

Energy and development in Uganda; whose electricity and for what?

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Despite a large pool of material and energy resources, Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, Uganda among them, are at the bottom pit of living conditions due to a low level of production (The New Vision, June 21, 1997). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Report on Poverty Eradication in Sub-Saharan Africa singles out 270 million Africans as “income poor” – earn a dollar a day, live below the poverty line and on the verge of starvation with little hope or none at all of living beyond the age of 40 years (The Guardian, 4th June, 1997). For the past twenty years, SSA has suffered from a 21% cumulative erosion and decline of real GNP per capita and a growing formidable external debt of over US \$ 200 billion. With 10% of the world’s population, the region contributes only 2% of the world trade and attracts only 3% of direct foreign investment. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be under attack and battering from the changing forces of impoverishment manifested in globalization, conflict, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation (World Bank, 1996). These forces have propagated and perpetuated a state of underdevelopment which calls for the mobilization of the region’s material and energy resources for development. Whose electricity and for what? Is an attempt to look at how Sub-Saharan Africa, with particular reference to Uganda, has distributed and utilized her energy resources, mainly electricity, for development from within. The study examines the generation capacity, distribution, utilization and management of the electricity energy resource for development and draws the conclusions that;

- Uganda has not mobilized and utilized its electricity energy resource for development. Little attention has been paid to generating adequate amounts of electricity.
- Its distribution is beset by an unannounced segregation and discrimination on account of income, location and social class limited to the elite and urban areas.
- Most of it goes into the unproductive use of lighting households other than industrial and agricultural production and related service industry.
- The electricity utility has been prone to abuse, misuse and mismanagement.

All these are attributed to the absence and lack of an energy policy to guide development. The study recommends that for Uganda to foster development, there is need for a multi - -sectional energy policy to be placed over the country to govern and direct all development planning. As a priority, the policy should look into energy choice, price, distribution, utilization and management for the attainment of national socio-economic development objectives and aspirations.