

OP-ED: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH: THE CASE OF ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

The Government's desire and aspirations have been to ensure increased access to electricity by Zambians and has made significant strides towards the realization of this goal. In the last seven years, the energy sector has been identified as an important driving force behind economic growth in Zambia and **Government has reaffirmed its commitment towards developing as well as maintaining the energy infrastructure and services.** This commitment is realized through investment in both hydro and non-hydro sources of energy, which has resulted into an additional 1350MW to the current 3250MW installed.

Electricity Projects

Government's commitment to increased generation capacity of electricity reached its peak with the **commissioning of the first unit of the 750MW plant at Kafue Gorge Lower (KGL) hydro- electric power station by His Excellency, President Edgar Chagwa Lungu on the 23rd of July, 2021.** The station is located in Chikankata district of southern province and is 90km away from the Lusaka. The power station is the third largest in the country and has a generation capacity of 750MW.

Government also embarked on other non-renewable energy projects during the same period through the Rural Electrification Authority (REA). **These include; the construction of the Chunga Solar Power Plant, located in the Kafue National Park and construction and upgrading of mini-Hydro's in North-Western**

and Northern provinces. These projects have been instrumental in the increased installed capacity in the country. The **Kasanjika mini-hydro in Mwinilunga** of North-Western province **generates about 0.64MW** and provides power to approximately 12,000 households in the district. Through the various solar projects the Government has embarked on, such as the Chunga solar project, there has been a significant increase in the **contribution of solar energy to Zambia's electricity capacity from 1% in 2013 to 3% in 2020 whilst overall renewable energy contribution has increased from 0.7% in 2015 to 4.5% in 2019.**

Benefits of the Electricity Projects

The positive strides made in the energy sector through infrastructure development have been done within the aspirations of the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP) and the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP 2020-

2020). **This demonstrates Government's determination to deliver improved infrastructure to facilitate economic activities that support Growth Domestic Product (GDP) growth and improve socio-economic opportunities in the country.**

Huge infrastructure investments such as the **KGL power plant has generated not only employment directly through construction and operations at the power plant, but has also created an industrial base around the plant that exploits the energy being produced.** The completion and commissioning of the KGL has a multiplier effect on job creation, the country's industrialization agenda and improved human development.

The continued investments in the energy sector especially for electricity generation are an ingredient for the industrialization agenda that Government has embarked on for both local and foreign investors who require electricity as a pre-requisite for investment.

Lastly, as a member of the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) it is timely that the country continues to invest in electricity production through the extensive power generation pipeline earmarked for development and opportunities being realized in developing of alternative energy supply. **Zambia can also build the capacity to sell into the Southern African Power Pool, thereby generating foreign exchange (FOREX) for the country through power exports.**

Conclusion

The country has already embarked on the economic recovery agenda through the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP 2020-2023), the Government has included the energy sector as one of the sectors to promote growth and stabilization through continued implementation of reforms for improved efficiency and transparency as well as the enhancement of the sector's support to growth. These reform programmes will include policy on the management of arrears in the energy sector to ensure sustainability. Actualizing these reforms will be essential in attracting investments in renewable energies thereby driving the country's agenda for developing an energy mix through solar, wind and geothermal power.



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