



FEATURES

70 years of darkness

● 16 deaths linked to lack of electricity in neglected Abuja village

In the first quarter of 2019, 16 residents of Gosa, along Abuja Airport Road, lost their lives while crossing the street to charge their phones in neighbouring communities. *Daily Trust* reports on how the community in Nigeria's federal Capital has fared without electricity since its establishment 70 years ago.

By Umar Shehu Usman & Shaba Abubakar Idris

Joy Paul, 18, lived at Gosa Kpanyi Kpanyi community along the Abuja Airport Road. One afternoon she crossed the expressway to charge her phone in a neighbouring community because in the 70 years since Gosa was established, it had never been connected to the national grid. On her way back, a car ran her over, killing her instantly.

Joy is one of 16 people who, according to community members, have died while trying to cross the road to charge their electronic devices.

Her brother Danladi Paul remembers exactly how his sister, who had just graduated secondary school died.

"She had to cross the express to charge her phone. On her way back, she crossed the high speed lane, while crossing the second one, a car rammed into her and killed her," he said.

If they had had electricity in Gosa, Danladi reckons that his sister would probably still be alive today.

In the nearly 400 rundown houses houses in this community, not far from the Centenary City, many residents have lost kin trying to cross the expressway to access electricity. One of them is Habila Dauda, whose elder brother, Danlami, also died in similar circumstances.

"My brother was hit by a car along the express," Habila said. "People around the community noticed he belonged to Gosa. They dropped his body by the roadside. We now picked the corpse and brought him back to the village and buried him."

Youth secretary of Gosa community, Joseph Dokayi, confirmed the number of casualties recorded in this year alone saying, "We have lost over 16 persons in the first quarter of this year 2019 in the process of crossing the road to charge their phones, yet our cries have not been heard by the government."

An elder in the community, David Danamu, said that Gosa community has suffered enough due to the absence of electricity while neighbouring communities are on the national grid.

"I was born here," he said. "For over 50 years, no electricity. My father lived here till he passed on, yet light has never come."

He said that the community has lost children and loved ones because they had to cross the road to the neighboring communities of Gosa, Angwan Tiv and Otoje to buy anything, to charge phones and even foodstuff.

"We have written several letters to AEDC [Abuja Electricity Distribution Company] to come and connect electricity to our community, Dokayi, the youth secretary, said. "We never



■ Gosa Kpanyi Kpanyi was established 73 years ago. They have never had electricity in all these years and the community has remained underdeveloped



■ Danladi Paul lost his sister Joy, 18, when she tried to cross the street to charge her phone in a neighbouring community

got any response. Only our community doesn't have electricity among all the communities along airport road."

For many years, all Gosa has received are promises by the government and politicians seeking votes but no power. Until three years ago when the Abuja Municipal Area Council installed power poles without cables. The community's hopes have been dashed as the poles have remained abandoned since.

Daniel Baba, secretary of the community, said the poles were installed by the AMAC administration of Abdullahi Adamu Candido.

"We have a lot of challenges bothering us in this community, but we don't even know who to tell our problems to anymore. We feel they don't take us serious anymore," he said. "All they need is our votes and once they have it, we don't see them again till another time."

These is a sentiment Mr. Danamu echoes. He thinks Gosa community only becomes relevant to politicians during election season, something he finds frustrating.

"We don't have any social amenities in this community. We are tired. If we chase them when they come for campaigns, they'll say we're violent," he said.

"We give them our votes, but we don't get anything from them in return," Ashibo Danjuma, who has resided in the community for over 30 years said.

Regardless, he realizes that their hope still resides with the government.

"If we have done anything wrong to the government, please forgive us, bring light to our community," he said. "Houses are empty because there is no light, some houses have started falling apart because there is nobody inside, just because there is no electricity."

For him, the AEDC's attitude towards Gosa's plight has made him question their credibility.

"The AEDC will be in their office, and won't go out to look for customers and would rather only customers look for them. Then when a community has light, they will be penetrating it, patrolling day and night. Why is it so?"

The lack of power in the community has resulted in the underdevelopment of the community as they still use firewood for cooking and until recently, they didn't have access to portable water, relying instead on a stream.

According to Dokayi, the untreated water had effect on about 50 children who were urinating blood until an NGO came and offered them medication.

"Just two months ago, the Federal Ministry of Water Resources heard our cry and mounted a water system for us. It functions no more than four times in a week. Before you know it, a crowd would gather. Though it is not enough but we thank them," Dokayi said.

At the secretariat of the Abuja Municipal Area Council, AMAC, an official said the council is very much aware of the situation at Gosa.

Eng. Alhassan Dakwaoui, Head of Department of Works at the council



■ These power poles were installed three years ago. They have been abandoned since

said, "Actually the contract was awarded in 2017, the contractors moved into the site and started planting poles, almost 80 percent of the poles have been planted and we even made provisions for a transformer."

On why the work has stopped, he said, "The challenge here is the scarcity of funds. That is not the only project [affected] actually. The council is working towards paying the contractors something so that they will complete the project."

When contacted by *Daily Trust*, the spokesman of the (AEDC), Mr Oyeboode Fadipe said the project is not that of AEDC.

"The village is in Lugbe, it is a Rural Electrification Project. It was the chairman of the local government that started the project. It is not our project," he said.

When asked if there was no intervention from AEDC to complete the project and provide access to electricity for the residents, Mr Oyeboode said, "I am sure REA [Rural Electrification Agency] will have its own remedial strategy. We are not the owners of the project."

Meanwhile in an earlier tweet, REA tweeting on the handle @realREANigeria, on June 25, 2019 in response to the *Cable News*' tweet on the community, said.

"Such under-served and unserved communities are the reason why we have continued to drive different novel mini grid projects. We give you our assurance of a feedback on this shortly." REA said it was working to connect such communities and gave instance of Kigbe village, where it highlighted the impact of a mini grid solar power installation.

For the likes of Danladi Paul in Gosa, the intervention cannot come soon enough. It will not bring back his sister, Joy, from the dead, but at least it would cut down the number of Gosa residents being killed while crossing the street to charge their phones.

Additional report by Simon Echewofun Sunday