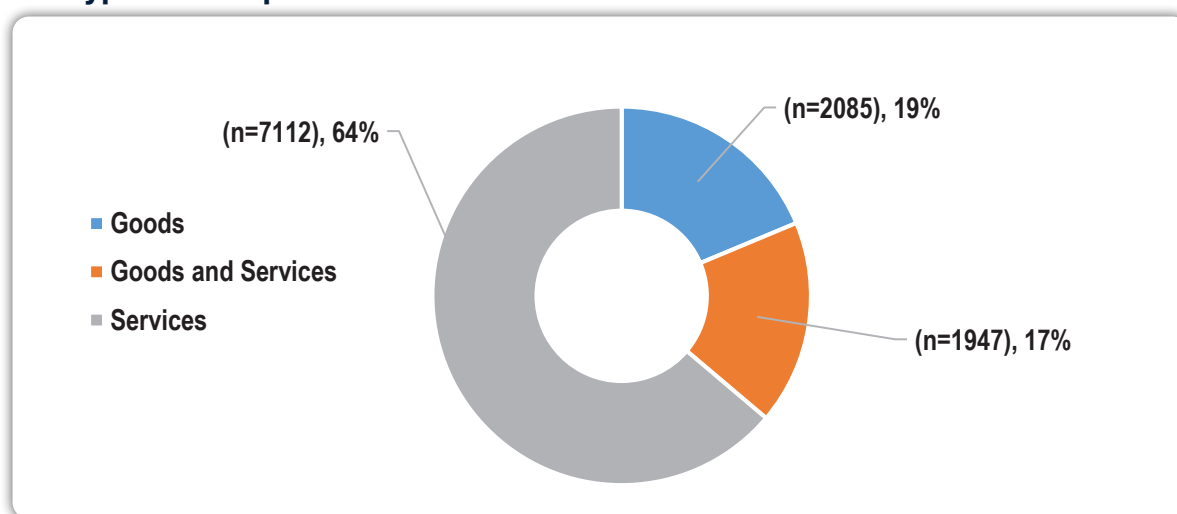


Figure 1: *Types of complaints*

From the figure 1 above, majority of the complaints, 64% (n=7112) were related to services, 19%(2085) were specifically on Goods while 17%(1947) were on both goods and services respectively. Since the services are not physical items that customers can inspect before purchasing, it is harder to know exactly what they're getting. This uncertainty can lead to higher consumer dissatisfaction if the service doesn't meet their expectations. Hence the higher number of complaints on services.

Secondly, services are often delivered in real time, requiring direct interaction between the customer and the service provider. This personal interaction means that any miscommunication, poor attitude, or delay in service delivery becomes more noticeable and often personal, leading to frustration and hence the more service complaints as compared to goods.

More so, this can be attributed to services being a facilitator in the acquisition of goods along the value chain. Consumers indicated that they are able to easily identify and reject goods that do not meet their standards as compared to the services which they usually have no control over.

A number of services ranging from transport, communication, electricity, agri-food systems, trade, healthy environment, water and sanitation, education, finances among others were complained about by consumers as indicated in the figure 2 below;

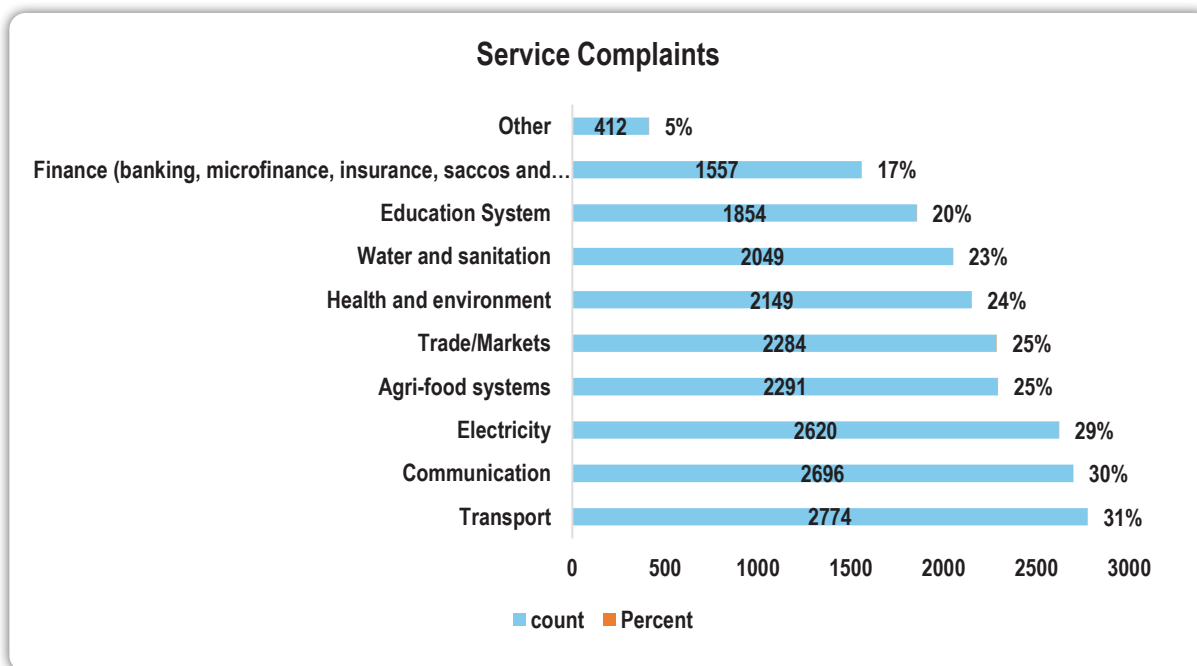


Figure 2: Complaints related to services

For the case of goods, majority of the complaints were about substandard goods, price fluctuations, counterfeit and expired products among others as highlighted in the figure 3 below;

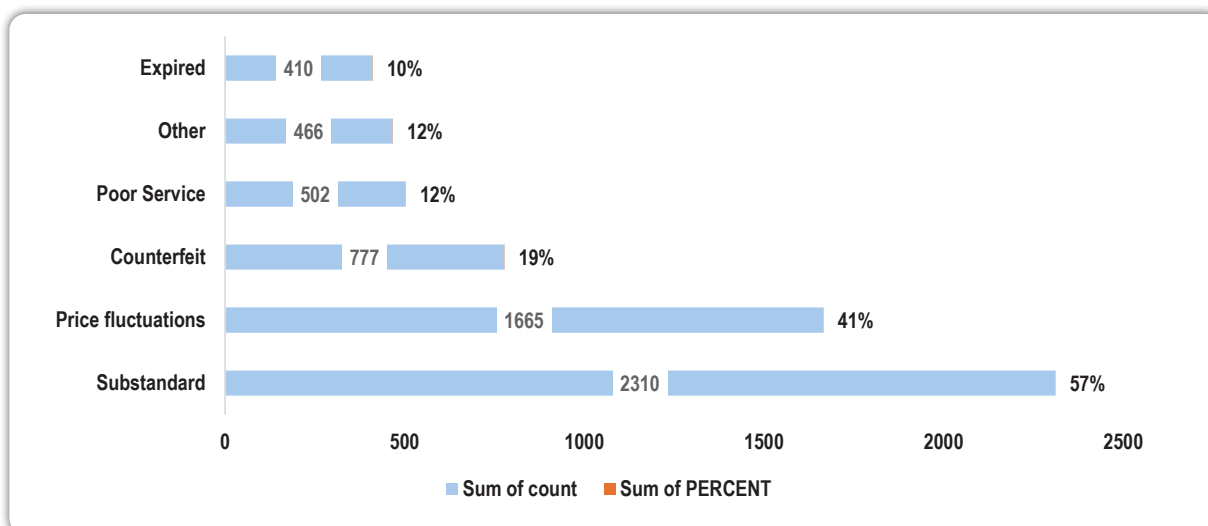


Figure 3: Complaints related to goods

3.3. Complaints by city/district

During the course of the year, CONSENT harvested complaints from different districts/municipalities and cities across Uganda as indicated in the figure 4 below. It's worth noting that majority of the complaints were harvested from Mbale (28%), Kampala (26%), Gulu (12%), Wakiso (11%) and Kasese (9%).

