

Electricity is a Right, not a Privilege

- Tunkara Pushes Borderless Energy Future for West Africa

Declaring that access to electricity must be treated as a fundamental right rather than a privilege, the Fourth Deputy Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, Hon. Billay Tunkara, has called for stronger regional cooperation and harmonized energy policies to accelerate rural electrification and guarantee reliable power to every community across West Africa by 2030. Speaking on the sidelines of the just concluded ~~Delocalized Joint Committee Meeting of the ECOWAS Parliament in Dakar~~, Tunkara said the West African Power Pool (WAPP) remains central to the region's ambition of achieving universal access to electricity and unlocking economic opportunities for millions living in rural areas. The meeting, which brought together the Committees on Energy and Mines, Infrastructure, Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, is examining the theme: "Harnessing Renewable Energy for Rural Electrification and Empowerment of Rural Economies in the ECOWAS Region:

The Role of the ECOWAS Parliament." "Our aim and objective is that by 2030, West Africa should have 100 per cent coverage in terms of access to electricity," Tunkara said. "We want member states to renew their commitment, particularly towards rural communities, because these areas require greater attention." He stressed that the ECOWAS Parliament sees electricity as a catalyst for economic growth, youth employment and entrepreneurship, while also addressing post-harvest losses faced by rural women engaged in agriculture. "We see electricity not as a privilege, but as a right. Every child, whether living far or near, should have access to electricity," he said. According to him, access to reliable energy can transform the lives of women farmers who spend months cultivating vegetables and fruits only to lose much of their produce because of inadequate storage facilities. "If there are refrigeration facilities powered by electricity, the pains and hardship of labour can be preserved through better storage, ensuring that the efforts of rural women are not wasted," he added. Tunkara described cross-border cooperation as indispensable to the success of the region's energy agenda, saying regional integration cannot be achieved without member states supporting one another. "The West African Power Pool is a manifestation of regional integration," he said, citing the Sambangalou Dam project in Guinea, which supplies electricity to Senegal and The Gambia and complements national efforts to expand energy access.

He explained that neighbouring countries often rely on one another to extend electricity to communities located near border areas, making cooperation more practical and cost-effective. "Senegal supplies electricity to complement our national efforts, and in some border communities we also supply electricity to parts of Senegal because of geographical realities. Cross-border cooperation allows member states to address deficiencies and strengthen energy security," he noted. The Gambian lawmaker identified regulatory disparities and tariff differences among member states as major obstacles slowing regional renewable energy projects. "We need to harmonize our legal frameworks and advocate common tariffs so that we can all speak the same language in terms of legal instruments governing electricity," he said. According to him, wide variations in electricity tariffs across countries make it difficult to ensure equitable access and seamless regional energy trade. "Where one country charges excessively high rates and another charges lower rates, it becomes difficult. As parliamentarians, we are looking at these regulations and seeking ways to harmonize them for the benefit of the entire region," he said.

Tunkara expressed optimism that the ongoing meeting in Dakar would produce concrete recommendations and resolutions aimed at improving energy access for rural populations across the sub-region. He said the recommendations from the joint committees would be presented before the ECOWAS Parliament for deliberation and adoption before being transmitted to the ECOWAS Commission and subsequently to Heads of State and Government for consideration and implementation. "The discussion will not stop here. The recommendations will be tabled before the Community Parliament, and after deliberations, resolutions will be forwarded to the Commission for onward transmission to the Authority of Heads of State and Government," he said. As West Africa intensifies efforts to harness renewable energy and close the electricity gap, Tunkara maintained that regional solidarity and coordinated policies would be critical to ensuring that no community is left behind in the drive toward universal energy access. "If we are to integrate and cooperate, cross-border cooperation is indispensable. Together, we can ensure that every West African child grows up with access to electricity and the opportunities it brings," he said.



Renewable Energy Must Become a Catalyst for Rural Economic Empowerment in West Africa – ECOWAS Parliament

The ECOWAS Parliament has called for accelerated investment in renewable energy to drive rural economic empowerment across West Africa, warning that millions of people remain without access to electricity despite the region's vast renewable energy resources. The call was made at the opening of a five-day Delocalized Joint Committee Meeting of the ECOWAS Parliament in Dakar, Senegal, where lawmakers, energy experts, government officials, development partners and private sector actors are examining strategies to expand rural electrification and stimulate economic growth. The meeting, themed “Harnessing Renewable Energy for Rural Electrification and Empowerment of Rural Economies in the ECOWAS Region: The Role of the ECOWAS Parliament,” comes amid concerns over the region's persistent energy deficit. Participants noted that rural electricity access in the ECOWAS region remains critically low, with some estimates placing access at about 12 per cent of rural households, while less than 40 per cent of the rural population overall has reliable electricity supply.

Declaring the session open on behalf of the Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, Rt. Hon. Hadja Memounatou Ibrahima, the Fourth Deputy Speaker, Hon. Billay Tunkara, said renewable energy must be viewed not only as a solution to electricity shortages but as a powerful tool for economic transformation. “Renewable energy is not merely a technical response to electricity demand. It is a key driver in transforming economic activities, particularly in rural areas,” Tunkara said. He stressed that access to clean energy could unlock opportunities for farmers, women and young entrepreneurs while improving livelihoods and fostering sustainable development across the sub-region. Tunkara also commended Senegal's progress in energy transition, citing investments in solar energy and efforts to diversify the national energy mix, which have expanded electricity access to hundreds of rural households. He further praised President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's commitment to energy sovereignty and urged ECOWAS member states to deepen investments in renewable energy through innovative financing, technology transfer, local manufacturing and stronger legislative oversight. “Together, let us make rural electrification through renewable energy a catalyst for the economic empowerment of women, young people and farmers. Access to clean energy is a fundamental right, a factor in social peace and a driver of sustainable development,” he added.



In his welcome address, Head of the Senegalese Delegation to the ECOWAS Parliament, Hon. Guy Marius Sagna, described the gathering as a strategic platform for advancing energy sovereignty in West Africa. According to Sagna, the region possesses enormous solar and renewable energy potential, yet rural communities continue to suffer from limited access to electricity. “The figures speak for themselves. In our ECOWAS region, access to electricity for rural households is still capped at around 12 per cent, while our region boasts exceptional solar potential. This gap between our resources and their exploitation is a challenge that we must collectively and urgently address,” he said. Sagna argued that achieving energy independence is essential to tackling some of the

region's most pressing challenges, including poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and underdevelopment. Earlier, Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Energy and Mines, Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, and Infrastructure, Hon. Fanta Conte, said the meeting was convened in response to the widening gap between energy demand and supply across ECOWAS member

states. She disclosed that fewer than 40 per cent of rural residents in the region have access to electricity, with the figure dropping below 10 per cent in some remote communities. “Less than 40 per cent of the rural population has access to electricity. In some of our Member States, this rate falls below 10 per cent in the most remote areas,” Conte said. She noted that inadequate electricity access continues to undermine healthcare delivery, agricultural productivity, education and income-generating activities, particularly for women and youth in rural communities. Conte emphasized the need for member states to domesticate and implement key regional frameworks, including the ECOWAS Renewable Energy Policy and the Energy Efficiency Action Plan, to accelerate progress in rural electrification. The parliamentary meeting, which runs until June 19, will feature technical presentations, stakeholder consultations and field visits to renewable energy projects in Mboursine village. Delegates are expected to develop recommendations aimed at expanding renewable energy deployment, strengthening rural economies and advancing sustainable development throughout West Africa.