



POWER OUTAGE AND VANDALISM IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *There are prevalent cases of vandalism on the national grid which usually throws Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria into darkness due to power outages. Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) is facing serious challenges of vandalism on electricity facilities across the country as it affects power supply, a situation that has become a social problem affecting both the rich and the poor. This study was conducted to examine the cause of power outage in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Participants were selected using multiple sampling techniques; this includes purposive, snow-ball and simple sampling techniques. Primary data were collected through interview and participant observation. Secondary data were collected from extant literature to make it more scientific. The study recommends that the government should provide a security network that would protect electricity facilities across the state. Government should prosecute any vandal caught sabotaging electricity facilities in the state.*

KEYWORDS: Insecurity, Power Outage, Vandalism, Sabotage.



INTRODUCTION

Vandalism has become a social problem in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general as industries, communities, households and government parastatals are usually thrown into darkness due to vandalism and sudden collapse of the national grid. Electricity facilities such as transformers, cables, insulators and electric poles are being vandalized by hoodlums and scrap scavengers. Recently, there has been a proliferation of scavengers across the entire country who parade themselves around rural and urban centers buying scraps and also vandalizing public facilities, especially electricity facilities.

Electricity facilities are being vandalized at every slightest opportunity and the effect of these acts is always very devastating as it causes power outages in Akwa Ibom State and other parts of the country. Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) has reported several cases of vandalism that led to nationwide blackouts because of the effect on the national grid. The youths are the people masterminding vandalism as these vandals go about removing bolts and nuts from the high-tension towers, thereby compromising the base of the towers resulting in its eventual collapse which the cut those steels and scale as scraps. In the course of their operations, some of them are electrocuted while some are caught in the process they are killed through jungle justice (Esara et al., 2023).

Communities and streets in Akwa Ibom State facing challenges of electricity facility vandalism usually remain in darkness for several months and years; this is equally applicable to other states in Nigeria. These vandalized facilities are usually restored by state government or collective efforts of the people through self-help, by contributing a stipulated levy for the purpose of restoring the stolen electricity facilities. Power outages as a result of vandalism usually affect economic activities within the affected area, because small scale businesses would be directly affected due to lack of power. Power outages due to change in transmission usually encourage vandalism because hoodlums do use these opportunities to vandalize electricity facilities, knowing that power outages in some places do last for several hours and days depending on the feeder that supplies voltage in the area.

Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) needs to intensify efforts in partnership with communities and state government in order to safeguard electricity facilities from the hands of vandals who are wandering day and night looking for the slightest chance to vandalize electricity facilities and throw the people into darkness. Electricity is one of the driving forces of development, it has been observed by the rural developers that once any particular rural area is connected to the national grid, the population of such a place increases drastically as people troop in to develop their residential houses and commercial centers that depend on power.

Power outage is counterproductive because of its effect on economic development, it usually pushes residents and business owners to relocate from one place to another undermining the growth and development of the former location. Power outages are not caused solely by activities of vandals alone, at times, it happens as a result of negligence and sabotage by some corrupt officials that prefer to replace inferior facilities in place of original and these facilities cannot withstand existing usage; it collapses and results in power outage. Officials of Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) have been informing the public concerning their experience on the challenges of power outage across the country and these are usually reported on the media for urgent intervention and record purposes. Power outage is one of the challenges that hinder the development of Nigeria because both micro- and macro-businesses need power



for their daily operations. Power is one of the sectors of the economy that generate huge revenue to the government and also create valuable business opportunities to both public and private companies operating across Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Power outage is a social problem that affects both the rich and the poor in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general. This ugly situation has affected both medium and small scale enterprises in the state as electricity facilities are vandalized on a daily basis. Nigeria has a chronic electricity shortage that has affected the country for many years. It is worthy to mention that most of these community electrification projects are collective effort through self-help and when these facilities are vandalized, it usually takes these communities some years to restore stolen electricity facilities in some communities both urban and rural that have people in government who draw the attention of government for prompt intervention. Most of these community electrification projects are sponsored by their indigenes who are outside the country who usually send remittance for community development projects. It is always very disgusting to see these facilities being vandalized by the youths of these communities in partnership with electricity company officials who usually shut down power for these vandals to have free access to vandalized these facilities and after the money is usually shared among the crime syndicates who engage in theft as a way for survival. This situation is why we are having rampant cases of jungle justice as the people now resort to setting any thief ablaze to serve as a deterrent to others who are engaging in theft as a legitimate medium for survival (Esara, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the cause of incessant cases of power outage in some parts of the state and Nigeria in general, while the specific objectives are:

