

Editorial

Towards Sustainable Energy Access

The planned commissioning of nationwide electricity access projects by President Adama Barrow across the Upper River Region (URR), Central River Region (CRR), Lower River Region (LRR), and the West Coast Region between February 11 and 15, 2026, is an important step in The Gambia's development. The projects are being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum, Energy and Mines (MOPEM) and NAWEC under the ECOWAS-supported ECOREAP programme, with funding from the World Bank.

Electricity plays a key role in national development. It supports better healthcare, improves education, strengthens businesses, and raises the standard of living. For many rural and underserved communities, access to electricity brings new opportunities and hope. It allows people to start small businesses, improve farming activities, and access modern services. In this sense, the ongoing projects support national efforts to reduce development gaps between urban and rural areas.

The scale of the project shows clear commitment. The construction of 142 kilometers of medium voltage lines, 350 kilometers of low voltage lines, and 92 substations is expected to benefit more than 100,000 people. These improvements are likely to boost local economic activities and improve service delivery, especially in regions that have long lacked stable electricity.

These efforts also align with the Government's goal of achieving universal electricity access. Over \$200 million has been invested in the energy sector, showing strong political will and effective partnerships with development partners. Plans to connect The Gambia's national grid to the West African Power Pool also reflect a forward-looking approach to improving energy supply and reliability.

However, while the progress is encouraging, it is important to focus on sustainability. Expanding access is only meaningful if electricity is reliable, affordable, and well managed. In the past, challenges such as frequent power cuts, delays in maintenance, and billing complaints have affected public trust. These issues must be addressed to ensure that communities truly benefit from the investments being made.

There is also a need for strong community involvement. People should be educated on safe electricity use, proper payment systems, and the importance of protecting infrastructure. When communities feel responsible for these facilities, cases of damage and misuse can be reduced. At the same time, NAWEC must continue to strengthen its technical capacity and improve customer service to meet growing demand.

Environmental concerns should not be ignored. As electricity access expands, renewable energy sources, especially solar power, should be further promoted. This will help reduce dependence on fossil fuels and support long-term energy security.

In conclusion, the nationwide electricity projects mark real progress in The Gambia's development journey. They show commitment to improving the lives of citizens and supporting economic growth. However, success will depend on how well these systems are maintained and managed in the long term. With careful planning, accountability, and continued investment, electricity access can serve as a strong foundation for sustainable development across the country.

Opinion:

The Gambia's Silent Soundtrack: A 20-Year Failure to Pay Musicians

By Haddy Gaye

For more than two decades, an Act of Parliament has mandated the collection of royalties for musicians in The Gambia. The Collecting Society of The Gambia (CSG), established by law in 2004, was created to ensure that artists are paid for the public use of their work. Yet, twenty-one years on, the system remains largely non-functional, leaving the country's most prominent musical voices uncompensated.

The music of Gambian artists such as Lalo Kaba, Jaliba Kuyateh, ST, Sona Jobarteh, Attack, Jizzle, and many others forms the soundtrack of daily life. Their songs are played in commercial spaces, public venues, transport hubs, and across radio and television airwaves. While the law requires royalty payments for such public usage, the collection mechanism has never operated effectively. Music purchased once for private listening generates no additional income for its creator when repeatedly played in profit-making environments.

As the Registrar General, Mr. Abdoulie Colley, aptly noted, "Once a debt is always a debt." The financial obligation owed to The Gambia's creative community continues to accumulate.

The 2004 Copyright Act prom-

ised more than royalty collection. It envisioned formal employment within the creative sector, the establishment of a national music archive, contributions to gross domestic product, and tax revenue for the state. Above all, it sought to provide artists with sustainable livelihoods—offering a dignified alternative to irregular migration.

These ambitions have failed to materialise.

The CSG lacks the operational capacity to track usage, collect licensing fees, or distribute payments. This institutional failure has driven several leading Gambian musicians to register with collecting societies in Senegal, seeking protection and recognition from a foreign system that their own country has failed to provide. This development raises serious concerns about national cultural sovereignty and the state's responsibility to its creative professionals.

Meanwhile, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has offered to support the Gambian government through the Intellectual Property Office under the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Registrar General. The proposed intervention includes technical systems and operational support valued at over one million US dollars to establish a functional IP office and an effective collecting society. However, this support remains

unrealised as the necessary bill is still before the National Assembly.

Current advocacy efforts are focused on activating the Copyright Office and strengthening the Intellectual Property Office at the Ministry of Justice. Central to this push is the practical enforcement of existing laws, including the proposed administrative transfer of copyright matters to the Ministry of Justice—an initiative also awaiting legislative approval.

Critical questions now demand answers:

- Why has the 2004 Copyright Act never been fully implemented?
- Who benefits from the uncompensated use of Gambian musical works?
- What does the migration of artists to Senegalese collecting societies mean for national cultural sovereignty?
- When will the National Assembly pass the bill to protect musicians' rights?

This issue goes beyond unpaid royalties. It represents a breach of the social and economic contract between the state and an entire sector. Every day without a functioning royalty collection system is a loss for artists, a missed opportunity for economic growth, and a steady erosion of the nation's cultural capital.

The debt remains. And settlement is long overdue.

Belgian Friends Present Computer lab Materials to Schools



By Lamin B. Darboe

Belgian Friends of The Gambia (BFGTG), last week presented computer lab, and educational items, including wood and metal work tools, wool, sewing items, desktops, laptops, external hard-disks, mouse, keyboards, beamer and garden materials, to schools within West Coast Region (WCR), and Kanifing Municipality (KM), a separate ceremonies held at the beneficiary institution.

Educational materials

The organisation also donated 252 bags of rice to their sponsored students attending New Yundum Lower Basic School in region two of West Coast Region.

The beneficiary schools are: New Yundum Lower Basic School, Bakoteh Proper, Bakoteh Upper

and Senior Secondary schools, St. Therese Lower and Upper School Basic Schools and Latri-Kunda German Lower Basic School.

The Belgian Friends of The Gambia (BFGTG) for the first time went to St. Therese's Upper Basic School, where they started a new project and they also visited Widar Nursery School at Kotu Quarry, where they presented educational items like reading books, toys, backpacks, among others.

Over the weekend, the donors held their 1st presentation of 40 sponsored boxes at Nyodemba Nursery school for their sponsored students attending Bakoteh Annex Lower Basic School.

Heads of beneficiary institutions expressed delight for the kind gesture and extended gratitude to their sponsoring friends in Belgium through the organisation's chairman, Patrick de Vos and Christa.

They assured the donors that the materials donated will be put to good use.