

ELECTRICITY >>

How gratification, high billing rob Oyo customers of electricity

From Jeremiah Oke, Ibadan

Residents of many communities in Oyo State are groaning under demands for gratification, high estimated bills and other issues by officials of the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) to ensure they stay connected to electricity.

In an investigation across communities in Ibadan, Eruwa, Saki, Iseyin, Ogbomoso and Oyo towns, some residents told our correspondent that about three groups of IBEDC officials could come at the interval of two weeks demanding for bills which sometimes were not distributed to them and would always threaten to disconnect their electricity.

It was alleged that since customers would not want that to happen, the officials always demand what they termed “disconnection fees” despite the fact that their electricity supply was not disconnected.

Some of the officials, it was alleged would outrightly demand for gratification with threats.

Daily Trust found out that the officials are allegedly taking advantage of the customers who do not know their rights as stipulated in the Electric Power Sector Reform Act (EPSRA) 2005. The Act states that, “All new electricity connections must be done strictly based on metering before connection.” That is, no new customer should be connected by a DisCo without a meter first being installed on the premises.

“All customers have a right to electricity supply in a safe and reliable manner. All customers have a right to a properly installed and functional meter. All customers have a right to be properly informed and educated on the electricity service.

“All customers have a right to transparent electricity billing. All un-metered customers should be issued with electricity bills strictly based on NERC’s estimated billing methodology,” the Act states categorically.

However, this is farfetched from the experiences of many customers of the Ibadan DisCo.

In Ibadan Town, out of 50 people interviewed, 37 condemned in strong terms the billing system, attitude of the IBEDC officials, saying they believed that the officials were not properly trained



■ Minister of Power, Works and Housing, Mr Babatunde Fashola

and thus the DisCo had poor marketing strategy.

Among the residents who spoke, only 10 have prepaid meters, but are still not satisfied with the system as they said their meters ran too fast. Many of them complained of poor power supply amid high estimated billing.

In Saki Town, 25 residents spoke with our correspondent of which 22 condemned the services of the IBEDC because of the poor power supply in the area. They argued that despite the poor services, the officials still came around with bills. The three others who are owners of hotels and business ventures have prepaid meters but want quick action on the epileptic nature of the power supply.

In Ogbomoso and Oyo towns, 26 residents described the services of IBEDC as “poor, terrible and worse.” Four, however, said the poor nature of power supply was a nationwide issue.

The situation was not different in Eruwa and Lanlate communities which are predominantly student environments. From the 20 residents who spoke to this paper, 14 described power supply in the areas as essential commodity which came alive once in a while or as officials of the IBEDC wished. Six urged the Federal Government to reverse the privatisation of the power sector and make it more efficient.

Landlords, community leaders react

Daily Trust spoke to house owners and community leaders in the towns surveyed.

Chairman of the Landlords Association in Gedu Area of Oyo Town, popularly called Small London, Alhaji Ayo Yusuf, said power supply in the area was between two to three hours daily and that each of the 200 households in the area was mandated by IBEDC to pay an estimated billing of N2,000 monthly.

“Many of us pay through IBEDC officials who are going around collecting the energy charges, but we have told them to be careful because it is illegal. We want to pay at their office,” he said.

Secretary of Saki Community and an advocate of power reform, Sola Ailako, said the management of IBEDC told the residents that a step down 132KVA substation was needed to ensure constant power supply in the land.

He said his people usually paid at least N1,500 into the offices of the company in Saki even with the epileptic power supply and noted that some officials came to read meters and even took some prepaid meters away and had refused to return them.

The Youth Chairman in Iseyin, Nureni Alli, said, “Officials of IBEDC told us that the same breaker that was brought into Iseyin since 1976 is what we are still using in the town. They only give us light between three to four hours daily, which you will agree with me is not enough. Meanwhile, they usually come to collect money from residents even without light, and when we begin to protest, they will tag us bad boys.”

Chairman of Saki Electricity Development Committee

(SEDC), Alhaji A.K.K. Tijani, said, “Youths wanted to fight the officials of IBEDC, but I resisted the move. IBEDC officials gave the pressure group powerful weapon by not giving them light and their staff also come and read the meters and bring estimated bills.

“We are asking for a transmission station in Saki. Fashola was with us recently to sympathise with us. Prepaid meters should be distributed to us. They are cheating us because they believe we are villagers,” he lamented.

A resident of Ogbomoso, Chief Ademola Olawale, said power was not regular and that many times they used to bring power between 12am and 6am and hardly brought the light during the day.

He said, “We are living on generators. We are hopeful that when they finish the construction of the 33kv step down in Ogbomoso, maybe we shall enjoy light.”

The Chairman of the Community Development Committee (CDC) in Lanlante, High Chief Anthony Oke-Adegbola (JP), called on the Federal Government to do the needful in ensuring that the power sector worked again.

Mr. Sunday Akinbade in Oremeji Agugu area of Ibadan said there was stress going to the office and bribing the officials to get assurance for power supply, but that the residents paid less when they paid through the officials rather than going to the offices.

“For instance, if the officials bring N10,000 monthly, the entire house will contribute N5,000 and they will issue

receipt without stamp which we know is a fake receipt.”

IBEDC officials confirm issues, insist action ongoing

In an interview with IBEDC’s Regional Communication Officer, Oyo, Mr. Frank Aina Williams, he said the company had a zero tolerance policy for corruption which made its management to discourage cash payment by customers.

Mr. Williams confirmed that some Customer Service Officers (CSO) of the DisCo assisted customers to pay bills based on their relationship with thee, but that the company had been discouraging that over the years.

Williams, however, agreed that there were bad eggs in the company and so he encouraged customers to expose them for better services.

“We have a ‘no cash policy’. This means we are discouraging paying with cash and that is why we have many platforms for payment. You can pay online, you can pay via your phone, you can as well pay through the banks. We also have agents where you can pay.

“If you are having challenges, send your complaints through our whistle blowing channels. Once we get any complain, we will investigate and pursue prosecution. We have told our customers to expose those who are behind the racketeering going on in the industry,” Williams said.

When contacted, the Head, Branding and Corporate Communication at IBEDC headquarters, Mrs. Angela Olanrewaju, said, “The issue of power supply is not in control of IBEDC. We are all aware of the power situation in the country. It is in our best interest to give power to our customers.”

On the estimated billing, she said, “It is going to be a thing of the past soon because there is a scheme called Meter Assets Providers (MAP) which gives the customers the opportunity to get meters. We are starting the scheme this May.”

On the alleged collection of bribery by IBEDC staff, Olanrewaju said, “We all have that general problem in Nigeria and I am sure this same allegation is what our customers are facing. We keep saying do not give gratification to our people. If you have done the right thing, you don’t need to gratify anybody.”

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