

ELECTRICITY

How storm, vandalism leave over 20 Sokoto communities in darkness

From Rakiya A. Muhammad, Sokoto

It is nightfall and the torch lights beam in the darkness that engulfed the healthcare centre at Danchadi, one of the communities in Sokoto state that were thrown into long power blackouts.

Danchadi Primary Healthcare Centre in Bodinga Local Government Area of Sokoto has over the years remained without electricity, with its activities including surgery and delivery of pregnant women, carried out with the aid of torchlight.

Daily Trust investigation shows that over 20 communities in Sokoto state have outages that have lasted for over one year from disasters and vandalism while the authorities are either not responding or taking time to fix them.

In Danchadi, a worker who pleaded anonymity said, "The transformer provided for us has been vandalized and the recent restoration of electricity just before elections in Danchadi town after over four years, did not extend to the hospital because it was not connected."

Elsewhere in Silame Local Government Area of the state, Sani Mohammed's voice was hardly audible above the awful din made by his electricity generator.

The town lost power supply following heavy down pour and flood that destroyed poles and other electrical installations in the locality. It crippled activities in the town which has many cottage industries such as welding, electronic/electrical appliances repairs and soft drink businesses collapsing.

"Since seven years ago, we don't have light in this place, seven years; large chunk of profit goes to purchase fuel for generator. You are either buying fuel or repairing generator," Sani said as he struggled to put on the generator which had failed for three days.

Sunday Silame who owns a cold drinks shop along the major Silame road, also decried the situation. He said, "Most of our money go into purchase of fuel, no gain, but our people need cold something and without it we won't get money, it is our means of livelihood and we need to keep being in business."

Silame is not the only community in Sokoto with such long term loss of power. Some other towns and villages in different



■ An electric pole that fell along Gidan Madi-Silame road



■ A vandalised transformer at Silame

parts of the state have also been thrown into perpetual blackout for varying number of years. Many of them were noted to have been triggered by severe weather conditions which affected the infrastructures and subsequently exposed them to vandalism because they were not fixed by the relevant authorities.

A visit to some communities in Rabah, Binji, Silame, Wurno and Bodinga reveals how life for thousands of people in affected areas regressed to pre-electric era as many have to abandon contemporary technologies in their daily activities.

The United Nations (UN) says electricity access is crucial to the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially on health and

economic development.

But Rarah, a village with a population of over 800,000, is one of the communities in Rabah local government area hit by blackout following damages to power installations. The District Head, Alhaji Muhammadu Muhammadu said, "From Maikujera up to the end of the local government, Dankarmawa, there is no electricity supply," adding that businesses have collapsed and basic amenities that require power are out of operation.

A resident, Malam Aliyu recalls: "We were enjoying electricity with many businesses flourishing; people were really empowered then came the ferocious wind over four years ago. Now there is no progress, we are not happy."

Abubakar Sani, a tailor

said lack of electric supply is costing them their profits, adding that the lengthy period of loss of electric power had been a major setback.

Some of the women say the electricity woe has particularly affected the small businesses they engage in. "We don't have money now because there is no business," Mallama Asmau said.

Students are also affected. Some have to study in dimly illuminated rooms with local lamps that only give faint glow. Aisha, a student expressed deep yearning for the restoration of electricity supply in the village.

At Gutun Gida in Wurno, it has been 12 months wait for electricity but residents are praying fervently they don't keep counting.

Malami Muhammad Gutun Gida recalled that wind had caused the problem. "We lodged the complaint at the Ministry of Rural Development, and the officials sent engineers to assess the damaged transformer, with the promise that a new one will be provided. But the situation is taking time to be rectified."

In Binji Local Government Area, 13 communities are suffering outage due to natural disaster damaging their power installations.

At Gande, some have ventured into phone battery charging business to help members of the community stay connected. Shehu Gande is one of them. "At least 30 inhabitants of the area patronize me daily even with others in the business."

Shehu charges a small battery at N30 and big one N50. He opens his shop from 2pm to 11pm and has to buy fuel of N900 daily to power

his generator since the outage started.

Sole administrator of Binji, Alhaji Muhammad Maikulki, and that of Rabah, Alhaji Abubakar Rabah said the electricity issues had been a source of concern for the localities as it affects economic and social development.

Responding to Daily Trust enquiries, the Permanent Secretary in the State's Ministry for Local Government Development, Alhaji Malami Ladan said, "We did not forget the affected communities. We are doing our best to see that electricity is restored in these areas, we already have a proposal for reactivating electricity."

He said the government cannot cover all the communities within one or two years but doing it gradually.

"Rabah to Rarah to Gandi are in the pipeline, we already have a proposal, for reconnecting electricity. When you go to Silame Binji and Gidan Madi and villages within Binji, as well as certain villages in Bodinga at the moment, you will see that work is in progress, the moment they finish, the people will continue to enjoy electricity in these areas."

He also noted that the state government has provided about 200 transformers for those communities that require them.

When contacted, Mansur Salisu, the Business Development and Regional officer, Sokoto, of Kaduna Electric, the Distribution Company (DisCo) that supplied power to those communities before the various cuts, confirmed that some areas especially within the rural feeders have been out of supply for quite some time.

"There are some areas that were out of supply but of recent we restored supply in conjunction with state government, areas as Wurno town, Gada, Illela. We are working closely to see how we will restore supply to the remaining customers with such problem," he noted.

On tackling the impact of natural disasters on power installations, the DisCo's official said, "The engineers and the planning team are doing very well in ensuring that we construct the right thing. That is why management scrutinize and ensure that only few certified companies were given the license to work on our network."

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