

Electric grid dakar

This page contains general information about electricity access in Senegal, some statements on what electricity might be able to teach us about inequality in Senegal and information about the history of the Dakar electric grid taken from documents found at the Senegal National Archives in Medina.

Senegal's national electric agency tasked with providing electricity to urban areas is called SENELEC and provides 63% of the total grid electric capacity of Senegal. Private, independent companies provide 37% of the total electric capacity.¹

Rural electricity is managed by an organization called ASER and depends on energy delivered off of the main power grid by diesel powered generators. Less than 30% of the rural population of Senegal has access to electricity, which is below the target availability level for 2015.²

Even when rural households are directly over an electric line, they may not be electrified due to limited incomes or due to a lifestyle that doesn't currently involve many activities that would benefit from electricity. However when rural areas are electrified, demand has increased. After electricity became available at two population centers in the Leone region, there was a large increase in "commercial activities, such as dressmaking, carpentry, welding, and commerce, which require electricity".³

One important factor to consider that is missing from some of the electricity planning literature is that villages tend to share resources like televisions and other appliances, so even if relatively few people have personal access to electricity in their household, they may have access within their community, which would allow them to engage in personal or maybe even commercial activities that require electricity.

One of the problems inherit in electricity planning for the rural areas is that the cost of diesel generators tracks the price of oil, and as a result are susceptible to relatively large fluctuations. The actual grid is often more robust than the decentralized diesel stations, but there is evidence to suggest that grid expansion is only cost-effective for between 20% - 50% of people living in rural areas, in particular those in population centers of 5000+ people.⁵

In order to learn more about the history of the electric grid of Senegal, some research was conducted in the National Archives in Medina. The earliest planning document about the electric grid is a 1904 letter from an employee in the public works division of the government of Senegal.

It appears that the chief purpose of the creation of the grid was to provide public lighting and improve reliability of telegram. The Mayor of Dakar at the time was also very involved, and needed to approve all parts of the process.

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A very interesting aspect of the early Dakar electricity project in the archives is that many of the requirements changed from the original plan, including the number of years the project would take as can be seen by the 30 years crossed out to be replaced with 50 years in the letter above.

It is also interesting that because the uses of electricity at the time were primarily urban, like telegraph and lighting, the foundations built on in 1904 have tremendous impacts on electric costs for all sorts of other electricity powered activities today.

Although Senegal's large offshore oil and gas discoveries have made the bulk of energy sector headlines in recent years, there are also major developments underway in the power sector. These are being spearheaded by Soci t  Nationale d' lectricit  du S n gal (Senelec) in partnership with the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy and a variety of local and international investors participating in Senegal's power generation and renewable energy sector.

Senegal has a young and growing population, as well as an economy that is recovering strongly from the adverse impact of the global pandemic. This has led to the steady yearly increase in the demand for electricity both from individuals and the corporate sector. In order to adapt to this rising demand for power one the primary challenges for Senelec is to ensure the adequate financing of new power projects and the continuous expansion of Senegal's power grid to ensure affordable and reliable power in the economic hubs such as Dakar or Saint Louis.

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Web: <https://sumthingtasty.co.za/contact-us/>

Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

