



**INVESTIGATION**

# Plateau electricity project abandoned for 20 years

■ Old metal poles found around Ngaher and Yelwa Ngaher in Gashish district of Barkin Ladi Local Government Area

**Lami Sadiq, Jos**

**E**lectric poles, piles of cable, fuses, insulators and other equipment have been left to rot in Kudadu community, Plateau State, *Daily Trust* investigations have revealed.

The equipment could have been used to provide electricity in the community in Jos East LGA since 20 years ago are today used for drying washed clothes.

The electricity project, aimed at extending power supply to Kudadu in Federe District, was suddenly abandoned without explanation. In the community's over 60 years of existence, residents say their hope was raised sometime in 1996 when the federal government attempted to connect them to the national grid before it was suddenly abandoned.

A community leader, Saleh Yusuf who also holds the title of Madakin Sarkin fawa of Jos East, said: "They installed the poles, brought the wires, insulators and other equipment but suddenly, the project stopped. Nobody said anything to us because it was during the military regime and since our return to democracy, we have made several appeals to government through the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and now to the Jos Electricity Distribution company yet there has been nothing."

Our correspondent observed that though one has to pass through Kudadu to get to Angware, the headquarters of Jos East, the headquarters is connected to the national grid while other communities close to Kududu, such as Dogon Kurmi, Kuribin keben, Federe and Jarawan Kogi have no electricity. Fobur which is a few kilometres from Jos city and only six kilometres to Kudadu was in the last five years connected because the then local government chairman, Brigadier General Samuel Abok (rtd), a native of the area, had influenced the project.

However, like the communities in Jos East, Ngaher and Yelwa Ngaher in Gashish district of Barkin Ladi LGA also have strong metal poles standing but there are

no wires to connect them with electricity. About 30 years ago, the communities had enjoyed electricity as a result of activities of foreign miners.

"When the foreigners left, the Nigerian overseers had rechanneled the wires to other mining areas, leaving our communities with strong standing poles but no lines," said the village Imam, Abubakar Abdullahi.

There are presently about 550 communities that are yet to be connected to electricity in Plateau State, according to the state Commissioner for Water Resources and Energy, Eng. David Jafaru Wuyep, who said a bill to create the Plateau Energy Cooperation when passed into law would enable the state government provide electricity for all rural communities.

**Residents decry darkness, outages**

But as government and the DisCos continue to marshal out extension plans, rural communities continue to lament the detrimental effects of lack of electricity.

In Kudadu, the use of mobile phones has become rampant despite a fluctuating service connection. But one major hindrance to the technology is the lack of electricity to charge the device.

"We have no access to television or electrical appliances like fans. During the heat, we sleep outside and we have to pay those with generators to charge our phones," said Saleh.

A power sector expert and former employee of a DisCo, Engr. Owu Adesina, explained why it has become increasingly difficult to connect rural communities especially when the energy sector has been deregulated.

He said the distance of the connection point, vandalism, insecurity and voltage drop are the major factors discouraging the privatised DisCos from connecting more communities.

Adesina said: "Imagine installing a transformer in a village and the next few days, vandals cart away the equipment, it will take a while before the electricity

company sends someone to either fix it or replace it and that cost money."

He noted that Ghana should be the closest example for Nigeria to get the power sector right. "One thing peculiar in Nigeria is that once it is about to rain, it will take two days before you get electricity but in Ghana, they have passed those stages, they don't run overhead cables.

"You only see underground cabling and if you see overhead, it is usually the main transmission line which is guided again with a good lightning arrest," he added.

He said while the country could make considerable effort in increasing the number of connected communities through the decentralisation of electrification, it has become practically impossible to meet the 2020 target.

**Rural electrification policy drags**

Just like the state government, the goal of the National Rural Electrification Policy is to increase access to electric power supply in rural areas across the country.

To do this, the federal government has set a benchmark to make reliable electricity available to 75 per cent of the country's population by 2020 and achieve 90 per cent electricity access by 2030 with at least 10 per cent of renewable energy mix by 2025.

The Rural Electrification Strategy and Implementation Plan clearly states that its 2020 target could be met if only urban electrification reaches 95 per cent and rural electrification reaches 60 per cent. To achieve the target, the document stated that more than 10,000,000 additional rural households would have to be connected.

In Plateau State, the Rural Electrification Plan has revealed that 63 per cent of the state's population remain unconnected to the central grid. The plan for the state to increase access to electricity in rural areas consists of a three-phased approach with the electrification option that includes grid extension, mini-grids or

small-scale systems.

Residents task selves to provide power

Communities like Guranpwana in Vwang district of Jos South and Kurfan in Jos North local government areas are however not waiting for government initiative to get electricity.

In Kurfan, an electricity project for a neighbouring community was cajoled to involve a part of the community. The youth leader, Amos Tegwi, said on noticing that government had approved a power project for their closest neighbours at Anguwan Mission a few years ago, the people of Kurfan had raised enough money to pay the contractor to extend the supply to their area.

"We paid for about 22 cement poles and wires and we were connected and attached to the Anguwan Mission transformer," he said.

Pam Dalyop, the community leader for Guranpwana, said individuals with the means now acquire solar panels for small scale electricity systems in their homes. While observing that more homes are resorting to solar panel, our correspondent gathered that the use of generators is often times discouraged in the evenings because criminals could take advantage of the noisy sound to launch attacks.

Daily Trust also gathered that the community had in November last year begun taxing themselves to raise money for electric poles after receiving a quotation from the Jos Disco.

However, almost six months since they parted with N80,000, Dalyop said they had neither received the poles, their money nor seen the agent. "We have asked for our money back but we have been getting promises upon promises," he said.

The agent while confirming payment made to him said the suppliers of the poles had disappointed him. "The suppliers have paid a part of the money but there is balance of N20, 000 pending which I would pay by the month end," he said.

**State to set up energy agency**

The Plateau State Commissioner of Water Resources and Energy, Eng. David Jafaru Wuyep, said government was not unmindful of the suffering of the people which was why it commenced a pilot study in the last one year in Damshin and Anguwan Rina in Shendam LGA using solar energy.

"Even though the energy sector is deregulated, there are some communities that the private sectors do not feel comfortable to go and invest.

"But through the Plateau Energy Cooperation when passed into law, government can provide energy for the people and once the community grows to a commercially viable level, then government can hands-off and move into another hinterland," he said.

Wuyep explained that the state government will commence phase one of the plan which will take 10 villages in the first year and then 50 more the following year to increase within a five year plan.

"The strategy is to use the energy source that is close to the people in the rural areas instead of the power grid that is quiet far. If they have a water source that can generate enough energy, we use it and combine it with solar and if there is a wind speed in that area, we use it to combine with solar," he said.

In its franchise states of Plateau, Benue, Bauchi and Gombe, the Jos Electricity Distribution (JED), one of the 11 Distribution Companies (DisCos) said it has experienced the worst forms of vandalism in Plateau State where at least 20 transformers and other network assets are being vandalised monthly.

Jos DisCo Executive Director Marketing, Verr Jirbo and Head of Technical Operations, Eng. John Emeruwa explained that vandalism poses a great threat to expansion since materials ought to be used for network reinforcement and expansion are being used to replace vandalized ones.

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