

SPEECH BY
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
GAMBIA,
H.E ADAMA BARROW,
EVENT: LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION
STONE OF A 30KV LINE FROM
LAMINKOTO TO DIABUGU-BATAPA
DATE: 10TH JULY 2021

Honourable Cabinet Ministers,
Honourable National Assembly Members,
Senior Government Officials,
Service Chiefs,
Governors,
Local Government Authorities,
Venerable Religious Leaders,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the Media.

Allow me to express my sincere gratitude to the people of Sami and, by extension, the entire Central and Upper River Regions for the warm welcome accorded to me and my delegation. It is also an honour to have so many dignitaries in attendance. I thank you for your presence.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Access to energy is, without doubt, of crucial importance to our country, for without electricity, there can be no real development. Without energy, there can be no modern industry, and processing our agricultural and raw materials would be hampered. In short, there would be no modern economy without energy.

It is sad and a great social injustice that most parts of our country have been without electricity since independence, thus denying them an essential aspect of a comfortable life.

In 2017, when my government came into office, most parts of the country were experiencing erratic and unreliable power supply. By 2018, however, we managed to stabilise the situation. We have since made appropriate policy reforms, and have made significant investment interventions in the sector to meet the country's electricity needs.

Against this backdrop, today marks an important milestone in respect of realising the Government's universal access to electricity objectives. In the drive to electrifying the entire country by 2025, we are here to launch a new phase of extending the national electricity grid to another area in rural Gambia. This Laminkoto-Diabugu link is part of The Gambia Electricity Restoration and Modernization Project Medium Voltage backbone networks.

The goal of this component is to enable medium voltage coverage within this area. The contract is the first phase of an ambitious project to electrify forty-six villages from Laminkato to Diabugu in the Sami and Sandu districts, at a cost of over Eight Million United States Dollars.

Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In September 2011, the UN launched the Sustainable Energy for All initiative. This is a multi-stakeholder partnership designed to attain universal access to modern energy services, and double both the global improvement energy efficiency rate and the share of renewable energy in global energy production.

It is also one of the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and forms part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015. Even in the absence of these global initiatives and targets, my government recognises that energy is a crucial factor for sustainable development and poverty alleviation, as well as for addressing key global development challenges confronting us.

I am happy to state, therefore, that The Gambia is on course to achieving universal access to electricity by 2025; in fact, we will do so five years earlier than the international target. This will be a huge achievement, and it illustrates my government's performance in the energy sector.

I assure you that energy will remain a critical, cross-cutting issue on our economic development agenda, because we recognise the vital linkages between energy and health, education, food security, foreign direct investment, poverty reduction, and climate change, to cite a few examples.

Despite the notable progress and achievements realised in the energy sector within a short period, there is no room for complacency. We must sustain and build on our gains by maintaining an enabling environment with the right policies, institutions, strategic planning, regulations, and incentives for private sector participation. Furthermore, we will continue exploring both on and off-grid solutions in our universal access to electricity campaign.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is obvious that the rural area has been grossly disadvantaged by inadequate supply and access to electricity. In spite of the high cost of providing electricity schemes to low populated and remote settlements, we consider it the right of all citizens to access electricity, regardless of their residential area.

As part of our all-inclusive approach to development, the provision of social and economic amenities to our rural dwellers is a highly ranked priority to enhance and improve living conditions.

With this in mind, nothing will deter us from providing such services, be it economic, political, or other considerations. Our focus is on the impact such investments will have on the lives and livelihoods of our people, irrespective of where they live.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Guided by this commitment, it is heartening that, from 2017 to date, access to energy has increased considerably in the country. I am happy to note the difference electricity supply has made in many small villages on the North and South banks of the country.

The Government is proud of this achievement, and I encourage the Ministry of Energy and NAWEC to accelerate efforts to cover the rest of the country by 2025.

In the same vein, I urge the Ministry of Energy, PURA, and NAWEC to work together to create alternative options of reaching out to areas outside the NAWEC grid. In this regard, the enormous potential in innovative financing and implementation of mini-grids and solar home solutions is quite encouraging. Accordingly, we will continue to explore low-cost power sources to make electricity consumption affordable to all citizens.

Before concluding, I must thank the World Bank and the European Investment Bank for funding this project. We are thankful also to all relevant stakeholders for their support and collaboration in making this event a success.

I urge the Contractor to deliver quality work within the agreed project schedule.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my singular honour to lay the foundation stone for the Laminkoto-Diabugu 30KV line electricity project.

I thank you all for your kind attention.