The high number of complaints recorded in the above locations is attributed to the availability of CONSENT's Consumer Advice Points (CAPs) in each of these areas. Similarly, this statistic is also attributed to the high population in urban and peri-urban areas of these mentioned locations. In addition, the distribution highlights urban areas as hotspots for consumer issues and being critical business hubs.

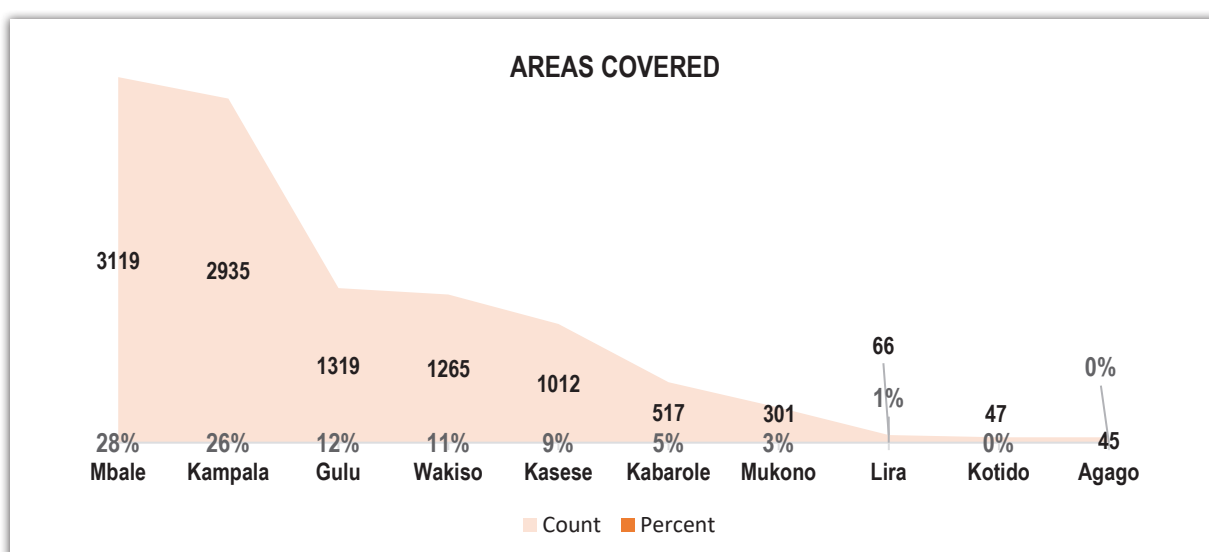


Figure 4: Major areas where complaints were collected

3.4. Awareness of Consumer Affairs Organizations, Departments and Agencies



Figure 5:
Understanding consumers' awareness on CAODAs

From the analysis, majority of respondents (87%) were not aware of Consumer Affairs' Organizations, Departments and Agencies (CAODAs) in their respective localities and workplaces across the country. On the other hand, only 13% of respondents were aware of CAODAs. The limited knowledge of consumers on the existence and operations of CAODAs could be attributed to low visibility and limited coverage of their work in the different parts of the country.

This statistic provides an opportunity for CAODAs to enhance partnerships for scaling up interventions and outreaches geared towards better business and quality of goods and services for the benefit of consumers, business entities and the economy at large while increasing CAODAs' visibility across Uganda.

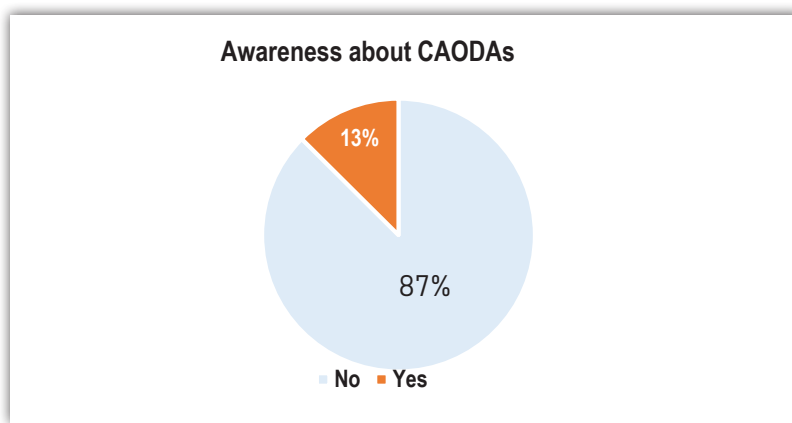


Figure 6: Consumer awareness on CAODAS

3.5. Preferred Resolutions



Figure 7: A consumer reporting her preferred option

The consumers were asked for their preferred options in resolving their complaints and 35% opted for a replacement, 34% an apology, 27% preferred a refund while 8% did not know how best to resolve their complaints. On the other hand, the majority of consumers (37%) proposed other means of complaints' resolutions such as improved quality of goods and services and

their delivery; response to community needs and implementation of policy frameworks and actions.

The above statistics, affirm an urgent need for further engagement of consumers on their rights and responsibilities as well as investment in effective implementation of consumer protection legal and regulatory frameworks. The statistics further provide an opportunity for duty bearers, CAODAs and business entities/service providers to partner in scaling up community-based approaches tailored towards awareness creation, consumer empowerment and strengthening feedback mechanism.

