

NWSC boss urges utility firms to embrace customer-centred services

KAMPALA. The Managing Director of the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), Dr Silver Mugisha (PhD), has urged public utility companies to shift from engineering-driven operations to customer-centred service delivery to survive mounting pressures from climate change and rapid urbanisation.

This was during the Global South Academic Conclave (GSAC) 2026 held in India on Friday, February 6. Dr Mugisha said utilities in developing countries operate at the intersection of climate resilience, public finance, governance, and social equity, and must, therefore, prioritise operational efficiency and service equity rather than merely expanding physical infrastructure.

“Engineering builds systems. Service delivery builds trust,” Dr Mugisha said.

He cited NWSC’s transformation from a struggling utility before 1998 into a high-performing public enterprise as evidence that management reforms and a customer-focused business model can deliver sustainable results.

Dr Mugisha noted that NWSC has expanded its area of operation from 23 towns in 2013 to more than 287 towns currently. The corporation now manages over one million water connections, serving more than 22 million people nationwide. Turnover has also grown from Shs170 billion to Shs622 billion over the past decade, which he attributes to a performance-driven culture and a business model that emphasises efficiency, accountability, and equitable service delivery.

“This is premised on incentive-based new performance management contracts, which set clear performance indicators at corporate, area, and individual levels,” he said.

He also highlighted the corporation’s investment in digital transformation, noting that NWSC has developed home-grown digital systems that allow real-time monitoring of operations.

“These digital enablers support data-driven decision-making, helping to reduce non-revenue water and improve billing efficiency,” he said.

Despite these gains, Dr Mugisha acknowledged persistent challenges, including climate variability, which is increasing water insecurity and triggering shocks that outpace infrastructure development. He also cited rapid urban growth and the expansion of informal settlements as major obstacles

to achieving universal access to water and sanitation services.

“One of the most significant disparities is the financing of sewerage systems, which lags due to high costs and limited cost recovery,” he said.

Dr Mugisha noted that utilities must strike a delicate balance between affordability for consumers and return on investment to remain commercially viable. As such, NWSC has established a strategic research committee to ensure management decisions are grounded in evidence, including a recent metre accuracy study involving 1,200 metres. He called for stronger partnerships between academia and utility providers, urging researchers to focus their work on solving real operational challenges.

“We need to invest in ecosystems that bridge the classroom and the field. Engineering innovation must drive the water and sanitation transformation agenda,” he said.

