Telecommunications. |

Telecom growth stalls as 780 towers sit idle

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In today's fast-paced digital economy, reliable communication is no longer a luxury—it is the backbone of business, trade, and community connectivity. Yet Uganda's telecommunications sector is struggling to realise its full potential, hampered by limited electricity access, regulatory hurdles, and logistical barriers that continue to weigh down growth.

The latest UCC Annual Communications sector report 2024, released on December 12, 2025, paints a sobering picture.

"With only 25 percent of the population enjoying regular access to hydroelectric power, keeping telecom towers operational has become an uphill battle. Service providers are forced to rely on costly alternatives such as generators and solar systems, pushing annual power-related expenses beyond $60 million (about Shs217 billion)," reads the report in part.

Capital costs are equally daunting. "Equipping sites with transformers and solar panels requires between $60,000 (Shs217 million) and $270,000 (over Shs977 million), a burden that has slowed expansion and strained operators," the report states. The report warns that the consequences are already visible: more than 780 network-ready towers across Uganda remain idle because they cannot be powered.

This infrastructure gap shows the urgent need for investment in energy and telecommunications. Without reliable electricity, Uganda's digital ambitions risk stalling, leaving businesses, communities, and the wider economy disconnected from the opportunities of the modern world. This implies that the pre-established towers sit idle due to an absence of electricity. This stark contrast is evidenced when comparing Uganda to neighbouring Kenya, where 76 percent of residents benefit from electricity, enabling 64 percent of the population to utilise mobile services. In Uganda, only 32 percent of the population engages with mobile technology.

Furthermore, the regulatory landscape complicates infrastructure development. The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) impose high costs on operators wishing to build towers in environmentally sensitive areas. Advance rental fees totaling $35,000 must be paid upfront, irrespective of whether the investment yields a return within the first five years.

A telecom tower in Kampala. More than 780 network-ready towers across Uganda remain idle because they cannot be powered. PHOTO/FILE

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"Both agencies require operators to pay five years of rental fees in advance $20,000 (over Shs72 million) for UWA and $15,000 (Shs54 million) for NEMA—whether or not the tower earns back the investment in that time," the report adds, noting that these fees help fund environmental protection, but they push total site costs up to about $175,000. This makes it harder for operators to invest in towers in remote, low-population areas, even though these places still require connectivity.

The UCC Annual Communications sector report 2024 adds that while these fees are crucial for environmental protection, they inflate the overall cost of setting up a communication tower, which can exceed $175,000 (Shs633.8 million). This report elucidates that the financial burden makes it exceedingly difficult for operators to place investment in remote and lower-population areas that desperately need connectivity.

In addition to these challenges is the hefty tax burden levied on the telecommunications infrastructure.

Despite being among Uganda's largest taxpayers, telecom companies face multiple taxation layers that elevate operational costs. For instance, a 35 percent import tax on galvanized steel, a key material for tower construction, forces operators to rely on costly imported materials, driving up both the capital expenditure and service prices for consumers.

The tax burden, coupled with a lack of local manufacturing capacity, hampers network expansion in underserved areas.

Additionally, logistical challenges also play a significant role in the slow rollout of telecom infrastructure, particularly in remote regions such as the rugged terrain and a lack of well-maintained roads that complicate the transportation of heavy tower components, leading to costly delays in equipment delivery.

In the rainy season, rural areas may become completely isolated, and accessibility issues prolong installation and repair times.

"A tower that might be erected in a week in an urban setting could take months in rural Uganda, making investment decisions difficult for operators," the UCC sector report 2024 adds.

Telecom licence mandate

Despite these challenges, Ugandan telecom licences mandate that operators cover at least 90 percent of their licensed areas. However, the UCC sector report 2024 indicates that the high costs draw investment focus towards areas with higher population densities and economic activity. This has resulted in significant disparities in infrastructure development across the country.

"While the Kampala and Buganda sub-regions, home to 30 percent of the population, have seen rapid advancements in fiber and tower infrastructure, the remaining sub-regions, each with fewer than 4.3 million people, lag far behind," the report states. The Central region alone houses 44 percent of Uganda's telecom towers, spotlighting the imbalance in service accessibility.

Professional accountants in Uganda reach 5,559

Accounting. |

MARTIN LUTHER OKETCH

Although the cumulative number of students who have completed the Certified Public Accountant course, making them qualified as professional accountants in Uganda, has reached 5,559, the rate of pass has continued to be low, blamed on students being so reluctant in terms of reading and preparation for exams.

Key importance of accountants in organisations rests on informed decision-making: By preparing and analysing financial statements (income statements, balance sheets, cash flow statements) accountants provide management with clear, factual data about the company's financial health.

While the Institute of the Certified Public Accountants (ICPAU), which is in charge of teaching, examining and qualifying the professional accountants in Uganda do accepts since the Certified Public Accountants (CPA) is hard in nature leading to low pass across countries in the, ICPAU maintains that Students do not pay attention to examiners rules and advised.

Speaking during the release of the December 2025 examinations results at Protea SKYZ hotel, the chairperson, Public Accountants Examination Board (PAEB), Ms Nancy Amuge Owino, said the average pass rate was 35.5 percent compared to 36.9 percent in May 2025.

Ms Amuge said the pass rate was lower at Level III (28.2 percent) compared to 41 percent, 36.2 percent and 42.2 percent at Levels I, II and IV respectively.

"Paper 3 – Quantitative Techniques at Level I; Paper 7 – Financial Reporting and Paper 9 – Auditing Ethics & Assurance at Level II; and Paper 12 – Advanced Financial Reporting, Paper 15 – advanced Financial Management and Paper 16 – Audit Practice & Assurance at Level III registered the lowest pass rates of 28.3 percent, 24.8percent, 25.3 percent, 20.4 percent, 8.5 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively," she said.

Ms Amuge said Paper 15 – Advanced Financial Management having declined to 8.5 percent in December 2025, from 16.7 percent in May 2025.

"An analysis of the comments made by the examiners indicated that candidates seem not to pay attention to the comments made by the examiners at every sitting because candidates continue making similar mistakes," she said.

Adding: "Many students do not attend engagement activities which are organised to help them prepare better for examinations. 6,145 candidates sat the December 2025 CPA (U) examinations and presented a total of 10,449 scripts of which 3,713 scripts (or 35.5 percent) registered passes."

The ICPAU results show that female candidates presented more scripts (6,068 or 58.1 percent) compared to male candidates who presented 4,381 or 34.3 percent.