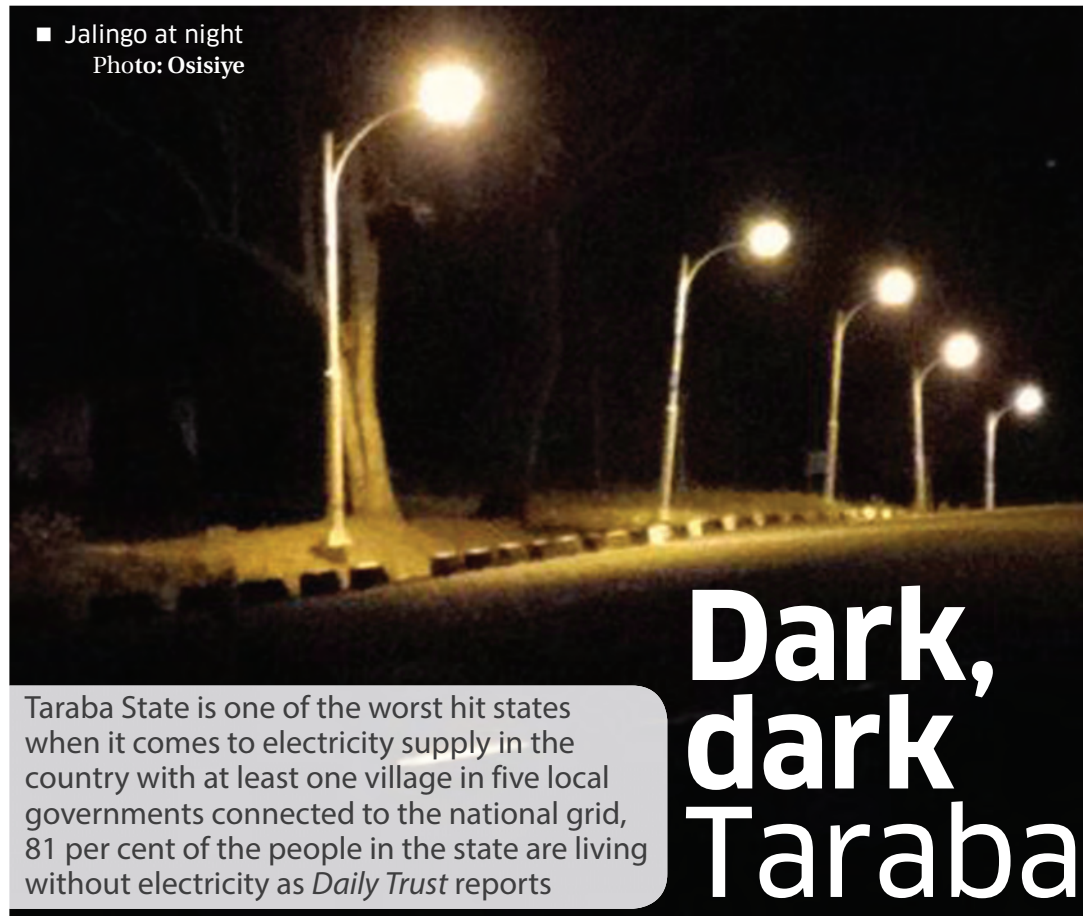




# FEATURES



■ Jalingo at night  
Photo: Osiyiye

Taraba State is one of the worst hit states when it comes to electricity supply in the country with at least one village in five local governments connected to the national grid, 81 per cent of the people in the state are living without electricity as *Daily Trust* reports

## Dark, dark Taraba

By Magaji Isa Hunkuyi, Jalingo

**W**ith only about 29 per cent of its population connected to the national grid, Taraba State is certainly the darkest state in Northeast Nigeria, if not the country as a whole.

To demonstrate how bad the situation is, in the five local government areas of Gassol, Sardauna, Gashaka, Kurmi and Bali only one town is connected to the national grid.

In the 11 other local government areas, *Daily Trust* findings show that were linked to the grid, only few towns and villages are actually connected.

With this low figures, it's no surprise that the state development has been slowed and the revenues of the Yola Electricity Distribution Company, which supplies the state is in the red.

With the absence of industries, the company's biggest customer is the state government. What this means is that the company's revenue targets are often not met.

With a few number of customers to cater for, one would expect they are treated as kings. Malam Ibrahim Garba, one of them, argues that is not the case.

