

FEATURE

Taraba zone where only one town is connected to national grid

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Over 420,000 communities in the Central Senatorial District of Taraba State do not enjoy electricity from the national grid a Daily Trust survey has revealed.

The district is comprised of five local government areas and is twice the size of some states in the federation. The five local government areas in the district are Gassol, Kurmi, Bali, Gashaka and Sardauna. It is the largest district in the state in terms of population, landmass and potentials.

However, the only town in the district that is connected to the national grid is Suntai: hometown of a late former Governor of the state, Danbaba Suntai.

Daily Trust further gathered that even Suntai town was connected to the national grid courtesy of the late Suntai, but the other towns in the district, including the headquarters of the district, Bali, have not been connected to the grid.

Daily Trust findings reveal that some of the local government areas in the district like Bali and Sardauna were created in 1978, while Taraba State was created in 1991: which means they are older than the state itself.

According to our findings, the only local government area in the state that is not in the central district and is not connected to the national grid is Karim Lamido: which is in the Northern Senatorial District.

The remaining nine local government areas: Wukari, Ibbi, Donga, Takum, Ardo-Kola, Yorro, Zing, Lau, Ussa and Jalingo, including Yangtu (Special) Development Area, are connected to the national grid.

Absence of electricity in the central zone has hampered socio/economic development in the area. The absence of electricity has also led to air pollution as small and big generating plants are the main sources of electricity.

Industries located in the zone like the Highland Tea Company in Kakara village of Sardauna Local Government Area, the Baissa Timber Company and the Baissa Palm Oil Processing Company in Kurmi Local Government Area, were closed down for many years due to high production cost mainly to lack of stable power supply.

The tea company, for example, was operating on generating plants for many years, with constant closure, until recently when the Taraba State Government and an international



■ The engine room that supplies electricity to Mutum Biyu town, headquarters of Gassol Local Government Area of Taraba State

agency jointly built a 400kw hydro power plant at Tunga, which now supplies electricity to the company.

The Tunga Dam, according to our findings, was initiated by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO); UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and several other United Nations agencies and the Taraba State Government.

Under the initiative, a small hydro power plant was installed at Tunga in Sardauna Local Government Area and the company located at Kakara, as well as surrounding villages; Kusuku, Galadima, Nguroge and Furmi are supplied with electricity. The project is intended to accelerate economic activities for a population of over 50,000 that mainly depended on growing of tea and other farm produce.

With the small hydro power plant, constant power is now being supplied to the tea factory, while surrounding villages and towns are getting electricity thereby boosting the economy of the area.

Daily Trust findings also reveal that absence of electricity in the

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area had hampered development of the tourism sector which the area is blessed with: a natural plateau with accompanying good weather, a lush environment and a game reserve: the Gashaka Gumti.

The Mambilla Plateau,

states.

"We are aware that in states like Gombe, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa, local government headquarters and ward headquarters were connected to the National Grid many years ago," he compared.

The Member representing Sardauna Constituency in the House of Assembly, Dr. Mohammed Jugulde, blamed the Federal Government for failing to supply electricity to towns and villages in the Central Senatorial District of the state.

He said he was aware that some states had embarked on rural electrification projects with the support of the Federal Government. However, that in the case of Taraba, the Federal Government was not favourable to the state when it came to refunding money spent by the state government to do a project which was supposed to be handled by the Federal Government.

"The Federal Government is yet to refund over N8b spent by the Taraba State Government on the construction of the Jalingo-Gembu Road, which is a Federal Road," the lawmaker said.

Also speaking on the issue, a politician from Gassol Local Government Area, Malam Idris Mohammed, said the Taraba State Government was to blame for neglecting the central zone in terms of provision of basic social amenities; especially electricity.

He said those they elected to the state and national assemblies had not done what the electorate asked them to do because most of those elected between 1999 to date got the mandate of the people in the area because they pledged to provide basic amenities.

"I can tell you that those occupying elective positions have not fulfilled pledges they made to us during campaign, and we would now vote people based on what they will offer to us, not empty promises," he threatened.

The Minister of Women Affairs, Hajiya Jummai Alhassan, however, blamed the Taraba State Government for the absence of electricity in the central district. She said while some states in the federation had connected several towns and villages with electricity and also built rural roads, the story was different in the state.

The minister told Daily Trust that the present government in the state had no interest in developing the central zone for political reasons, adding that it was a shame to discover that it was only in Taraba, more than 400,000 of its people were not enjoying electricity.

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