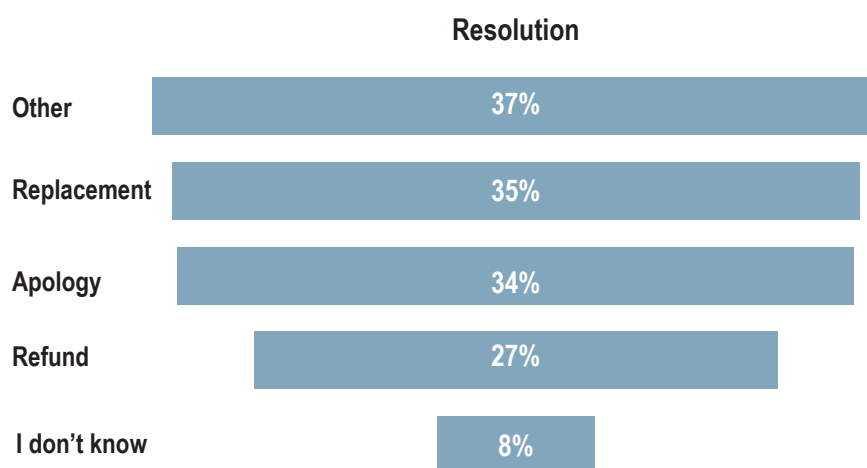


Figure 8:
Consumers preferred resolutions

3.6. Major findings and insights about Service Sectors

Consumer complaints on numerous service sectors including transport, communication, electricity, agri-food systems, trade/markets, health environment, water and sanitation, education and financial services were recorded. This section presents the major complaints and insights on each of the service sectors highlighted above;

3.6.1. Key findings and insights on the electricity service sector



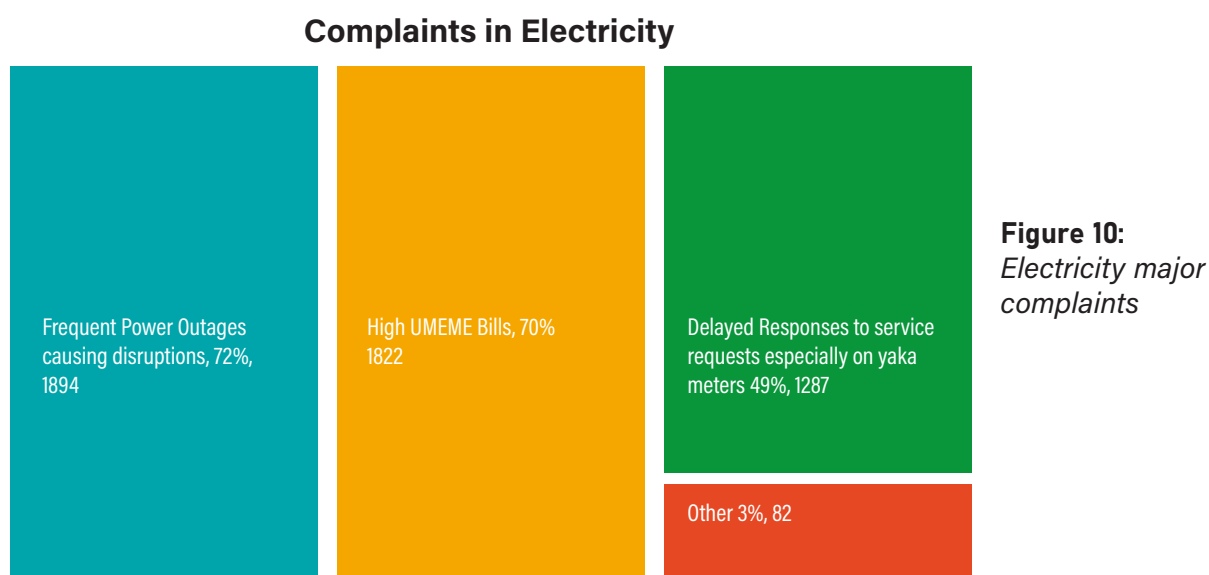
Figure 9 : *CONSENT's volunteers harvesting a consumer complaint on electricity*

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, 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;



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/inconsistencies 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.

3.6.2 Key findings and insights on communication service sector



Figure 11: A consumer submitting his complaint on communication

A total of 2,696 complaints were harvested specifically on the communication sector. Of these complaints, 2029(75%) related to poor network signals on both calls and internet; 1827(68%) were associated with fraud (Bafeere); 1563 (58%) were on unexpected charges while 1249(46%) were on poor customer care services.

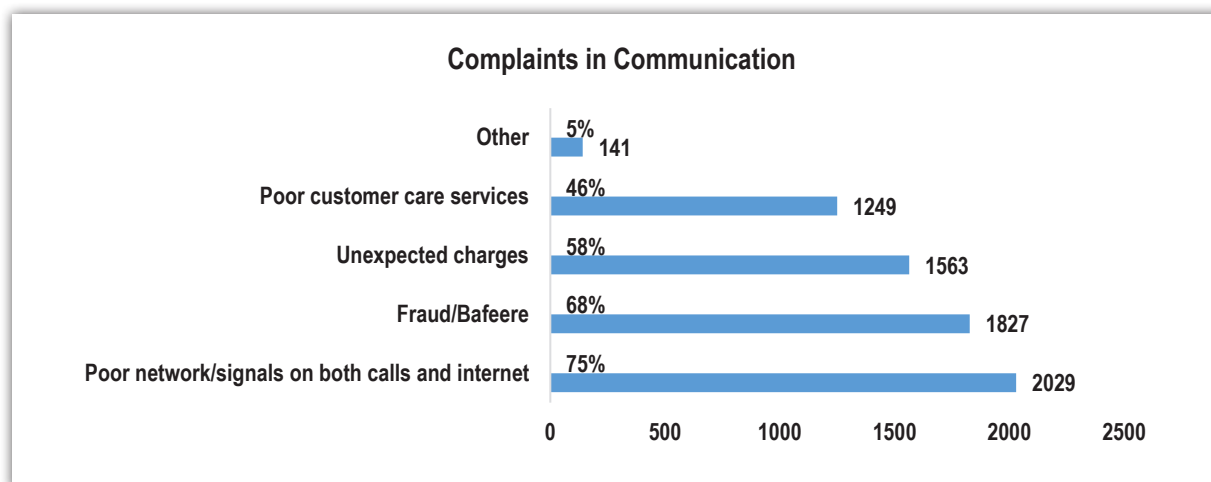


Figure 12: *Complaints on communication services*

Other commonly reported issues from the communication sector included; data bundles procured are less compared to the money charged. This was further backed up by the variations in the different data bundle packages; furthermore, consumers highlighted that AIRTEL and MTN seem to provide less minutes as compared to the money charged. Similarly, some consumers reported dissatisfaction about the high rate of mobile data drainage as compared to the data charges.

The table below outlines some of the consumer voices on communication;

- ☀ "The network in my place of residence is sometimes too poor that even if one got an emergency, one is unable to make a rescue phone call. It is even worse when you move to the rural areas indicating an urban- rural connectivity divide
- ☀ "My phone was disconnected abruptly by MTN and it was reassigned to another person for whatever reason I wasn't notified as a customer. Unfortunately, I cannot use that line for calls but rather am using the line successfully for WhatsApp while the new user is also using the same line for phone calls. What kind of customer services are these?"
- ☀ "The rate at which internet data is drained on my phone is unacceptably high, it seems that all telecom companies are cheating us grossly since we have no control of how data utilization is costed, measured and controlled "I think the telecom companies owe us an explanation as to why and how data is currently fast drained as compared to the previous days. Not forgetting the fact that data bundles are costly to purchase"

- ☀ Whenever I call the customer care helplines of the telecom companies like MTN and Airtel, there are four things that are likely to happen to me as consumer i.e. they may delay to pick my call and later inform me that all their customer care service providers are busy; sometimes they pick the call but they connect me to speak with artificial intelligence gadgets which never give me the solution I need; they may also pick the call and then take you through a long list of services that they offer and surely by the time they want to give me the appropriate response I have already given up or gotten disgusted to listening to whatever they are trying to explain; lastly, they may never pick the call at all. Sometimes, some of the customer care service providers are rude to customers. This is a total reflection of limited customer care services within our communication sector.
- ☀ I and my colleagues have been scammed or defrauded on several occasions but even when we report to the telecoms or even UCC, we never see scammers or fraudsters arrested or tried in courts of law. This has overly discouraged us as consumers from actually trusting the processes in the communication systems. We have even reached a point of thinking that the fraudsters are being protected by the system itself.