Malam Garba told *Daily Trust* that he only has two ceiling fans a television set and few bulbs but his monthly bill is usually estimated at N10, 000. If he were using prepaid meter, he said, his bill would be between N4000 to

N5000.

Ibrahim Garba explained that in most instances, his area used to be without light for several days and even when there is power supply light it hardly lasts for more than six hours in most days of the month.

He lamented that apart from frequent blackout most of the time the light used to be of low voltage.

"Despite the low voltage and black out yet the electricity bill is always the same," he complained.

The lack of prepaid meters is a major worry for electricity consumers, something re-echoed by another customer, Mr Charles Bala who told our reporter in Wukari that the system was exploitative because those on estimated billing pay higher compared to those using prepaid meters.

He said for instance, some consumers using air-conditions, refrigerators and pressing iron are given a bill of N8000 a month, He said however consumers using

few appliances are in some instances charged higher.

According to him some staff of the power distribution company are taking advantage of non-availability of prepaid meters in the state to swindle customers.

This sentiment is echoed by electricity consumers in Takum, Zing, Wukari Ibi and Jalingo who stated their preference for the prepaid meters.

In Jalingo metropolis most business premises have prepaid meters and owners of some business centres told *Daily Trust* that they were comfortable with charges they pay through prepaid meter.

Ishaku Gidado, owner of WebTech Café, along Higher Court Road Jalingo is one of them.

"Unlike estimated billing system where crazy bills are sent to you with prepaid meters, you are sure that nobody short changes you," Gidado said.

Yola electricity Distribution



■ Prepaid meter



■ Manager Jalingo business unit under Yola power distribution company. Mr. Harbert Hamawa



■ Mal Yau Ibrahim a consumer on estimated billing system

Jalingo business center only 8,000 pay for electricity they consume regularly," he said.

"We need more meters to supply our customers so that we can effectively collect bills from our customers but the meters are not available," he said.

Mr Hamawa stated that customers on estimated billing are always hostile to the staff of the company whenever they are approached for payment of bills.

"Apart from this, there is also cases of communal conflicts, illegal connections and existence of syndicates of transformer vandals which is another factor responsible for poor revenue generation in Jalingo and Wukari business centers," he said.

Our finding revealed also that presently, a 20 MWH transformer is being delivered from the national grid to Jalingo business unit with the actual demand being less than 12MWH per day.

The business manager however suggested that the current supply of 20MWH from the national grid to Jalingo business unit be reduced to 11MWH to avoid energy loss.

*Daily Trust* gathered that the Kashinbilla hydro-power project with an installed capacity of 40MWH and nearing completion would not be utilized in the state due to the low energy demand.

The expected annual revenue target from the proposed 40MWH is N6.6 billion and going by the less than 50 percent revenue collection in the state, it will not be wise business to inject the 40 MWH from Kashinbilla power station to Taraba line.

The business manager, while commenting on the 40MWH from Kashinbilla power station said management should consider pumping the 40MWH to the national grid.

"It is necessary to construct transmission lines to link local government areas in Taraba State which are not connected to the national grid if the entire 40 MWH is to be channelled to the state," he suggested.

He said cost benefits analysis needed to be conducted to see the best option, adding that it was more cost effective to inject the 40MWH to the national grid.

But for the other 81 per cent of people in the state without electricity, issues of prepaid meters seem like a luxury. All they want is some light in their lives.

Company, our finding revealed is losing huge revenue due to lack of prepaid meters.

Our findings revealed further that many electricity consumers in some areas and communities across the state are not captured by the company in its billing system.

There are also cases of meter bypassing and illegal connections in most towns and communities which are costing the company millions of naira in revenue.

The business manager, Jalingo business centre of Yola Electricity Distribution Company, Mr Harbert Hamawa confirms this much to *Daily Trust*.

According to him, Jalingo business center, which take cares of local government areas of the Northern zone of the state and Jalingo the state capital, has total revenue target of N2.1 billion for the year 2017 but only N1 billion was generated.

He said the Wukari business center's 2017 revenue target of N321.3 million ended up generating only.

The business manager explained that Yola Electricity Distribution Company has set a total revenue target for Taraba state in 2017 to the tune of N2.4 billion but at the end only N1.1 billion was collected.

He said apart from poor customer base in Taraba State most customers were not paying for electricity they consumed.

"Out of 18,000 customers in