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Italian Firm Wins Batoka Tender

Phillimon Mhlanga | 27 Mar 2014



THE Zambezi River Authority (ZRA), a company jointly owned by the governments of Zimbabwe and Zambia, has engaged an Italian firm to update the feasibility studies for the proposed bi-national Batoka Gorge Hydro-electric project.

The Financial Gazette's Companies & Markets (C&M) can exclusively reveal that Studio Pietrangeli, a consulting engineering firm, has won the bid ahead of five other companies that entered the race. Energy and Power Development Minister, Dzikamai Mavhaire, told C&M that the study was expected to take 11 months.

"An Italian consulting company has won the bid to upgrade Batoka's feasibility studies and we expect them to start work by end of March," said Mavhaire, adding that the study is expected to be ready by February next year. C&M is also reliably informed that the Italian company won the tender at a contract price of US\$3 565 968,26.

The project's feasibility studies had been initially undertaken by Batoka Joint Venture Consultants when plans for the project were mooted 20 years ago. The Rome-headquartered firm, which specialises in engineering services for large dams and hydro power plants, will commence work at the end of this month.

The company, which has to date successfully completed work on over 160 dams and 60 hydro power plants around the world, also has branches in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Ecuador and Ethiopia. The company's works of note in Africa include the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance project which is one of the largest hydro-electric power plants in Africa producing 6 000 megawatts (MW) of electricity.

It has also done feasibility studies for Ethiopia's Gibe 111 which is the world's highest Roller Compacted Concrete dam which is about 240 metres high with an associated power plant producing 1 870MW of electricity in Ethiopia. It is part of a series of dams which include Gibe 1 (184MW) and Gibe 11 (420MW).

This development comes after a South African company, Environmental Resources, won the bid to carry out new environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) studies for the Batoka Gorge Hydro-electric project at a contract price of about US\$1,345 million. The company is expected to commence the studies, which aim to identify the positive and negative environmental and social effects of the project, at the end of this month.

The studies would also recommend mitigation measures for the identified negative environmental and social impacts and are scheduled to take 12 months to complete. An ESIA on the multi-billion hydro power project, which is expected to generate 1 600MW of electricity to be shared equally by the two countries, was initially done about 15 years ago.

However, according to the Environmental Act, the studies should be re-done if they were done more than three years prior to submission for review. Now that the two categories of bidders have been selected, the next step for ZRA is to consider bids for companies that expressed interest to develop the Batoka Gorge Hydro-electric project.

The Batoka Hydro-electric project requires more than US\$2,5 billion and will entail construction of a 181 metres high Roller Compact Concrete Gravity arch dam, which will in turn create a lake with a relative surface area of 26 square kilometres. Two underground hydro-electric power stations will be constructed, one on each side of the Zambezi River, some 54 km downstream from the Victoria Falls.

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