3.6.3 Key findings and insights on the transport service sector



Figure 13:
*CONSENT
volunteer
harvesting a
complaint from a
motocyclist*

For the case of the transport sector, a total of 2774 complaints were registered. Majority of these complaints 65%(n=1804) were related to over speeding, followed by 53%(n=1482) that were linked to poor mechanical conditions of the motor-vehicles and 46%(n=1287) associated with drivers or cyclists using unpleasant or questionable shortcuts. In addition, 45%(n=1249) of

the consumers complained about dirty taxis and motor cycles while 42%(n=1171) complained about being exchanged from one taxi to another during the course of a single travel.

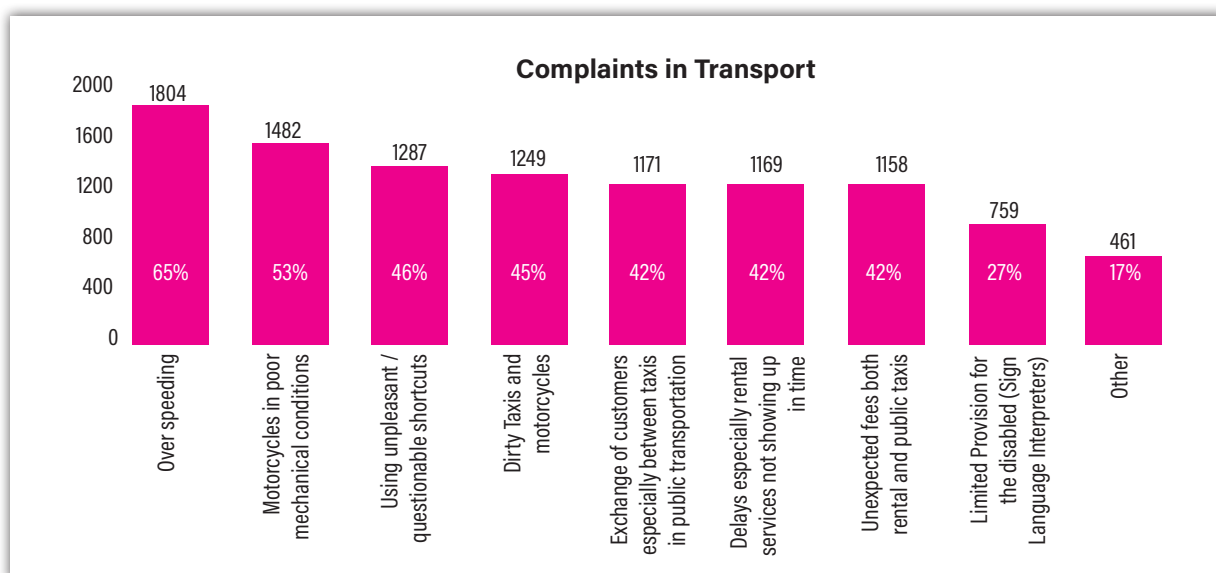


Figure 14: Consumer complaints on transport

Other pertinent complaints in regards to transport ranged from: Limited options and support for the disabled persons for example, the lack of ramps to enable the lame enter vehicles and the unavailability of signs or interpreters to aid the deaf in communication were reported to be limitations to the optimal utilization of the transport services by the persons living with disability. This further confirmed the disparities surrounding leaving the disabled persons behind in the transport service sector.

Furthermore, consumers highlighted unnecessary delays on the road as a result of poor road network, excessive loading of passengers in vehicles by operators, driving mechanically unsound vehicles, drivers and vehicles lacking optimal traffic requirements to operate and thus leading to the use of suspicious and unpleasant short cuts as they try to dodge traffic police.

The unexpected transport fares probably resulting from unregulated transport costs across the country as well as the exorbitant fuel prices was also highlighted among the consumer complaints. Conversely, poor customer care by taxi drivers and their conductors were also strongly reported by consumers.

Some of the consumer voices recorded during the complaints harvesting are indicated in the table below;

- ✱ "Some of the taxi drivers in Kampala have expired driving licenses and some of the taxis are actually in very bad mechanical conditions hence the fear to drive on the main roads as they fear being arrested by traffic police. This confirms why some of the drivers opt to drive through the suspicious and very uncomfortable routes putting the life of consumers at risk.
- ✱ "I lost my two parents in a car accident just because the taxi was over speeding amidst the passengers complaining to the driver. Surprisingly, the taxi was not yet full to capacity and so the driver was just speeding to be a head of other taxis so that he could get more passengers on the road before they can be taken up by other taxis."
- ✱ "Some of the taxis are extremely dirty, with broken seats tied with rugged clothing or ropes, with no window glasses and even sometimes with no lights or indicators. All these conditions predispose consumers to unbearable and yet preventable risks of accidents and even death. The traffic must kick out such vehicles immediately.
- ✱ "Vehicles especially taxis in rural and peri-urban areas are always overloaded with passengers. Much as the primary reason for overloading is to get more money, it's so surprising that one of the other major reasons for overloading is to get relatively more money that shall cater for bribes of the traffic police when they stop the vehicle".
- ✱ Some of the motor-cyclists (boda-boda riders) have helmets as per the road safety guidelines however they only remember to wear them when they see traffic police. Some of them even wear them inappropriately. The same case happens to majority of the taxi drivers who only put on their seat belts when they come closer to traffic police. This is an indication of people riding or driving without sufficient awareness on their protection and protection of passengers."

3.6.4. Key findings and insights about the Health and environment sector



Figure 15:
*Consumer
registering his
complaint*

With regards to the health sector, a total of 2149 complaints were registered as indicated in the figure. Majority of the complaints 70%(n=1504) were about poor customer care services at the health facilities, 56%(n=1202) related to exorbitant medical billing that have always resulted into inadequate medical treatment by the consumers who have inadequate money, 50% (n=1075) were associated with lack of or limited access to health specialists while 48% (n=1028) were on misdiagnosis of patients due to negligence and inexperienced personnel.

Consumers also strongly complained about the limited information shared on medical regimens given to patients, fake/damaged/old medical equipment, exhaustion and extortion of patients due to long hours of waiting for health workers and overcrowding especially in government health facilities. In addition, limited provisions for consumers living with disability whenever they seek for health care services as some times they have no sign language interpreters and no ramps to enable them access the service points.

Other key consumer concerns that are worth noting regarding the health sector included; charging patients money in government hospitals, expired drugs in health centers, long distances to health care centers, insufficient or no medicine in most health centers and poor sanitation in health facilities that could be responsible for health facility acquired infections.

For the case of complaints on environment, majority (34%) of consumers complained on improper waste disposal and air pollution from toxic fumes, 33% registered their complaints on water pollution while 30% highlighted noise pollution especially from the Bizindaalo(loud speakers), show drives and industrial activities.