- i. To investigate the measures put in place by government and communities to guide against future occurrence;
- ii. To investigate how stolen electricity facilities are restored back for use; and
- iii. To make recommendations that would help in the reduction in electricity facilities vandalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The incessant cases of power outage in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general is as a result of Vandalism and grid collapse. Although electricity has been generated in commercial quantities in Nigeria for over a century, the rate of electricity infrastructure development in the country is low and power supply remains inadequate. Prior to reforms, the central challenges of the Nigerian power sector was the vertically integrated monopoly of government in power generation, transmission and distribution. While the reforms were successful in privatizing the power generation and distribution segments of the Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry (NESI), the overbearing problems in the sector persisted with privatization only changing the dimensions of the challenges (Oyeowo, 2018).



Financing remains a major problem across all the segments of the NESI partly due to non-cost reflective tariff. Yet each segment of the NESI is faced with its unique challenges. The generation segment is riddled with the problems of grid collapse, vandalism and energy security. The inefficiencies in other segments and the challenges in the transmission segment lies in the lack of modern transmission lines and equipment, gross mismanagement, poor maintenance of available infrastructures and inefficient grid design. In a bid to tackle the aforementioned challenges, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) set ambitious targets for the country's energy mix. This should allow Nigeria exploit its potential for coal, solar, wind, biomass as well as small and large hydroelectric power electric generation, while reducing the prevalence of self-generation, which constitute two-third of present energy mix. In 2018, the FGN targets to achieve up to 75 percent access to electricity by connecting 1-5 million households annually (Oyewo, 2018).

While Nigeria's energy mix targets are desirable, the prospect of success remains bleak on account of financial constraints, pricing policy and lack of policy coordination. Improving electricity supply in Nigeria and addressing barriers to achieving the energy mix targets will entail efforts in addressing incessant vandalism, grid collapse, addressing payment risk, financing power sector investment, providing security as well as improving the pricing and tariff structure, gas pricing and allocation and market republic, power generation was mainly the Federal Government's responsibility through National Electric Power Authority (NEPA). However, reforms started in 2005, in which the Electric Power Sector Reform Act (EPSRA) signing opened up the industry to private investors (Oguguo, 2020).

In 2010, the Nigerian Bulk Electricity Trading Plc (NBET) was established as a credible off taker of electric power generation companies. In 2014, the sector was privatized with three groups having the responsibility of providing power. By November 2013, the privatization of all generation and II distribution companies was completed, with the Federal Government retaining the ownership of the transmission company. Current electricity generated in Nigeria needs to be improved due to incessant power outages as a result of vandalism, there is demand for power by households and businesses. The usual grid collapse has affected by infrastructural and maintenance issues, which indicates electricity loss in transmission and theft from unauthorized connections which usually return voltage and damage equipment, lack of proper maintenance of transformers, poor management and corruption are a few of the reasons Nigeria has produced suboptimal electricity (Adedji, 2016). Grid collapse usually results in low voltage or total outage. However, some customers, for example, industries and commercial customers like, flour mills, paper mills, refineries, steel rolling mills, cement factories, rice mills, may receive their power directly from the primary distribution line depending on their power utilization (Oseni, 2011).

According to Esara, Asuquo and Ekanem (2023), in pre-colonial Africa, society was governed using traditional measures to ensure stability of law and order. People who acted contrary to societal norms and values were subjected to flogging, payment of fine, banishment amongst others. As noted by Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024), traditional cults are seen as ancestors coming to the land of the living to fight crime, deviant behaviors, social ills and oppression. It is a general belief of the people that the supernatural powers possessed by these cult groups are given to them by the gods of the land, which is why anybody behaving contrary to the norms and values of these cults must get spiritual sanction from the gods which usually result in untimely death. Vandalizing electrical equipment is against the norms of the society and often land those involved in such acts in untimely death. As posited by Esara, Asuquo and Samuel



(2024), the persistent communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State have increased the level of poverty as lives and properties are destroyed thereby affecting the economy of the State. Some of these properties destroyed are electrical installations, this always throws communities into darkness.

