

Public Utility Research Center (PURC): African Infrastructure Research and Outreach

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With nations facing difficult financial choices in funding health, education, and infrastructure services, leaders have begun to focus on ways to improve performance in the energy, water, telecommunications, and transportation sectors. Many African nations have established utility regulatory agencies to separate the political processes behind policy-making from the professionals who implement that policy. Thus, there is a need for training and the sharing of best practice across national boundaries.

Since 1997, the Public Utility Research Center/World Bank International Training Program on Utility Regulation and Strategy has been delivered every January and June. Although PURC received seed money to design the course, the program has been self-sufficient. The course has been customized to offer infrastructure professionals around the world technical skills and lessons about ways to improve infrastructure sector performance. Of the 2,000 participants from 140 nations, nearly half have come from African regulatory commissions, government ministries, or utilities.

"I am now armed with the information that will enable me to appreciate telecommunications," said Ugandan Communications Commissioner Timothy Lwanga after his participation in the PURC Program. "I have learned a lot and hope to be a more effective commissioner. [It was] quite an experience."

The two-week program focuses on infrastructure to prepare utility professionals with the tools they need in their profession.

"This course [gave me] an opportunity to interact with some of the best speakers around the world," said Zambian Consumer Officer Stephen M. Bwalya of the 26th PURC/WB Program. "The program is very good for the regulators, as it provides insights to apply to decision-making and tariff-setting."

PURC-affiliated scholars have organized customized courses in Botswana, Namibia, Nigeria,



South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia (and more than 20 other countries around the world). For example, Ted Kury, PURC director of Energy Studies, will be delivering courses in Rwanda and Ghana in fall 2009. In addition, professor Sanford Berg, PURC director of Water Studies, has written a number of papers, including "State-Owned Enterprises: NWSC's Turnaround in Uganda," in the *African Development Review* with co-author Silver Mugisha of the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC). The article describes the strengths and limitations of the Ugandan water reform efforts.

Berg and Mugisha also have a paper forthcoming in *Water Policy*, "Pro-poor Water Service Strategies in Developing Countries: Promoting Justice in Uganda's Urban Project," that examines how public standpipes (and a combination of other options) can meet both financial constraints and social objectives. Infrastructure is one arena where UF researchers are having a significant impact.

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