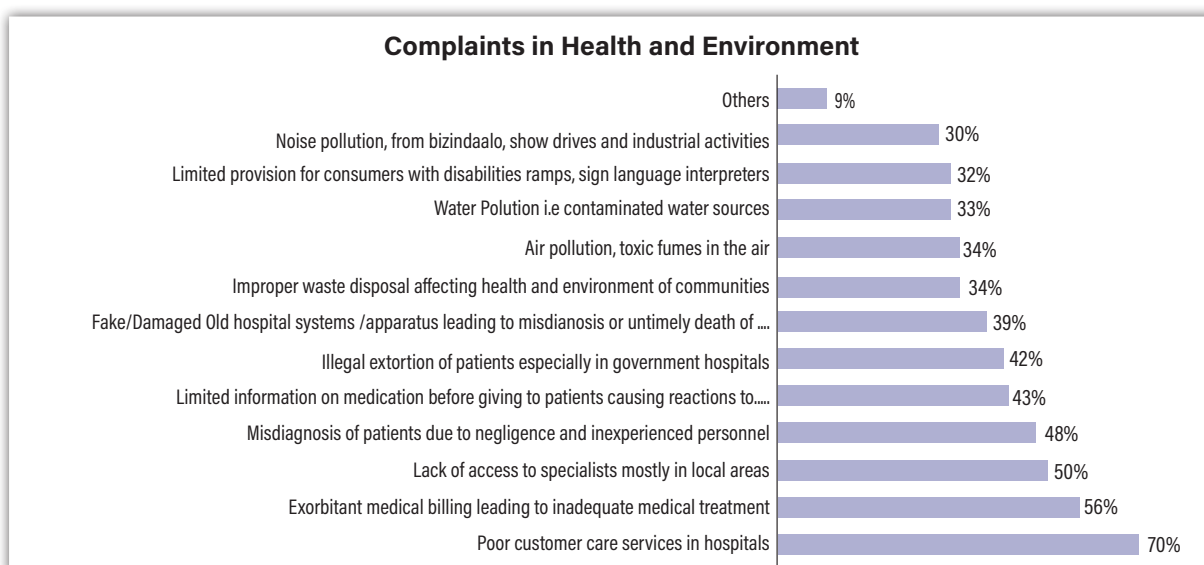


Figure 16: Consumer complaints on health and environment

Some of the documented consumer voices regarding health and environment are indicated in the table below;

- ✿ "I took my son to Mulago hospital for treatment after being referred from St Mary's hospital in Kasese. I took 3 days in Mulago without seeing a specialist. I wondered why a referral case would take all this long without being attended too until I was told by some nurses to first pay some money for seeing the specialist. I quickly borrowed 100,000Ugx from a friend and paid it. Just within an hour I was connected to a specialist. This explains the plight of the poor who prematurely die due to lack of money to pay for health services even in the government hospital".
- ✿ "When we go to the health centers in our communities to seek health care, we have been challenged by the late coming of the health workers who even when they come are too slow to attend to the patients. The patients end up staying at the health center the whole day. Even after waiting the whole day, the patients are later told of stock out of medicines or some are even sent to private clinics to do some laboratory testing and then return to the health center for treatment. Some of our people end up dying in this kind of state".
- ✿ "Most of the health facilities and especially the private ones need money before they can work on the patient and in this way, the poor community members die silently with their diseases since they can't afford the required amount of money prior to treatment".
- ✿ "The long queues of patients in hospitals amidst the fewer health workers have made some people fail to go for health services. We have also observed that customer care services in the hospitals are seriously lacking and this could be due to the demotivated staff".
- ✿ "I am disgusted by the frequent stock out of medicines in our health facilities. Every time I go to the health facility am told there is no medicine and am referred to a private clinic to buy the required medicines. For that matter I have stopped seeking for health care services at any government health centers".
- ✿ "We have no specialists in the lower health facilities but even when we are referred to the regional or national referral hospitals, it's very difficult to access the specialist after traveling from very distant areas". We have actually lost hope in our health system.
- ✿ "Many times when women go to deliver in the hospitals, the doctors conduct the procedures and surely the women deliver successfully, however after the main procedures, such women are left with student doctors or student midwives with minimal or no experience to complete whatever was not yet completed. We have observed that such acts have left many women with complications.
- ✿ "There is negligence in most of our public health facilities, a sister of mine went to deliver and the midwives kept tossing her and telling her to keep moving around, she nearly

delivered her baby on the floor while the night shift midwives were just sleeping amidst attempts to keep moving to inform then that the lady was in pain”.

- ☀ One of my friends was in labor and the health workers did not support her until she had no option than to just push her baby wherever she was. Unfortunately, the baby's head hit the floor and up to now the baby got cerebral challenges
- ☀ “People in Kampala especially those working in market places heap garbage near their stalls and in other unauthorized places. The garbage currently takes long to be collected and disposed of by the city authorities hence creating environmental pollution and leaving the city and its neighboring areas stinky. All these compromise public health”.
- ☀ “As a consumer, am very disturbed and distracted by the noisy environment especially caused by loud speakers of advertisers that move around in our residential areas and the noise deliberately made by Subaru motor vehicles and bikes driven by celebrities”.
- ☀ “Currently, there are many mushrooming places of worship that have been established in our residential areas and such places make extreme noise at different points of the day especially at night and very early morning as the congregation prays. Such places play high tone music, use high tone microphones to speak even if there are just a few people. Such acts make us fail to sleep at night and hence compromising our health and other human rights.

3.6.5 Key findings and insights about the water and sanitation sector.



Figure 17:
Consumer submitting her compliant on water

During the reporting period, 2049 complaints related to water and sanitation were harvested. Of these complaints, 79% were specifically related to Water shortages, 58% were on poor water quality (poor taste, odor, discolorations), 51% were linked to inaccurate/ faulty water meter readings leading to overcharging while 47% were associated with fewer or no water sources and 46% were related to sewer backups or overflows causing property damage.

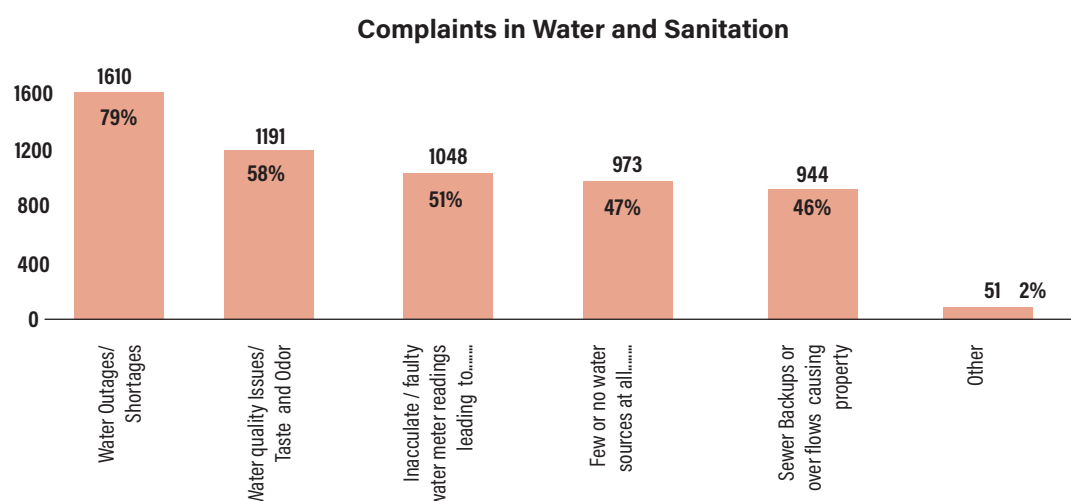


Figure 18: Consumer complaints on water and sanitation

Other critical consumer complaints that came up loudly under this sector included; late or no warnings to clients prior to water disconnections, low water pressure for both new and old metered customers and dirty dirty/unclean water supplies and sources.

