# Human Security and Nigeria's Energy Crisis

by Déborah Giusy Londoño Londoño

Nigeria's challenges are not limited to ethno-religious conflicts, poverty, corruption, porous borders and terrorism. The energy sector – particularly power supply and electricity distribution – suffers from severe mismanagement and lack of investments, having adverse effects on internal stability, economic development and human security.

Reliable and efficient access to energy is an indispensible ingredient for sustained economic growth. The energy sector is also fundamental to begin addressing Nigeria's disparate challenges in the security field. Consequently, the energy sector should represent a key priority for the government, and yet large parts of the country still suffer from repeated energy outages and blackouts, some even lasting for days.

According to World Bank figures, 59,3 per cent of the population had access to electricity in 2016.[1] Between January and June 2017, most Nigerians only enjoyed between 7 and 9 hours of daily power supply.[2] To put this into perspective, such data means that Nigeria has about as much electricity as the city of Edinburgh.[3]

Government officials have acknowledged the extent of the problem. Proposed solutions, however, fall well short of what is necessary. Last March, for example, Nigeria's Minister of Power, Works and Housing outlined government plans to increase installed daily capacity to 10,000 MW by 2020 and

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[1] World Bank Data, *Access to electricity (% of population): Nigeria*, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=NG.

[2] NOIPolls, *Quarter 2 2017; Power Supply to Nigerian Households Remains Poor*, 11 July 2017, http://www.noi-polls.com/root/index.php?pid=442&ptid=1&parentid=13.

[3] "Powerless", in *The Economist*, 3 March 2016, https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/03/03/powerless.

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further to 28,000 MW by 2035.[4] These figures are well below estimated daily requirements of 180,000 MW, or about 1,000 MW per million inhabitants.[5]

Energy scarcity affects the daily lives of citizens in different ways. If electricity is not provided, food cannot be refrigerated, the storage of medicines is affected and running water is not available. Furthermore, people are forced to use organic fuels to cook, which increases environmental pollution and health risks, as does the need for independent generators for most commercial activities.

The electricity system suffers from several problems at different levels of supply. These range from the lack of maintenance and repair, to leakages in power transmission and distribution and innumerable cases of energy theft and acts of vandalism. The poor state of lighting system also represents a threat to personal safety. Exposed cables, precarious lampposts, the absence of protective devices can cause accidents and consequently death. In 2017, 366 people died due to electrocution.[6]

The privatization of the energy sector that began in 2005 was originally outlined as a solution to Nigeria's challenges. Attracting foreign investment and dismantling the

National Electric Power Authority's (NEPA) monopoly were billed as a means to improve services and remove political barriers to modernization.[7]

Unfortunately, reforms did not provide the expected results. Capacity has not increased and Nigeria's electric grid generation has remained stable at about 4,000 MW/h since 2005.[8] Instead, the privatization drive increased nepotism and corruption, as the authorities tended to appoint political allies or family members to head the new private distribution companies. Meanwhile, as utility costs went upwards, no significant improvement in power delivery materialized, while layoffs of public employees increased, causing dissatisfaction and public grievances.

People in the less advantaged northern regions of Nigeria are most affected by the energy crisis.[9] The national grid does not cover the whole of these regions. Moreover, since 2009 northern Nigeria has been the theatre of a violent insurgency carried out by the terrorist group Boko Haram (also called *Yusufiyya* after their founder Mohammed Yusuf). Benefitting from an environment of poverty and lack

[4] "Nigeria Eyes 10,000mw by 2020", in *APA News*, 31 January 2018, http://mobile.apanews.net/en/news/nigeria-eyes-10000mw-by-2020.

[5] Roseline Okere, "Nigerians Require 180,000mw of Electricity", in *The Guardian Nigeria*, 20 September 2017, https://guardian.ng/?p=418650.

[6] Gabriel Ewepu, "366 Nigerians killed by electrocution in 2017-NECAN", in *Vanguard News*, 16 January 2018, https://www.vanguardngr.com/?p=925927.

[7] Michael I. Obadan, *Privatization of Public Enterprises in Nigeria. Issues and Conditions for Success in the Second Round*, Ibadan, National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA), 2000.

[8] Ogbonnaya I. Okoro and Edward Chikuni, "Power Sector Reforms in Nigeria: Opportunities and Challenges", in *Journal of Energy in Southern African*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (August 2007), p. 52-57, https://journals.assaf.org.za/index.php/jesa/article/view/3386.

[9] UNDP Nigeria, *National Human Development Report*, December 2015, p. 19, http://hdr.undp.org/en/node/2661.

of services, the group has been able to expand its operations. Lack of electricity and a largely underdeveloped public lighting system are also hampering governmental efforts to tackle the Boko Haram phenomenon.

To achieve human security means creating sustainable social, environmental, economic systems that can provide for the empowerment of society and the individual. Security refers not just to external threats or physical abuse, but also covers development and human rights. In order to address poverty, unemployment, crime and deal with population growth and urbanization, Nigeria urgently needs to take specific steps to modernize and improve its infrastructure.

This cannot be limited to a simple technical upgrade or increased generating capacity. The government needs to rethink its energy strategy as a whole. Addressing the economy's overreliance on petroleum is a key step. Since 1970 the oil sector has developed at the expense of the agricultural one, which currently receives less than 10 per cent of the budget, the goal set by African leaders in the 2003 Maputo agreement.[10]

Oil exports represented 10,4 per cent of GDP in 2017 and about 82 per cent of total export revenues.[11] The collapse of oil prices and the incessant conflict in the Niger Delta region, where oil exploration activities have led to environmental degradation, demonstrate some of the negative consequences of this overreliance on oil exports. In addition, Nigeria also needs has to improve tax collections from the non-oil economy.

Renewable energy may represent part of the solution. In 2012, the Nigerian National Council of Power (NACOP) adopted the country's Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) Action Agenda, a national response to the UN Sustainable Development Goal #7 (SDG) on access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy by 2030.

In 2013, the government launched the Nigerian Energy Support Programme (NESP) co-financed by the EU and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to invest in renewable energy. Meanwhile, the World Bank has financed rural electrification through renewable energy in the framework of the Power Sector Recovery Programme (PSRP).[12]

Nigeria's ongoing energy crisis requires urgent attention. Durable approaches are needed but no quick fix solutions exist. Beginning to address energy supply as directly

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[10] Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013-2017*, 2015, p. 3, http://www.fao.org/3/a-au053e.pdf; New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), *Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme*, July 2003, http://www.nepad.org/node/4052.

[11] See OPEC website: *Nigeria Facts and Figures* (data from the OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2018), https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/167.htm.

[12] World Bank, *Upscaling Mini Grids for Low-Cost & Timely Access to Electricity*, December 2017, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/851271512391124096.

related to Nigeria's wider hard security challenges may result in increased focus and prioritization, but a simple "securitization" of the sector will not suffice.

Government officials, international non-governmental organizations and major donors would do well to prioritize Nigeria's energy sector as the fundamental motor for the countries continued growth. Yet, more transparency, public oversight and accountability will be key to reviving the sector.

The energy sector is the basis to develop a vibrant economy and attract investments. Energy is moreover considered an indispensible ingredient for the attainment of all of the UN's 17 SDGs. Ultimately, development and a more sustainable and efficient power sector will have carry on effects on Nigeria's other challenges, beginning from ongoing efforts to counter the threat of radical ideologies.

Helping to address popular grievances and contribute to more stable and sustainable state-society relations in Nigeria will be key achieving human security in the country. Without improvements in energy generation, management and coverage, Nigeria will be hard pressed to address the challenges of tomorrow.

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