

NYOMBI KEEN ON BALANCING INTERESTS OF BOTH OPERATORS AND CONSUMERS DRIVING AN INCLUSIVE DIGITAL ECONOMY

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has made significant strides in digital safety, telecom quality, and ICT growth. Executive Director Nyombi Thembo, who was recently named Executive Director of the Year 2025, shares insights on UCC's achievements with *New Vision*.



Thembo



UCC works with telecom operators to co-fund rural connectivity projects

It examines the comprehensive market definition and power assessment and structures, identifies key players and their services, and analyses barriers to competition.

The findings will help enhance competitiveness, foster a healthier business environment, and ensure that Uganda's telecom sector continues to grow in a fair and sustainable manner. To protect consumers, UCC conducts regular quality of service assessments to ensure standards, reliability, transparency, and fair service delivery.

UCC works to reduce the cost of devices in partnership with relevant stakeholders, particularly government and the private sector. The establishment of local device assembly plants (two factories in Uganda so far) is a step in the right direction.

In addition, telecom companies are implementing device ownership schemes targeting various categories of consumers. UCC/UCUSAF has distributed over 10,000 devices free smart devices to low-income households across the country.

UCC is also engaging the

government, through the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, to reduce taxes on entry-level smart devices so as to make them affordable for low-income earners. Through such interventions, the price of smart devices has overtime reduced to sh140,000. However, UCC is engaging stakeholders to get it lowered even further.

Meanwhile, to enhance rural connectivity, UCC requires telecom operators to ensure 90% geographical coverage within five years. The remaining 10% is covered through UCUSAF's infrastructure funding programme.

How is UCC safeguarding consumer rights in an era of increasing cyber-risks and digital transactions?

UCC has embarked on a combination of strong regulatory enforcement, cyber-security readiness, digital literacy initiatives, and effective consumer-protection mechanisms. To strengthen national cybersecurity, UCC operates the Uganda Computer Emergency Response Team (UG-CERT), which monitors and responds to cyber threats in real time, issues alerts, and coordinates incident response across sectors.

UCC conducts regular quality-of-service assessments to ensure that operators meet standards for reliability, transparency, and fair service delivery. On mobile money and digital financial services, we work closely with the Bank of Uganda, telecom operators, and other stakeholders to curb fraud, enforce SIM-card registration guidelines, and strengthen the safety of digital transactions.

UCC also runs nationwide campaigns on safe internet use, online fraud prevention, data protection, and responsible social media behaviour. Our child online protection initiatives, including platform and community awareness campaigns, ensure

that young users stay safe online. Our consumer help desk and toll-free line give citizens a direct channel to report service issues, fraud, unfair billing, or harmful content.

Finally, through UCUSAF, UCC expands connectivity to underserved communities, bridging the digital divide.

What role is the commission playing in promoting ICT skills, local content creation, and youth innovation?

UCC conducts digital skilling programmes for women, youth, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and the informal sector. The Commission also introduced the Uganda Film Festival, the Content Development Support Programme, and the Regional Film Competition initiatives designed to promote excellence and professionalism in Uganda's audio-visual industry. One of UCC's flagship initiatives for youth empowerment is the National Conference on Communications (NCC), where we partner with universities to identify, nurture, and support tech innovations. Content creators are supported, promoting responsible and culturally relevant local content. UCC has also expanded the broadband infrastructure to increase access and opportunity.

How is UCC collaborating with private-sector players to advance national development goals such as Vision 2040?

UCC collaborates closely with private-sector players to advance national development goals, including Vision 2040, by fostering a conducive regulatory environment that supports investment, innovation, and competitiveness.

We work with telecom operators, broadcasters, tech companies, postal and courier firms, digital platforms, and educational institutions to extend quality communication services across the country.

Through UCUSAF, for example, we co-fund rural connectivity projects with telecom operators, support innovation hubs, and expand digital infrastructure in underserved areas. We also partner with industry players to strengthen national cybersecurity readiness, promote digital literacy, and grow Uganda's local content ecosystem.

These partnerships ensure that the private sector continues to serve as a major engine of Uganda's socio-economic transformation, helping to deliver a secure, inclusive, and innovation-driven digital future.

Q How is UCC contributing to Uganda's growth as a digital economy?

A As the regulator of the communications sector, UCC is mandated to drive the development of a modern, dynamic ICT industry in line with national policies, laws, and regulations.

The Government has long recognised ICT as a critical enabler of socio-economic growth and therefore prioritised its development.

Thanks to the favourable legal, policy, and regulatory environment, strong investment climate that government has fostered, the ICT sector continues to expand at an average rate of 14.8% per year and contributes about 9% to Uganda's GDP.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a 10% increase in broadband penetration can yield up to 1.4% growth in GDP.

This is in line with our vision: *An inclusive digital economy* - where quality ICT services are accessible and affordable to all.

What regulatory reforms has UCC introduced to support innovation, fair competition, and improved service quality in the ICT sector?

The e-Booster programme, provides funding and technical support to develop and scale digital solutions addressing everyday challenges.

On fair competition, UCC's mandate is to balance the interests of both operators and consumers. Ensuring a level playing field promotes innovation, improves service quality, and keeps prices competitive. To strengthen this regulatory function, UCC recently commissioned a study through Saliency Consulting, to assess the state of competition in the sector.

AFFORDABILITY AND RURAL CONNECTIVITY

UCC drives collaborative efforts with multiple stakeholders to reduce the cost of ICT products, services, and devices. Internet pricing in Uganda has decreased by 50% over the last three years to an average of \$1.35 (sh5,000) for 1.5GB mobile internet bundle. Other ways include;

- Attracting new players into the market through a favourable regulatory regime.
- Promoting innovation among operators to establish cost effective broadband delivery mechanisms and attractive data packages.
- Collaborations with industry stakeholders to continuously review the supply side determinants of Internet pricing.
- Cross-sector collaboration working with other sectors to build demand through supporting development of e-services.
- Continuously lobbying government to reduce direct taxes on broadband.