

# Katsina wind farm: N4.4bn down the drain, yet zero electricity

From Habibu Umar Aminu, Katsina

It was with joy and fanfare that residents of Lambar Rimi and neighbouring communities in Rimi Local Government Area of Katsina State welcomed the establishment of a 10-megawatt wind farm power project in their locality.

However, 12 years after that euphoria, the people's hope is fast fading as the project has gulped over N4.4 billion while the 24 months commissioning timeline earlier set has been missed for several times, the *Daily Trust* on Sunday reports.

When our correspondent visited the communities around the site recently, Malam Ahmad Aliyu from Bisau village, near the site of the plant, said, "We have lost hope in the project for it has failed to commence. The project is now a shadow of itself. We were happy and jubilating, but now, we carry sad faces. We have continued to live in darkness.

"When the then governor, Umaru Yar'adua brought the project here, it seemed that in no distant future our villages would be lightened up, but it seems an eternity for it to come on board," Aliyu noted.

For Sabiu Mohammed, the project has now become a source of worry, most especially because of the link road to the village where the project is located, which gets closed at the end of working hours.

"We can't access the road when it is evening. We get cut off from the main town. Our sick and the elderly have to take a long route to get home. So, beside the non-completion of the project, it has cut us off," he lamented.

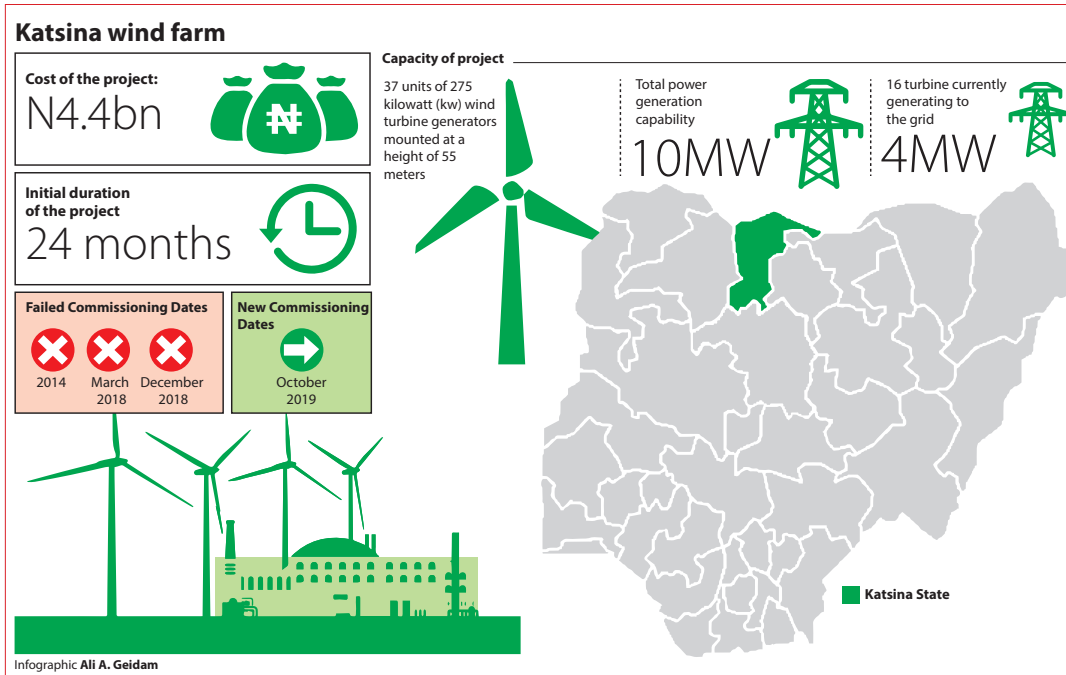
At Lambar Rimi, Bashir Mahmud said the work was very slow and residents keep asking if they would ever witness its completion. "Every day we see people come to visit and leave. When we enquire, we only get assurances that it would be done soon, but for how long shall we keep waiting?" To him, the vast land is just being wasted with the poles that don't carry power.

"The Federal Government should have just allowed us to continue to farm, which is far better for us," Halilu Hamza, a resident of Bora village said.

## Project records 6 failed timelines

The Katsina wind farm project has defied several completion dates, with successive governments assigning a date for its completion, but to no avail. Since 2005 when the government of former Governor Umaru Musa Yar'adua started the project before it was taken over by the Federal Government in 2007, many dates have been fixed with no result.

The Federal Government awarded the project to a French firm, Messrs Vergnet SA in 2010 at the cost of 18,500,000 pounds, plus N494million with a completion period of 24 months, that was by 2012. In the 2017 budget, the Federal



■ The tower laying on the ground

Ministry of Power, Works and Housing allocated N904.5m for its completion. But from 2012 till date, more than six dates of completion were slated and all have come to pass.

The project has suffered several setbacks, including the kidnapping of its engineer, a French nationale, Mr Collomp Francis, vandalism from both human and rodents, following the abandonment of the project and government bureaucracy.

