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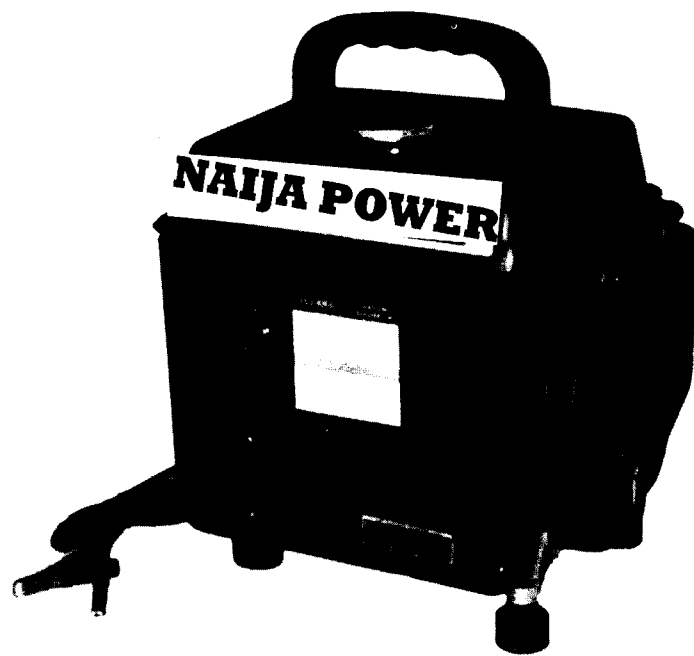
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ANNIVERSARY EDITION

## ENDLESS DARKNESS IN NIGERIA

Amidst the uncertainty that has become synonymous with the power sector in Nigeria, one thing that seems quite certain is that no end is yet in sight to the endless darkness which the nation has been plunged by successive regimes; both military and civilians. The pains of darkness linger for Nigerians who are unable to reconcile failed promises of electricity generation and distribution with overwhelming darkness even as Nigeria marks a decade of civil rule. Prospects of earlier relief from consuming darkness appear clouded by selfish politicking, corruption and impunity of the ruling elite.

In the days of the military, Nigerians braced up to the reality of disappointment constituted by National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) otherwise popularly referred to as "Never Expect Power Always". But the agony of power outage got messier when NEPA became National Electric Power Plc leaving Nigerians with no other choice than to accept the refrain: "Never Expect Power Please Light Candle."



Amidst this deepening frustration, came the political transition programme that led to the emergence of Obasanjo's administration in May 29, 1999. Not unlike his predecessors, Obasanjo vociferously denounced the decay and inefficiency in the power sector promising to ensure regular power supply in the country. The promise to revive the power sector which was a major plank of Obasanjo's campaign obviously prompted Chief Bola Ige who emerged Minister in charge of Power and Steel in 1999 to confidently pledge to turn 'stone to bread' within a short while. To many Nigerians, the appointment of Ige; erudite scholar, legal luminary and political icon as the Minister in-charge of Power was calculated to shore up the credibility of Obasanjo regime and to imbue confidence in the capacity of the administration to deliver. If Bola Ige thought patriotic zeal was sufficient to turn the power sector around when

Nigerians nor deliver himself from the intricacies of the power game in government. He was brutally murdered in his bed room while serving as Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Obasanjo's administration!

President Umar Yar'Adua took over from Obasanjo on May 29, 2007 and joined the bandwagon of empty promises with pledge to revive the power sector. Indeed, many Nigerians made poor judgment of Yar'Adua's seemingly patriotic declaration at the inception of his administration. His ability to perform as the chief helmsman was mistakenly tied to the much publicized but largely unverified transparency and achievements as Governor of Katsina State for eight years. President Yar'Adua's much taunted modesty when compared to the thieving crowd of the ruling elite was mistaken for capacity to provide leadership for the country or even transform the power sector. Yar'Adua toyed with the idea of declaring an emergency in the power sector upon assumption of office. But overwhelmed by the depth of corruption and rot in the sector he has had to reverse himself like he did in so many other cases.

After a year in office, the government of President Ya'Adua went to sleep on the power sector while the huge drama constituted by the House of Representatives' probe of the scam uncovered in the Independent Power Project (IPP) initiated by Obasanjo's regime lasted. The public hearing conducted by the House of Representatives' Committee on Power and Steel following the widely reported scam spiraling into several billions of Dollars appropriated for the power sector between 1999 and 2007 is presently the most disturbing revelation of the corruption that took place under the nose of Obasanjo whose claim to transparency and accountability called the integrity of everybody's else into question. With controversies already trailing the probe and allegations of bribery being leveled against the House Committee conducting the probe, it is almost certain that the exercise will go the way of other similar probes whose reports and recommendations never saw the light of the day let alone implemented.

