

By Benon Ojiambo

Karuma works inch to 2022 deadline

Delays in technical designs and drawings approval have come back to haunt Karuma power project as reports of slowed progress emerge, threatening the new commissioning date.

The technical designs whose approval has been delayed are for remedial works that the contractor — Sinohydro — is meant to undertake as it rectifies what the Uganda Electricity Generation Company Limited (UEGCL) described in 2019 as shoddy, specifically the electromechanical installations.

UEGCL is the government agency overseeing development of the 600-megawatt project. It is represented by AF Consult, a Swiss firm as its (UEGCL's) or owner's engineer.

"The remedial works are ongoing, although the rate of progress is lately very slow," Enock Kusasira, the UEGCL spokesperson, said last week.

"As per the contract, the contractor (Sinohydro) cannot start rectification work without the approval of the methodology or drawings by the owner's engineer," Li Ji, the deputy project manager for Sinohydro, said in a correspondence.

Li added that Sinohydro is working with AF Consult to "expedite the pending approvals of the rectification methodology and design drawings so that work can commence".

This is the second time

commissioning of the plant is extended partly on the basis of delayed approval of technical drawings and designs. The issue first emerged in 2019.

Commissioning of the plant was, for the third time, extended to August next year as the UEGCL asked the contractor to undertake corrective electromechanical works on the project.

Other reasons for the previous extensions include delays in land acquisition for the transmission lines and the reservoir and poor workmanship by the contractor.

Though the UEGCL was impressed with the work the contractor Sinohydro was doing during its visit to the project in May, the board chairperson Eng. Proscovia Njuki had her reservations.

"The contractor needs to recruit more people if we are to beat the August 2022 deadline," Njuki said in May.

Sinohydro contractor had done a poor job during electromechanical installations and has since then been fixing the errors and poor works that had been done by Sinohydro during electromechanical installations.

The poor works had been technically referred to as 'non-conformities' identified by the board in its last visit in December 2019.

Some of these included poor laying of cables, corrosion of metal in the dam areas, rusting particles and poor



filters and installation of poor-quality firefighting systems.

Li said their operations have been affected by COVID-19 and that it "has taken a serious negative influence on the project".

"Despite this, we have made great efforts to schedule human resources and kept adequate maintenance access on site, which includes 1,013 Ugandan employees and 133 Chinese," Li added.

Some of the works completed include replacement of under-sized electrical cabinets, re-orientation of cabinets to provide adequate maintenance access and replacement of cabling that did not meet technical specifications, installation of new and additional cable trays.

UETCL HOPEFUL
Uganda Electricity Transmission

Company Limited (UETCL), the company mandated to evacuate the power generated, maintains optimism that they will beat the August deadline with the transmission lines.

Karuma will be evacuated by three transmission lines; Karuma-Kawanda, which will be the first 400 kilovolt capacity line in the country, Karuma-Lira and Karuma-Olwiyo.

UETCL deputy managing director Valentine Katabira said the Karuma-Kawanda and the Karuma-Olwiyo have been completed, pending substation works.

"There are some snags at Kawanda that the contractor must fix before the testing is done. The Karuma-Olwiyo line is also done, awaiting completion of substation at Olwiyo," Katabira said.

He added that they have faced challenges in land acquisition on the Karuma-Lira line, where they have not acquired all the land needed for the line.

A section of landowners along the corridor are said to have rejected the values offered to them by the government valuer for their land and have resorted to courts of law to seek redress.

"Our legal team is trying to work out a few things on the issue. We remain optimistic that we shall be in time, but we wait to see how long the court process takes," Katabira said.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Karuma is a 600-megawatt underground hydropower project located at the border of the Northern districts of Kiryandongo, Nwoya and Oyam.

The project was contracted to Chinese firm Sinohydro and is supervised by UEGCL.

It is developed at a cost of \$1.7b (about sh6 trillion). 85% of this was sourced from the China EXIM Bank, while the Ugandan Government provided the balance.

Its development has been ongoing since 2013. Completion was initially expected to be realised in 2018. Its commissioning has since been pushed to August next year.

DEMobilISATION

Kusasira explained that the project has entered its final stages and that last-mile works architectural and decorative mechanism, demobilisation and site restoration and completing employer's camp works, including roadworks, electrical and water supply are currently ongoing.

Currently, the project is employing about 600 people, a nearly half-decline from the about 1,000 workers it employed a year ago.

During peak season, the project employed between 7,000 and 8,000 people.