The table below, highlights some of the consumer voices on water and sanitation concerns;

- ☀ "National water and Sewerage Corporation(NWSC) sometimes disconnects our water without prior notification, this deprives us the opportunity to adequately prepare ourselves for any inconveniences or to timely handle any pending payments".
- ☀ "It's absurd that the NWSC is too quick to threaten to disconnect our water whenever we don't pay their money timely. Unfortunately, when we call them for technical support they either take their time to respond or they completely fail to come and offer us technical support".
- ☀ "As a consumer, I feel entitled to knowing how much a unit of water costs, however I don't see NWSC conducting mass consumer awareness on such entitlements."
- ☀ "Sometimes I wake up to take a bath and only to open the tap and no water flows until after a while. This gives me a very bad start of the day. On some other occasions, I open the tap and only to see very dirty water. While on other days, I open the water tap and only to get highly chlorinated water with too much smell of chlorine that spikes my allergy"

3.6.6 Key findings and insights about complaints on agri-food systems



Figure 19: *The CONSENT volunteer harvesting complaints on agri-food system*

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the agri-food system is defined as all the interconnected activities and actors involved in getting food from farm to fork. This broad definition encompasses everything from agricultural production and processing to distribution, consumption, and waste management. It also highlights the critical role of economic, social, and environmental factors in shaping how food reaches our plates.

Consumer also singled out a number of complaints related to agri-food systems. It is worth noting that a total of 2291 consumer complaints on agri-food systems were registered between October 2023 and October 2024. From the data, 86%(1978) of the Agri-Food System complaints were linked to poor quality of products, 56%(1273) were related to pesticides and chemical residues in food stuffs, 53%(1203) were associated with unhealthy food environments while 49%(1128) were on fake/counterfeit and adulterated inputs.

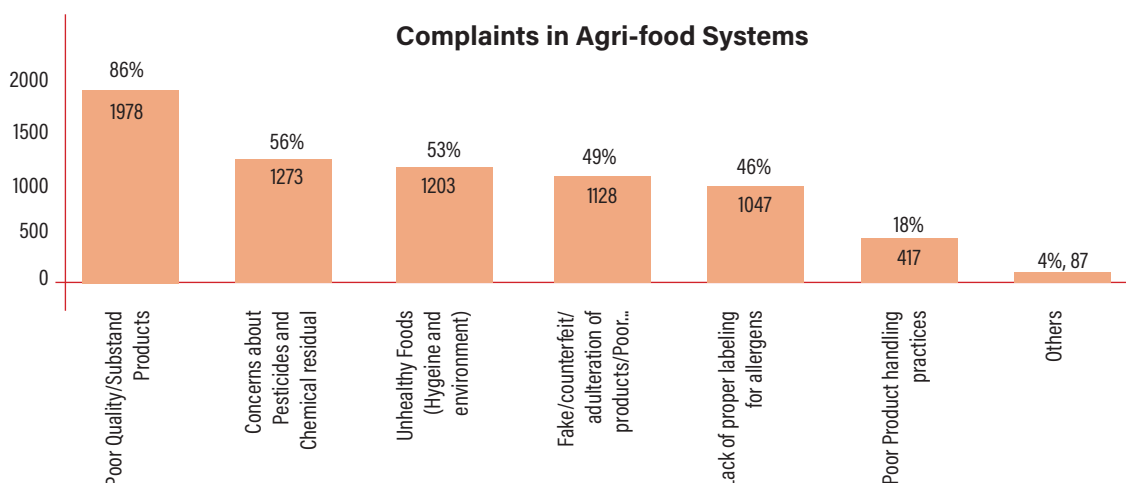


Figure 20: *Complaints on agri-food systems*

Among other concerns raised by consumers in relation to agri-food systems include; misuse of pesticides and chemicals in food production and preservation, poor food handling practices across the food value chain, exorbitantly high cost of food, unforeseen and unexplainable food price fluctuations, sell of leftover foods by restaurants, limited or no access to healthier alternatives for pesticides and preservatives and gross use of chemically contaminated water in irrigation.

Consumers indicated that some of the issues highlighted above could be responsible for the increased disease and death burden in the country. Most consumers related all the above food system gaps to limited or no enforcement of existing policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks.

Some of the consumer voices were recorded as indicated in the table below;

- ☀ "These days you go to the market and find almost all tomatoes with a powder like chemical and you wonder what exactly we are eating".
- ☀ "I bought seeds from an agro-input shop and all the seeds didn't germinate am still suffering with the payment of the loan that I had obtained from our SACCO during the season"
- ☀ "Last season, I bought a spray pump which looked attractive but I couldn't use if for just a single season, it just broke after a few days since it was perhaps fake. Similarly, I bought gum boots and I was shocked that a simple thorn penetrated the gum boot and injured me. As farmers we are no longer sure of who regulates agro input in this country"
- ☀ "Many agro input shops are mushrooming in our communities, sometimes even the agro-input dealers bring to us agrochemicals at our door steps but when we apply them, they surely never work amidst spending lots of money on purchasing them. We no longer know what to do as farmers"
- ☀ We have heard on news that some street foods are cooked with transformer oil and other unsafe chemicals but we are not seeing government swinging into action. What must we do as consumers?
- ☀ "I just passionately hate street foods especially chapatti because of the dirty cloth/towel that the chapatti man uses to clean his hands and also utensils while touching food, charcoal and money at the same time."
- ☀ "Our markets are extremely dirty, hosting all sorts of garbage and thus unconducive to accommodate food, unfortunately our leaders are not so much concerned about such public health issues".
- ☀ Am always worried of eating processed foods just because of the likelihood of metals that wear off from the machines used in processing. Are our leaders even bothered about our health? How do they allow nonfood grade materials to be used in our country?

3.6.7 Key findings and insights about trade and market sector



Figure 21: The CONSENT volunteer harvesting complaints from traders

A total of 2284 complaints related to trade and market sector were recorded during the reporting period. Majority of these complaints (82%) were on fluctuating prices of products, 64% were associated with expired goods while 59% were about the poor quality of produce.

Other critical consumer concerns were related to counterfeit goods on the market, misleading adverts, fraud in both physical and online market spaces, delays in product deliveries or even lost shipments, inaccuracies in product weighing systems, poor food handling practices especially among street and market vendors.