As posited by Asuquo and Ekanem(2023), corruption hampers development and thus raises the level of poverty in any economy that finds itself entrenched in corrupt practices. Corruption is a serious crime in Nigeria and it is punishable by the law. Vandalizing electrical installations which belong to the public is also an act of criminality and it is punishable by law. As seen by Esara, Mfon and Walter (2024), cultism is a social problem disturbing the society; cultism can be reckoned as one of the highest forms of murder and unlawful activities that have taken over the streets, communities, LGAs and the State as a whole. Most of these vandalisms are done by cultists. To Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024), the issue of security, peace and development remain at the center of focus on national and international research and topical discourse. Hoodlums who vandalized electrical installations contribute to insecurity in Akwa Ibom State. Daniel, Ekoriko, Akpan and Nsima (2024) opined that despite the importance of this issue, there is a lack of research specifically exploring the relationship between electrical vandalism and power outage. Scholars, such as Akpan, Ekoriko, Ekanem and Ottong (2024), equally observed that the act of vandalism has seriously eroded academic excellence in Nigeria's institutions of learning- primary, secondary or tertiary due to power outages.

Asuquo, Ekanem, Samuel and Esara (2023) argued that the inadequate provision of infrastructural services and the associated problems has affected most business firms as they spend more of their capital outlay on providing their own infrastructure - electricity, water supply, transport, telecommunications, and waste disposal which, under normal circumstances should have been provided by the urban planning authorities. Some of these infrastructures are even vandalized by hoodlums. Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024) observed that these hoodlums can break into people's houses or offices, hospitals, shops, churches or banks to vandalize electrical installations for their selfish gain. Esara, Mfon and Walter (2024) noted that those who work in armory simply sell arms and ammunition to armed robbers. Any person who is accused of committing a crime ought to be charged accordingly and if found wanting, he or she is to be punished in accordance with the law. As such those involved in vandalizing electrical installations should be made to face the rod of the law.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Retributive Theory of Justice propounded by Cesare Beccaria in 1764 and expanded by other scholars. For proper understanding of Vandalism and Power Outage in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, Retributive Theory of Justice is understood as a form of justice committed on the following three principles:

- i. That those who commit certain kinds of wrongful acts, paradigmatically serious crimes, morally deserve to suffer a proportionate punishment.
- ii. That it is intrinsically morally good without reference to any other goods that might arise if some legitimate punisher gives them the punishment they deserve.
- iii. That it is morally impermissible to intentionally punish the innocent or to inflict disproportionately large punishment on wrongdoers (Walen, 2016). The 'just deserts' theory of sentence advocates that punishment should be proportionate to the gravity of



the crime committed. Proponents of the just deserts philosophy emphasize the importance of due process, determinate sentences and the removal of judicial discretion in sentencing practice.

Unlike theories that are primarily concerned with preventing future offenses, such as deterrence, rehabilitation and incapacitation, constructivist theories are only concerned with punishing crimes that have already been committed. The concept of “just deserts” seeks to preserve human dignity through punishment. It asserts that a person is a rational individual with freewill to make a moral choice whether or not to engage in conduct known to be prohibited. Retribution under a just deserts principle treats a defendant as a dignified human being by responding to his or her conduct in a way that respects his or her choice to engage in wrongful behavior (Hirsch, 1976).

Under this definition of retribution, crime is a conduct that disturbs the “right” relationships with the society. That is the relationships between offender and victim, offender and community and victim and community. A criminal “deserves” to be punished because he or she violated the “moral order” and proportionally is the rope used to measure the type of punishment he or she deserves. In other words, the level of punishment must be proportional to the crime he or she has committed rather than taking laws for granted. Because punishment has been observed not to be commensurate with the crime committed, higher punishment might infringe upon the right of the alleged criminal, but not jungle justice, as it contradicts the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Jungle justice is triggered by provocation and frustration caused by seriousness of the crime committed by vandalizing power facilities by throwing the people into darkness, jungle justice set in to serve as deterrent to others engaging in theft (Esara, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a survey method in carrying out this research. Participants were selected across 10 Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, mainly Uyo, Itu, Ikot Ekpene, Eket, Uruan, Ikot Abasi, Ibesikpo, Abak, Nsit Ubium, Nsit Ibom. Participants were selected using multiple sampling techniques; this includes purposive, snowball and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data were collected through FGDs and participant observation. Secondary data were collected from extant literature to make the study more scientific. Data were analyzed thematically using excerpts from the FGDs conducted.