The project comprises the erection of 37 units of 275 kilowatt wind turbine generators mounted at a height of 55 meter on an inclinable tower to generate power from wind. At present, only 16 turbines have been erected with the remaining lying fallow on the ground at the detriment of further decay and vandalism.

Some experts in the renewable energy sector may have since written off the project on the ground that it was just a white elephant project. This is on the premise that the wind speed around the area is lower than the expected capacity to generate the 10megawatt energy from the plant.

Abdulkareem Mohammed El-Ladan, a research fellow on renewable energy, who has studied the project, told *Daily Trust* on Sunday, that using such project for power generation was not viable because the wind speed is a serious setback to it.

He said, "The average wind speed in Katsina is between 3.5 meter per second (m/s) to 4.5m/s and what that

particular wind turbine requires to get a narrative output for 10megawatt is above 11m/s continuously.

"With such average wind speed of 3.5m/s it will be hard to get 20 per cent of the output because the wind speed is too low."

He said that in some countries, especially Germany, what they normally do is the hybrid system by using wind, biomass, hydro and solar.

El-Ladan said, "What they normally do is that since air is erratic, it comes and goes unless you are in the ocean, when you have wind flow throughout the year, to move the wind mill, you link up sources for year round supply.

"To make it viable is to use it to generate the little power during its peak period to pump water into a reservoir of a dam for hydro power plant so that when there is no wind, the hydro dam can be used to generate power," he explained.

Giving a history of the project, the expert said Yar'adua initiated it to supply power to the state university and the host community, and for research purposes, "but not as a source for power to be connected to the national grid."

"So, even with the little 4megawatt, it can generate at peak during harmatan period and it can meaningfully serve the institution, not Nigeria," he added.

A coalition of civil society organisations in Katsina had tried to get to the root of the project delay

by raising a committee. Chairman of the coalition, Bishir Ruwangodiya told our correspondent that the committee visited the site twice to interact with the contractors, who equally said the delay was from the Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing.

"The issue of non-completion is of great concern to us. Our dismay is that over the years, it has failed to come on board. Our appeal is for the Federal Government to come to our rescue, considering the amount of money already expended there, to speed up its completion for the benefit of the people of the state," Ruwangodiya said.

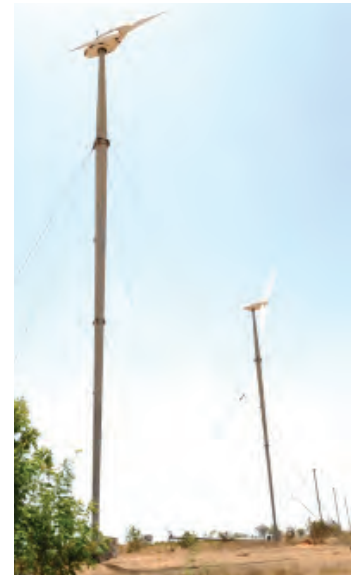
## Vandalism, rodents threaten project survival

In February 2018, officials of the ministry inspected the plant to see some of the fabricated and erected turbines that were operational. The consultant and assistant project manager for O.T. Otis Engineering, Pius Onyenagubo, said the operational part would be commissioned in March 2018.

"The 15 fully installed turbines will be commissioned by the end of March while the others will be commissioned by the end of the year," Onyenagubo had said.

He noted that nine of the 15 installed turbines were operational and delivers 4.5megawatts already on a test run, while six others require some minimal maintenance.

Four of the uninstalled turbines



■ Some of the erected towers

were vandalised and most of the wires carted away. When operational, the generated power will be sent through the Liyafa injection substation and would supply electricity to nearby communities.

Meanwhile, the project has gotten a fresh timeline of October for commissioning. This latest timeline was set in March 2019, when officials of the ministry and those from the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGOF) visited the plant.

*Daily Trust* on Sunday had also visited the plant in February 2018 when the director, Energy Resources at the ministry (Power), Olatunbosun Owoeye, committed to clearing outstanding payments for contractors and providing access road to facilitate the completion in 2018.

Owoeye, who represented the Minister of Power, Works and Housing, Babatunde Fashola, said there was a ready budget provision for the completion. The Katsina State governor, Aminu Masari, who was represented by the special adviser on energy and power, Mansur Mohammed Musa, an engineer, had harped on the significance of the project to improving power supply in the state. In spite of these efforts, the 2018 timeline was missed.

During the latest inspection by the OSGOF monitoring team, the project engineer, Emmanuel Yakubu, said the operational turbines were 16 units, generating 4megawatts, while 21 others have been installed. He confirmed that the host communities were yet to benefit from the generation.

"Since their installation, they have generated nothing less than 4megawatts. Although the host community has not started benefitting directly from the power generated from the wind farm, the electricity generated is moved to the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) substation in Katsina," Yakubu said.

Crown Resources and Development Company (CREDCO) Nigeria Limited, the contractor handling the project, assured the team that it would be delivered by mid-October 2019. The contractor, however, addressed the concern of low wind speed as he said the plant recorded a maximum wind speed in October 2018 and February 2019. He noted that the wind speed operated between five and 12 meters per second.

*This investigation was funded by the Daily Trust Foundation, with support from the MacArthur Foundation.*