The above complaints have a direct bearing on the consumers purchasing power and the competitiveness of the Ugandan products on domestic and international market. In addition, such complaints indicate the magnitude of compromising of all consumer rights.

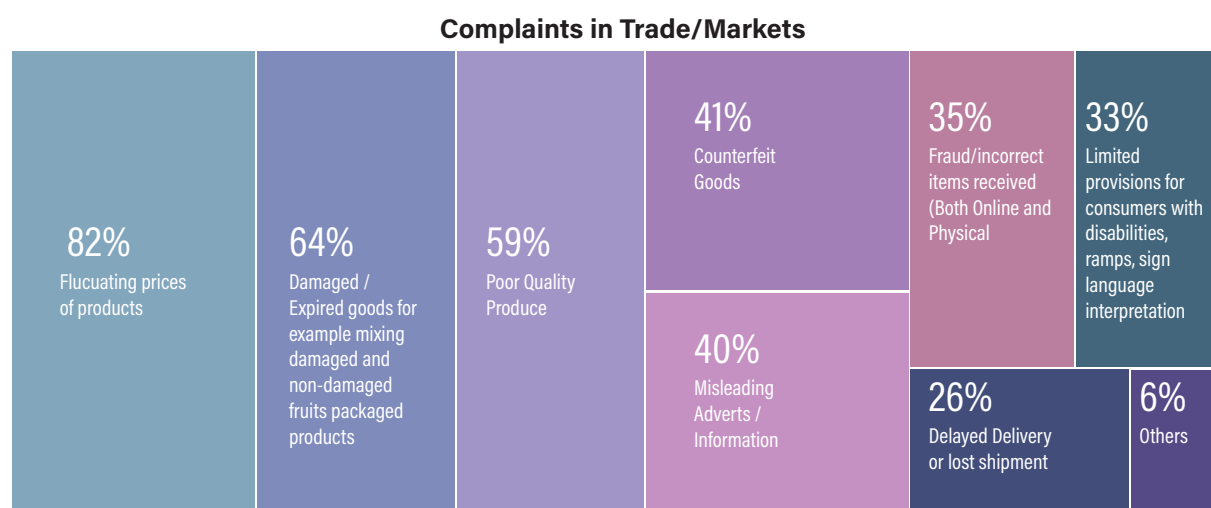


Figure 22: Consumer complaints on trade and markets

3.6.8 Key findings and insights about the education sector



Figure 23:
CONSENT
Volunteer
harvesting
consumer
complaints

A total of 1854 consumer complaints were lodged in regards to the education sector. High school fees/ tuition and school requirements (80%), inadequate resources and infrastructure such as science laboratories and libraries especially in rural schools (59%), poor curriculum (more theory taught than practical) as reported by 58% as well as poor trained teachers (57%) formed the major complaints of the sector.

The above complaints reflect the limited regulation of schools especially private schools in determining harmonized tuition fees and other school dues. If this persists, most parents may be unable to support their children through school. The government needs to prioritize establishing policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks that are geared towards harmonization of school fees and requirements.

In addition, the complaints show that citizens seek for more practical learning curriculum as compared to the theoretical teaching methods. This way, the schools will be in position to graduate more job creators than job seekers. The need for government to invest in continuous capacity building of teachers is also vividly pointed out in the complaints.

Other consumer issues raised ranged from; insecurities in some schools, unavailability of some institutions like universities in some parts of the country, limited access to technology in most schools, limited reading materials, low salary for teachers, poor and monotonous diets at school and poor sanitation in some schools.

All these concerns compel government to offer security to schools, invest more in rehabilitation and or establishing more institutions of learning to respond to the ever increasing population, support the uptake and adoption of technological advancements in

institutions of learning, consider enhancement of teachers' salaries to motivate them and expedite the formulation and enforcement of the school feeding policy.

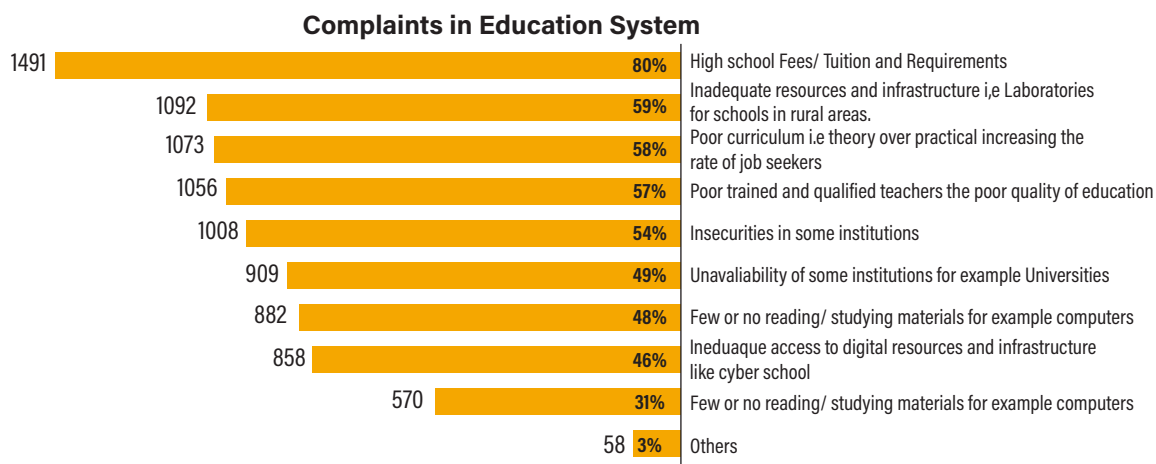


Figure 24: Consumer complaints on education sector

Some of the consumer voices on the education sector include;

- ☀ "Most of us parents who have a low income status are nearly failing to educate our children because the school fees and requirements are too high. Actually the school requirements these days even double the tuition. If government does not come to our rescue, then we shall have no option than taking children out of school".
- ☀ Am getting puzzled when our children eat only posho (maize meal) and beans amidst paying millions of school fees. Are schools mandated by the Ministry of Education to prepare posho and beans? "
- ☀ We see schools in urban areas having computers for children to learn basics of computer, but for us in our village schools, it hard to get computers. Why is this so? Are we just being segregated?"
- ☀ As a teacher, am so concerned about the high cost of living versus the amount of salary I get at the end of every month. The teachers 'salary cannot even pay for the basics of life. Most of us are thinking of just leaving the profession and probably we search for other things to do. My fellows left the profession and started riding boda-boda and they seem even better than me. I have always wondered why teachers have to first strike for government to think about enhancing our salaries?"
- ☀ "Our children no longer have time to rest and am worried their growth and development may be affected. Most of our day scholars start heading to school as early as 4:30am in school vans or even boda-boda and they return home very late with homework. Then at what point should such children rest? It's even worse when you see lower and upper primary school going children carrying huge bags with so many books. What is the intention of the schools?"

3.6.9 Key findings and insights about digital financial services



Figure 25:
CONSENT
Volunteer
harvesting a
complaint from
the consumer

During the reporting period, a total of 1557 complaints on digital financial services were registered with majority (71%) pointing out to scams and fraud targeting mobile money, 66% were on poor customer care services while 65% were on poor network among others as indicated in the figure below. While interacting with the consumers, we noted a knowledge gap on how to prevent scams or fraud. It would be very important for UCC and the telecom companies to deliberately create more sensitization campaigns focusing on prevention of fraud and scams.