RESULT/DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The result of this study shows that in most cases power outages were as a result of vandalism. 60% of the respondents said that electricity facilities were vandalized across various communities in the state, throwing the state into darkness.

The participants from Oku Iboku in the Local Government Area, narrates:

We have experienced power outages over time in these communities as a result of vandalism. Now we have our community security of vandalism, now we have our community security that protects these facilities, especially the transformers. We also charge our people to see security



as everybody's business, because we are the ones enjoying the light. However, when these electricity facilities are vandalized we are the people that contribute to restore it not the NEPA officials (Interviewed on 02-02-2024).

The participants from Uyo Local Government Area narrates:

Most of the cases of power outage is as a result of vandalism and installation of substandard facilities by Transmission Company of Nigeria "TCN" these situations usually result in grid collapse (Interviewed on 03-03-2024).

In an interview with the Regional Transmission Manager, Port Harcourt Region Engr. Daniel Udofia.

Engr. Daniel Udofia accused the youths of masterminding the vandalism of the high tension tower by removing bolts and nuts from the tower, thereby compromising the base and resulting in its eventual collapse (Interviewed on 11-04-2022).

In an interview with the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Transmission Company of Nigeria, Engr. S. A. Abdul Aziz and Executive Director Transmission Service Provider, TCN, Engr. (Dr.) Victor Adewunmi said that the nationwide blackout experienced last week has been traced to the vandalism on the National Grid High tension tower in Akwa Ibom State (Interviewed on 11-04-2022).

In an interview with the Commissioner of Police of Akwa Ibom State Police Command, P. Ajetola Durusemi in his office said that there are several cases of vandalism in electricity facilities. He charged community leaders to volunteer information to police, assuring them that the police are ready to arrest and prosecute all culprits to serve as deterrence to others (Interviewed on 01-02-2024).

FINDINGS

The findings of this study have shown that the incessant cases of vandalism and power outage in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general, is as a result of economic sabotage by youths and power company officials who shut down power and give way for vandalism. The findings also showed that police are not helping matters, thereby creating lack of trust among the people by releasing culprits on bail; this situation forces the people to resort to jungle justice to serve as deterrent and guide against future occurrence. The findings also show that corruption is a major factor in power outages as power officials and management prefer to replace vandalized facilities with substandard facilities thereby causing grid collapse. The findings further reveal that another factor responsible for power outage is the poor maintenance culture and negligence that cause damage to power facilities. The findings shown that whenever there is vandalism in power facilities, power company management takes time to intervene or the people contribute money for replacement, or receive direct intervention from the government.

The findings further show that most electrification projects are solely undertaken through community efforts "self-help" from remittances sent by their statesmen from abroad to encourage community development, but it is sad that these facilities are vandalized. The findings showed that the electricity company is responsible for vandalism because they usually shut down power for several days and week thereby giving a chance for vandals to vandalize



these facilities at the detriment of the innocent poor masses. The findings also show that police usually collect money from vandals that were apprehended by community vigilante for prosecution and conviction by court of competent jurisdiction. (Offiong, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Vandalism and power outage is a social problem because it affects a significant number of people in the society. Communities both rural and urban should endeavor to protect public facilities, because government is trying to make sure that all social infrastructures, not only electricity, but also roads, pipe borne water, hospitals, schools and other things in Akwa Ibom State and Nigerian general that government has provided for the well-being of her citizens. This would encourage the government to provide more life touching projects for the people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Communities should constitute vigilante groups that would protect power facilities from vandals.
- ii. Government should prosecute police, youths and power officials in connection with vandalism.
- iii. Communities should regulate the activities of scavengers.

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APPENDIX I



Reported Cases of Vandalism and Power Outage in Akwa Ibom State.