

# NWSC boss Mugisha urges public utilities to go customer-centric

By Michael Odeng

The managing director of the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), Eng. Dr. Silver Mugisha, has called on public utilities to transform into customer-centred service providers if they are to survive climate change and rapid urbanisation pressures.

Speaking during the Global South Academic Conclave (GSAC) 2026 summit at CEPT University, India, on Friday, Dr Mugisha said utilities now sit at the intersection of climate resilience, public finance, governance and social equity.

He told the summit that Uganda's national water utility has evolved from a struggling entity into a high-performing public enterprise through reforms in management, performance systems and digital innovation.

Mugisha said the journey of Uganda's NWSC reflected a shift from what he described as a "broken" state before 1998, marked by low service coverage and weak financial sustainability, to an era of institutional reforms and jurisdiction expansion.

"Today, NWSC operates in over 287 towns, up from 23 in 2013," he said, adding that the utility manages more than one million water connections serving over 22 million people.

Mugisha disclosed that the

# 287

## The number of towns NWSC operates in today.

corporation's annual turnover has grown from sh170b to sh622b over the past decade.

"Engineering builds systems, but service delivery builds trust," Mugisha told the conclave.

He attributed the corporation's performance to a business model that prioritises operational efficiency and service equity rather than asset expansion.

### DATA-DRIVEN EXPANSION

The NWSC chief highlighted the role of digital transformation, saying the company had developed home-grown digital systems that allow real-time monitoring of operations, data-driven decision-making, reduced non-revenue water and improved billing efficiency.

However, Mugisha said the utility company still grapples with climate variability, rapid urban growth and the spread of informal settlements, all of which are deepening water



One of the organisers of the 2026 GSAC gives a token of appreciation to Mugisha (right) after he delivered his keynote address during the event at in CEPT University, India, on Friday

insecurity and triggering climate shocks that outstrip infrastructure development.

"Success does not mean the absence of problems; it means having better tools to confront them," he said.

Mugisha added that while water coverage has expanded rapidly, sanitation infrastructure still lags behind due to high costs and lower cost recovery. He said utilities must balance affordability with commercial sustainability.

To strengthen evidence-based decision-making, Mugisha said NWSC has set up a strategic research committee and cited a recent water meter accuracy study involving 1,200 water meters as an example of how research is being used to improve service delivery.

He called for stronger partnerships between academia and utilities, urging researchers to focus on practical solutions to operational challenges.

### GRAND PLAN

Mugisha said the NWSC Corporate Plan 2024-2027 sets ambitious targets, including expanding service coverage to 350 towns and serving 26 million people by 2030, with a focus on climate stewardship and equity for residents of informal settlements, who are often vulnerable to water scarcity.

He added that the future of water and sanitation in the Global South will depend on leadership and the courage to implement reforms, noting that how a utility engages its customers and manages its people remains the ultimate determinant of success.

During the summit, NWSC's senior manager for performance management and staff development, Martin Kalibbala, shared insights on data-driven innovations for water, sanitation, hygiene and climate change.

Penninah Nabireeba, the branch manager of the Industrial Area branch (Kampala), presented the corporation's best practices in urban water utility operations.

She said partnerships with institutions such as CEPT University, the Gates Foundation, the Civilian Research and Development Foundation and the Viega Foundation were helping to accelerate service delivery.