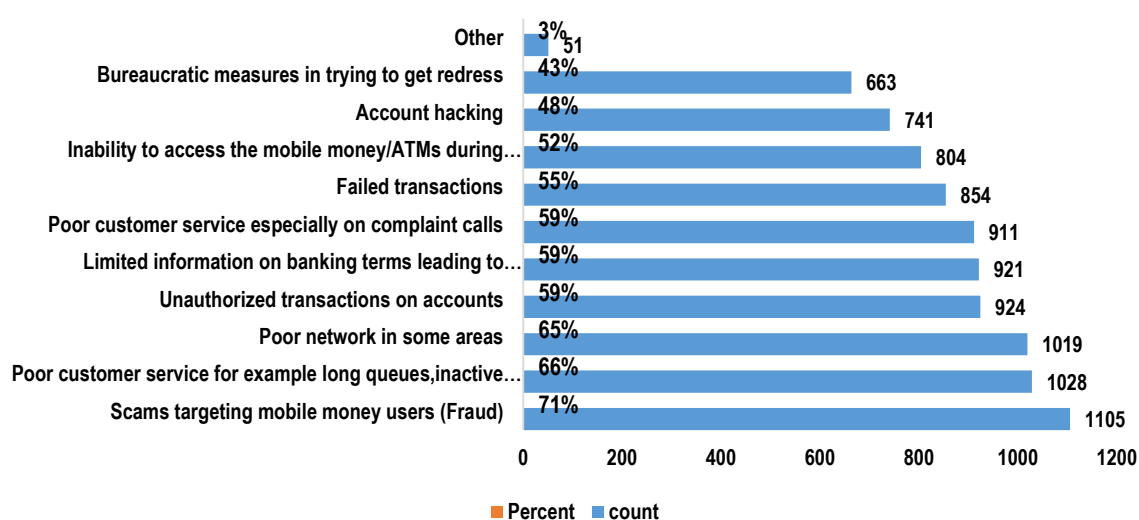


Figure 26: Consumer complaints on digital financing

3.7. Prevalent Issues Across Sectors

Complaints across goods and service sectors were recorded consistently throughout the year, indicating ongoing challenges faced by consumers. Primary concerns on the products and goods in the markets were about: price fluctuations, substandard products and counterfeit items, misleading adverts, mis and disinformation. For the case of services, the major grievances were on issues relating to: high cost of services; poor service delivery; poor customer care; money scams; and unexpected charges on peoples accounts.

3.7.1. Recurring issues

A number of critical issues that recurrently emerged across sectors, indicate systemic challenges that require sustained attention and interventions geared towards improving service delivery and regulations for consumer protection, trust and confidence in the respective sectors.

The major recurring issues were:

- ✱ Poor customer care and poor-quality service delivery mechanisms
- ✱ Availability of substandard and counterfeit products on market
- ✱ Mis/disinformation practices and misleading advertisements
- ✱ Poor network signals that disrupt voice, online data and digital transactions
- ✱ Exorbitant bills especially in the electricity, health and education services

3.7.2. Emerging Trends

The major emerging issues reported were;

- ✱ Evolving consumer preferences and expectations in technological advancements leading to increased demand for quality digital resources and infrastructure in various sectors like education, health, communication, finance and transport.
- ✱ Amplified consumer voices, awareness and advocacy initiatives on food safety, nutrition and healthier diets have triggered calls to action for sustainable and equitable agri-food systems.
- ✱ The recurring consumer protection gaps necessitate that CAODAs rethink their approaches to work, coordination and partnerships to holistically address consumer issues.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, harvesting of the complaints provides an opportunity to voice consumer plight, perceptions and perspectives that facilitate remedial mechanisms to respond to consumer demands and scaling up consumer protection. The complaints also highlight key areas of improvement in the goods and service sectors.

It is paramount to widen the scope of harvesting consumer complaints and disseminating the findings of the emerging trends. This provides an opportunity for actors and stakeholders to proactively address evolving consumer needs and preferences through result-oriented actions.

Moving forward, all relevant actors and stakeholders are called upon to actively collaborate and strengthen partnerships geared towards scaling up the enforcement of quality control measures, regulations and standards; foster transparency and accountability in business operations; strengthen customer care services; investment in quality technological infrastructure and consumer awareness initiatives for effective consumer protection, improved quality of life and sustainable socio economic development of the Ugandan population.

5.0 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are prioritized based on their potential impact and feasibility in addressing persistent issues and improving consumer experiences. By implementing these recommendations, actors and stakeholders can work towards creating a more transparent, accountable, and consumer-centric marketplace that prioritizes consumer welfare and satisfaction.

Enhanced Quality Control Measures, Regulations and Standards Enforcement

Duty-bearers and business entities are urged to strengthen their efforts to monitor, enforce and comply with quality standards of both goods and services so as to build consumer trust and confidence. Furthermore, consumer protection laws and enforcement mechanisms should be strengthened to address fraud, counterfeits, mis/disinformation and misleading advertisements across the sectors.

Foster Transparency and Accountability in Business Operations

Business operators are encouraged to be transparent and accountable to consumers through adherence to standards. In addition, the business operations should set up mechanisms for consumer feedback and traceability as well as facilitate seeking of redress and provide avenues for holding businesses accountable on corporate responsibility.

Strengthen Quality Customer Care Services

Business entities are called upon to invest in quality management and customer satisfaction to enhance consumer trust, confidence and loyalty.

Parliament is in a unique standing of power, authority and legitimacy to positively influence the cause of consumer safety as the peoples' representatives. In this regard, MPs are called upon to educate themselves more about consumer safety issues, and to initiate and pass legislation to fortify consumer protection. In doing this, MPs are encouraged to consult with consumer organizations, cognizant of their exceptional positioning as knowledge-bearers of issues concerning consumer protection.

Investment in Quality Infrastructure and Technologies

Duty bearers and business operators are urged to invest in quality technological infrastructure to address consumer plight experienced while accessing goods and services in various sectors such as education, electricity, transport, e-government, water, environment, communication, finance, and healthcare.

Consumer Engagements and Awareness Initiatives

Actors and stakeholders are strongly encouraged to invest in consumer awareness initiatives geared towards empowering consumers to demand for quality goods and services, responsible consumption and production. Additionally, the CAODAs should invest in increasing coverage for consumer awareness to foster mindset and behavioral change for sustainable development.

The realities of pesticide misuse and poor product handling practices continue to be a blight on the health and wellbeing of consumers in the country that should not be ignored and CAODAs are encouraged as they engage with consumers to stress this among other sticking issues.

Address Cost of Goods and Services

The prohibitive cost of goods and services bog down consumers whichever way they turn across all sectors. Uganda operates under a mixed economy so that it is not just the laws of supply and demand at work here. Parliament and relevant governmental ministries are urged to find ways of ameliorating the plight of consumers on this score and come up with tangible, actionable measures to alleviate the burden of the cost of living on people of Uganda. As actors for the cause of consumers, CAODAs are encouraged to put their heads together and come up with a unified position for which they will then make representation to Parliament on this important consumer concern.



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