Regular power cuts in Rwanda have become a disruption in several parts of the country, nearly impacting the entire country simultaneously. In some instances, power cuts so called load shedding have occurred up to three times a day, disrupting everything from daily routines to business operations.

Despite the national utility company, Rwanda Energy Group (REG), consistently reassuring customers with the same statement, the outages show little sign of improvement, according to some of the small business entities, leaving many feeling increasingly frustrated.

“Dear esteemed customers, there is a technical problem causing power cuts in some areas. We are doing everything possible to restore power as soon as possible. Please bear with us. Thank you.” REG normally reassures clients with this statement.

The utility body went on to reveal, “The disruptions were caused by vandalism of power line infrastructure on the interconnected transmission system, leading to challenges in maintaining power exchange stability in regional interconnected networks, while line repair works are going and expected to be complete not later than17th March 2025.”

However, some of the businesses without generators are struggling to maintain operations, leading to mounting complaints about power cuts.

One affected sector is retail, where owners are increasingly frustrated with the power disruptions. “Our customers are becoming frustrated because we can’t operate fully during the power cuts,” said Jean-Claude Mpenzi, the owner of an electronics store in Kigali. “It’s not just about the inconvenience; it’s hurting our sales and customer trust. We need a more consistent power supply to maintain our business.” Mupenzi also highlighted the growing risk of losing customers to competitors who are able to maintain more reliable operations.

Similarly, businesses in the hospitality sector are facing challenges. Sandrine Nyiransengimana, manager of a motel in Nyamata, emphasized how these interruptions affect guest experience: “Power cuts are especially tough for motels. Our guests expect a seamless experience, but with frequent blackouts, we risk disappointing them. It’s affecting everything from our restaurant services to the ability to maintain heating and lighting in rooms.” Nyiransengimana shared that the lack of reliable electricity is not just an inconvenience but also a reputational issue,

which could lead to a decline in future bookings.

Meanwhile, Charles Niyomwungeri, who sells and delivers fresh milk daily, humorously yet seriously noted, “At this point, I’m considering a power generator for my milk daily just to keep the fridges running. If the lights go off, so does my business! I don’t just sell and deliver milk—I deliver smiles, but I can’t do that without power!” His lighthearted comments underline the challenges small businesses face when the basic infrastructure fails.

Parts of Kayonza district experienced a widespread power outage that lasted over 8 hours on Saturday, causing severe business disruptions.

Beyond the direct impact on businesses, the frequent power outages are also affecting daily life in unexpected ways. In Kigali, several individuals have started to embrace unconventional solutions to manage the inconvenience. “I had to install a small solar panel just to keep my lights on so that my children can study and do homework before they go to sleep,” said Grace Igabire, a local resident. “It’s not a perfect solution, but at least I can have some light during the power cuts.”

Meanwhile, on social media, frustration has turned into a movement gaining traction among residents and business owners alike. This collective online outcry has created a public space for individuals to voice their dissatisfaction on REG’s X handle formerly X. “We need more than just an apology. The power cuts are a major disruption to my workday,” said Clever Nsengimana, a small Kigali-based bar owner. “The constant back and forth between power on and off is exhausting. We need to know when to expect it to end, because power is everything.”

Even more eye-catching has been the emergence of memes poking fun at the situation, one of which thank REG, “ Looks like our phones can finally stop acting like they’re on a permanent vacation Thanks REG, for making sure we didn’t have to learn how to live without,….it”.” These memes, while comedic, reflect the collective exasperation many feel about the frequency of these outages.

Energy experts are now weighing in on the situation, offering insights into the root causes of the outages and the challenges REG faces in addressing them. Jimmy, an energy consultant based in Kigali who prefers to be named by a single name, noted, “The power cuts are likely due to a combination of aging infrastructure, increased demand, or technical challenges with the national grid. REG’s efforts to resolve the issue are commendable, but the situation highlights the urgent need for

investments in infrastructure and modernization.”

The expert further highlighted that the growing demand for power, coupled with the insufficient infrastructure to support it, is exacerbating the issue. “Rwanda’s energy demands are increasing, but the infrastructure is struggling to keep pace. This is a signal that long-term solutions, including investments in renewable energy, need to be prioritized to secure future supply stability.”

“Businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, are the backbone of the economy. Frequent power cuts lead to lost productivity, lower revenues, and even the potential for business closures. It’s vital for REG to find a sustainable solution before the situation becomes direr.” He added.

While REG has acknowledged the technical difficulties causing the outages, businesses and residents across the country are urging the utility company to expedite solutions. Many argue that a reliable power supply is not just a convenience but a critical component of Rwanda’s economic success and its goal to become a regional hub for business and innovation.

“If these power cuts continue, we could see more businesses relocating outside Rwanda, and this would significantly hurt our economy,” said Jean-Paul Kabanda. As more businesses are affected and the frustration grows, the hope is that REG will take quicker, more visible action to resolve the issue and ensure a stable energy future for the country.