Peter Mwenemugabo has spent the past two months making about 400 bricks for a two-room house in Kayonza District, eastern Rwanda.

He timed the work carefully, hoping to begin construction before the rains.

But there is one thing he cannot control: electricity.

The sector office where he needs to obtain a construction permit has been slow to process applications and, at times, has ground to a halt because of power cuts and grid maintenance.

The delays are particularly frustrating for citizens because local government services increasingly rely on computers, scanners and other digital systems.

“I have spent over a month running up and down to the sector office trying to get the official in charge of construction to give me permission to start,” Mwenemugabo told Rwanda Dispatch.

“Every time I go to see him, he tells me he is busy trying to meet a reporting deadline, and there is no electricity, so he cannot help me.”

Mr Mwenemugabo said he was worried that his bricks could be damaged by rain if the delay continued.

“I may be forced to start building without the permit. My concern is that I could end up paying a fine,” he said.

He questioned why government offices did not have backup power, such as solar panels or generators, to keep essential services running.

“The power cuts mean lost time, extra transport costs and delays in accessing services,” he said., they have to wait for systems to come back online, because they loose networks

Mr Mwenemugabo is not the only resident affected.

People in parts of Kayonza and neighboring Gatsibo districts say power cuts are disrupting services at local government sector offices, some of which now rely on charging laptops to serve residents.

The services most affected include civil registration, particularly the processing and approval of birth, marriage and death certificates.

Sector staff also struggle to use equipment such as scanners when there is no electricity. Local leaders are also unable to access the Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS), which is used to manage cases digitally.

Some residents say they are given no information about when the electricity will return or when they should come back.

A local security guard in Gahini, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to comment, said some sector offices have backup solar systems or generators, but this is not the case everywhere.

“In some sector offices, they have backup solar power or generators. But in more rural sectors, when the power goes off, citizens have to usually wait for Rwanda Energy Grop (REG) to restore the grid,” she explained.

‘Come back when the power is back’

Rwanda Dispatch visited the Gahini, Kiyenzi and Mwiri sector offices in Kayonza last Thursday.

The offices were open, but there was no electricity.

Two security staff were available to tell residents that services could not be provided because of the outage. At Kiyenzi, the offices were closed but the widows were open.

Two Kayonza residents said they had also been trying to transfer their children to schools closer to home to reduce daily transport costs.

But they said they could not complete the paperwork.

“We understand that there can be problems, but whenever we go to the offices, they tell us: ‘We don’t have electricity. Come back when it is back,’” one resident said.

At both offices visited by Rwanda Dispatch, there were no service log or notice telling residents when they should return.

The problem extends beyond Kayonza.

In Karamurozi sector in Gatsibo District, motorist Thierry Nsambimana said he had begun planning his day around the electricity supply.

“We spend almost four to five hours every day without electricity,” he said.

“When it comes back, it doesn’t last long. On a bad day, we can have three or four power cuts.”

The interruptions have also affected his household.

His wife has to wake up early if she wants to use a milling machine before another outage begins.

“She has to go very early to avoid the queue because the power usually goes off around 08:00,” he said.

Businesses also feeling the pressure

For small businesses, the outages can mean lost income.

Mama Sarah, who runs a milk shop and asked to be identified only by her first name, said she had become reluctant to stock more milk because she could not rely on the electricity needed to keep it cold.

“I’m scared to sell because the cooling machine won’t be running when the power goes,” she said.

“I can’t afford a generator, and I’m still paying off the loan on the cooler.”

Mr Nsambimana also works as a Spiro electric motorbike rider.

When his battery runs low during an outage, he said, he has little choice but to stop working.

“You have to wait, or go home, because you can’t transport a client when the battery is low,” he said.

Other Gatsibo residents, who did not want to be named, said the cuts had disrupted

their evenings.

“We have to sleep early because of load shedding, yet children have homework to do,” one resident said.

Residents say the outages have become more frequent since the dry season began last month.

A wider power problem

The disruptions come as Rwanda’s electricity network has experienced a series of significant outages in recent months.

A nationwide blackout on 5 January 2026 affected several parts of the country, following another major outage on 9 November 2025.