Although a school of thought holds that graft may not be the only factor jeopardizing efforts at generating, transmitting and distributing electricity in the country. But revelations and evidence tendered at the Elumeluded House Committee on the probe of the power sector confirmed that contracts worth several billions of US Dollars were awarded to companies and contractors whose certification and competency remain in doubt. Testimonies by prime officers of the Obasanjo's administration revealed that due process was sidelined in the award of the contracts in the power sector and attested to the monumental fraud that has rendered power generation impossible in Nigeria. "*Madam due*

corruption agenda confirmed that due processes were subverted in the award of contracts. Dr. Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; a World Bank Expert and former Finance Minister who abandoned Obasanjo's ship unceremoniously revealed in her testimony that unusual concessions and waiver were given to some of the companies in circumstances that underscored undue influence and compromise. On 12th day of May, 2008, Minister of State for Finance under the Obasanjo administration, Hajia Esther Nenadi Usman pointedly indicted Cross River State Governor, Lyei Imoke and Dr. Olusegun Agagu both former Governor of Ondo State and one time Power and Steel Ministers under Obasanjo. According Hajia Usman, Imoke reportedly asked for waiver and obtained same notwithstanding her recommendations to the contrary. Imoke like Agagu denied culpability while in office as Minister of Power and Steel and justified actions on the basis of exigency of the moment.

However, the actual amount of money sunk into the power sector by the Obasanjo administration remains shrouded in secrecy. Even with the public hearing conducted by the House of Representatives, the figures appear not to be for public consumption. The figures made available at different times oscillate between \$5 billion and \$16 billion depending on who is providing the figures and for what purpose. Nigerians however continue to suffer immense epileptic supply of electricity. Whereas the Federal Government is believed to have spent approximately N521 billion in the eight years of Obasanjo's administration, a breakdown of estimated figures below shows that the power sector gulped far in excess.

**2003- N61 billion**

**2004- N71 billion**

**2006- N75 billion**

**2007- N88 billion**

**2008 (Jan-March)-N24 billion**

**2008 (March-December)-405 billion**

According to an industrialist whose company has been forced to wind up owing to unbearable overhead resulting from unavailability of electricity, "the situation at every turn appears worse than it has ever been"! It is worrisome that darkness persists despite the amounts of money appropriated so far for the power sector. The figures, according to experts and analysts were sufficient to guarantee transmission and distribution in the country. The figures are also believed to surpass the budgets of some African countries where there is relative steady supply of electricity.

The question remains what will be the state of power supply in Nigeria by 2011 when Yar' Adua would have

challenges in the power sector; whether short or long term basis. Although the Seven Point Agenda has electricity as an item, popular opinion is that One Point Agenda with electricity as the sole item would be more ideal for a government led by Yar' Adua given his snail-like and uninspiring posture in governance. Unfortunately power supply is at the soul of turning Nigeria's socio-economic condition positively around. Power supply affects every other sector in substantial and all embracing manner. There is no doubt that if the crisis in the power sector is appropriately resolved, there will be resounding leaps in other sectors of national endeavours.

Without doubt, previous efforts aimed at reviving the comatose power sector failed largely owing to politics, corruption and impunity. The Lyel Imoke-led Technical Board of the National Electric Power Authority was commissioned in March 2000 to focus mainly on generating power through rehabilitation of old units. Indeed funds were released by the Federal Government to the tune of about \$1.3 billion for the supply, installation and commissioning of additional materials and spare parts for the rehabilitation works at the major power stations at *Afam, Sapele, Kainji, Ebiri, Ikorodu, Akangba and Jebba* respectively. It was the conviction of the Obasanjo regime that something drastic and quick needed to be done to increase the mega watts of 1,500 (out of the installed capacity of 3,500mw) to about 10,000mw into the national grid by December 2005. Although a temporary measure, the move was approached somewhat holistically as additional 4,000 distribution transformers were also delivered to boost distribution capacity. This became necessary because for electricity to be enjoyed eventually by the Nigerian people, power needed to be generated, effectively transmitted in a coordinated manner for efficient distribution. This was the projection of the government that by year 2005 all of these arrangements would have yielded about 10,000 mw from the unacceptable 1,500 mw. But behold, the funding of this exercise was cut short due to the privatization policy of the Federal Government which recognizes the fact that there can no longer be government funding for a utility that has been privatized. Gradually therefore, there was a relapse to the old situation with reduced funding and dependence on the old turbines. The consequence of such inconsistent policy left the power sector in more parlous state.

The Bola Ahmed Tinubu-led administration in Lagos State took a bold step to generate about 270mw into the national grid. The entire idea was to import barges from Enron Corporation in the USA. Lagos State government demonstrated capacity to generate electricity but needed the cooperation of the Federal Government to transmit

owing to politics, the PDP-led Federal Government frustrated the scheme notwithstanding that the Lagos State government had already committed to a bond of about N220 million which would be deducted at source from the state's share of monthly federal allocation. Another intervention was the National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) originally designed as the Niger Delta Power Project (NDPP) with seven medium sized plants which took on a 'national' outlook in 2005 when President Obasanjo ignored his privatization policy to make yet another incursion into the power sector. Obasanjo cleverly bought into the idea when he realized that the project could indeed be funded from the excess crude oil revenue account belonging to the three tiers of government.