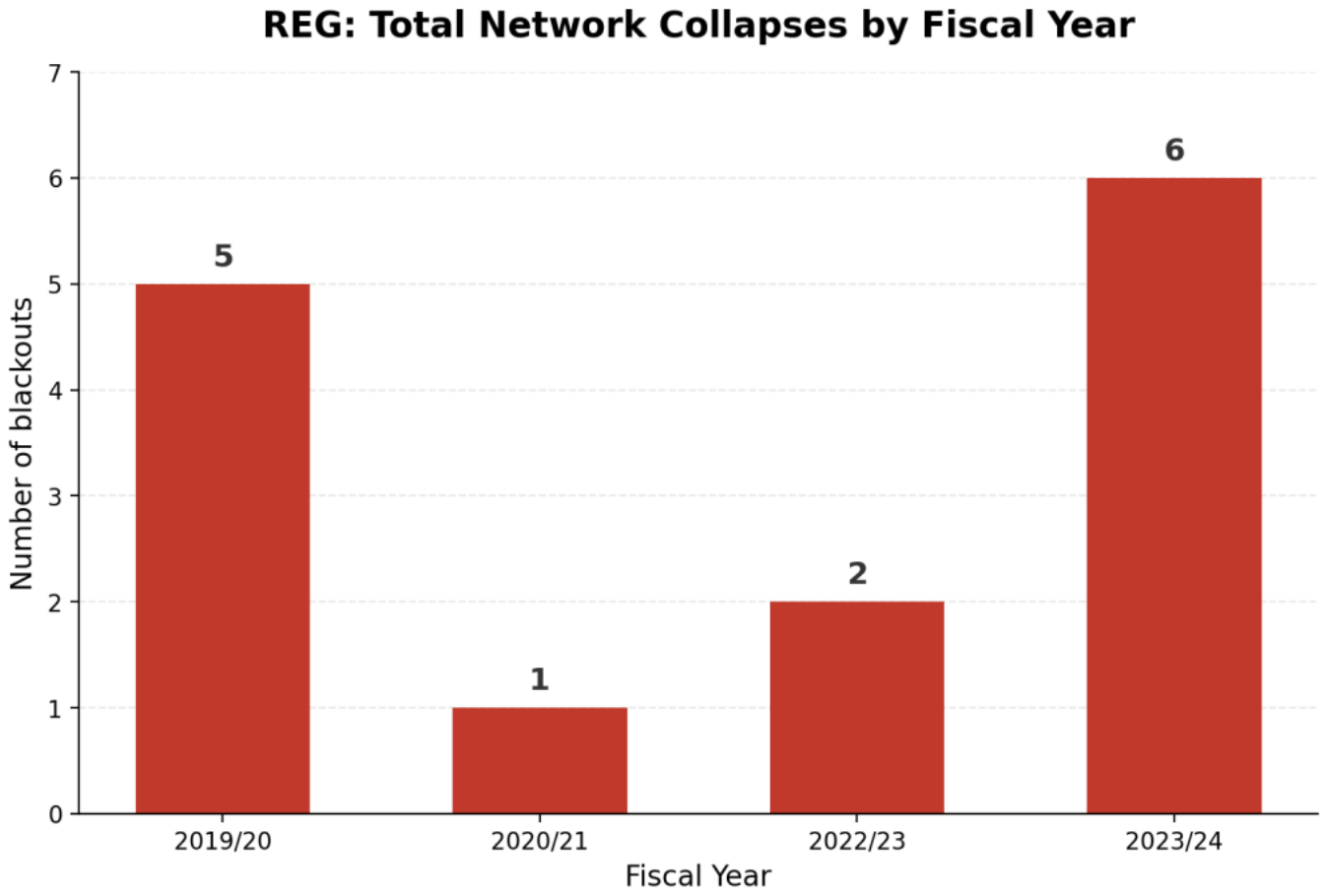
Power disruptions had increased from November, with one incident coming close to a nationwide blackout and prompting complaints from residents on social media about a lack of warning.

The Ministry of Infrastructure has attributed some of the disruptions to faults on transmission lines shared with neighboring countries.

On 6 January, the minister of state for infrastructure, Jean de Dieu Uwihanganye, apologised to Rwandans on X and said faults on the regional grid were affecting Rwanda’s electricity supply.

He said upgrades were under way.

Official figures also show that problems with the electricity network are not new.



Source: REG Annual Reports (2020/21, 2023/24). A gap exists for fiscal year 2021/22, for which no public figure was found. REG has not yet published its 2024/25 or 2025/26 annual report, so the January 2026 nationwide blackout and other recent outages are not yet reflected here.

Annual reports from the Rwanda Energy Group (REG) recorded five total network collapses in the 2019/20 financial year. The figure fell to one in 2020/21, before rising to two in 2022/23 and six in 2023/24.

Transmission network availability was 99.77% in 2023/24, compared with 99.72% the previous year.

REG has not yet published annual reports for 2024/25 or 2025/26, meaning the most recent outages are not included in those figures.

For people such as Mr Mwenemugabo, however, the impact is immediate.

His bricks are ready.

The house is not.

And until the electricity returns to the sector office, he says, he does not know when he will be able to start building.

Kayonza District did not respond to Rwanda Dispatch’s written requests for an interview or comment on the power cuts and their impact on services at sector offices.

Attempts to reach the district mayor by phone were also unsuccessful. The district’s toll-free number, 4157, was not working when Rwanda Dispatch called.

At the two sector offices visited by Rwanda Dispatch, there was also no service log or notice telling residents when they should return if services were disrupted by a power cut.