However a major challenge suffered by the initiatives of the Federal Government was the controversies regarding sources of funding. Failure to arrive at a consensus on the funding of the IPP through the excess crude oil account jointly owned by Federal, States and Local Government Councils became a major hurdle. Besides, most of the contractors favoured by certain interests within government circle had no registered companies to bid for the job. Besides, those registered were later found to be lacking in requisite expertise to undertake projects of such magnitude; resulting in multiple consultancy services that in turn increased the original appropriation for NIPP in 2005 from N322 billion to N1.210 trillion. More so, a number of these contractors (according to revelation from the House of Representatives Public Hearing) have collected virtually all that was approved for them without visiting the site. Indeed, some of the contractors by some inexplicable reasons are known to have been paid in excess of the contract sum approved for them.

Crisis in the power sector has become the pains of the Nigerian masses. Ten years down the lane of civil governance, the story remains the same. The situation has indeed worsened with far reaching economic implications for Nigerians who continue to suffer excruciating economic and social losses resulting from epileptic power supply. The cost of power outage is scary as statistics reveal that N126b is lost annually by the PHCN owing to power cut while Nigerians spend N200billion to purchase fuel to power millions of generating sets. A World Bank report indicates that 90% of Companies and factories rely on generators. Telecommunication (GSM) operators spent huge sums to fuel generators leading to high tariff paid by Nigerians for telecommunication. More disturbing is that the high cost of power supply is not in term of money alone. Implication for the environment and livelihoods is grave as shown by the negative effects of pollution and emission which contribute to the deterioration of health.

resulted in several hundreds of severe injuries and deaths. Thirteen members of a family in Imo State died as a result of explosion from generator. Another family of six in Benin City, Edo State, fell victims of similar incident. The incident in the Obile community in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State the thirteen members of a family were reportedly choked to death by generator fumes. The victims of the Obile incident include eight children, two pregnant women and three men. Among them were one Ethelbert John, his wife, maid and four children.

According to a report *"the victims were watching television at night and slept off while the generator was on. They were later found dead in the morning. An autopsy conducted and released to the officials of the State Ministry of Health linked the death to carbon monoxide arising from generator fumes. A similar incident was recorded in Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State in 2007 in which eight persons lost their lives."* The incident in Edo State led to the death of a 75 year-old man, Michael Aiwekhoi, his 50-year old wife and four other members of the family. The incident, the report adds *"occurred at his Ihogbe Street residence in Benin City, claimed the life of the son of the deceased, Eric Aiwekhoi, who was to have completed his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme in February this year. It also claimed the life of a graduate of Auchi Polytechnic and three others"*. In July 2008, sixteen people also died in Abia State after a prayer session. The victims reportedly inhaled poisonous fumes from power generating set while they were sleeping after a prayer session.

In December 2008, power generation in the country dropped from about 2,600 megawatts to about 1,200 megawatts. The national demand for power is estimated to be about 10,000 megawatts. Increasing deaths by

generator fumes is an indication of the government's failure to tackle the energy problem. The economic implications of erratic power supply has been a major concern for Nigerians. Productive capacities of various categories of Artisans like Hairdressers, Pepper Grinders, Welders, Tailors and other small scale business centers are been grossly hindered. Now the situation has ignited crisis in the sustainable livelihoods activities of low income families who either solely rely daily returns from small scale engagement for survival or those who depend on this activities to augment earnings from paid employment. In 2006 and 2008, some factories were forced to shut down operations owing to inability to cope with high cost of fueling power generating plants. Some companies that have managed to stay afloat up to 2009 are considering relocating to neighbouring countries, notably Ghana where stable electricity is guaranteed.

#### CONCLUSION

By and large, it is clear that no solution is yet in sight as darkness persists across the country. In the last ten years of civil rule, the power sector has been enmeshed in combination of the ills of politics and corruption typified by ambivalent policy, culture of impunity. Ordinary Nigerians however remain victims of the ugly "power play", crass corruption and unmitigated impunity in the power sector.

**We can all reclaim our rights to constant supply of electricity by demanding:**

- \* **Independent probe of the power sector**
- \* **Prosecution of all indicted for corruption without further delay**
- \* **Regular electricity as campaign issue at the next election.**

*You have the right to democratically elect,  
socially protect and periodically change your leaders.  
Defend this right. Join the cdhr*

#### **HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER**

You can become a member by obtaining, completing and submitting the membership form at any Unit or Branch or the National Secretariat of the CDHR. Membership forms is available at CHDR's website [www.cdhrnigeria.org](http://www.cdhrnigeria.org)

#### **HOW TO FORM A UNIT OF CDHR**

Application to form a Unit must be signed by at least five (5) members and submitted to the Branch or the National Secretariat. Visit [www.cdhrnigeria.org](http://www.cdhrnigeria.org) for further details