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New engineer boosts Isimba contractor

By John Odyek

China International Water and Electric Corporation (CWE), the contractor of the 183MW Isimba Hydropower Project, has hired a new engineer to oversee the timely completion of the project.

The project is behind schedule because the works were suspended for three months, a year ago, due to shoddy works.

Dr Badru Kiggundu, the chairperson of the project steering committee, during a recent site visit, expressed optimism that Prof. Yongtian Wang, the new engineer who arrived last month, would overcome the challenges of cracks and shoddy works.

Kiggundu added that the contractor had made changes in the management structure, which could enable the completion of the project on time. The project is expected online by August next year.

Prof. Yongtian Wang lectured engineering in Tsinghua University in Beijing, China for several years, before joining CWE 19 years ago. He has worked on several dam projects in Laos and Indonesia.

Wang said the project is entering a crucial stage that will require more manpower of 60 more engineers to be brought from China to boost the 70 already working it.

The project is 22 months into its 40-month period.

"There has been improvement in the method of work," Eng. Simon D'Ujanga, the state minister for energy said.

D'Ujanga added that young Ugandan engineers were added to the project to enable them gain experience. He said they expect to build the capacity of young engineers to maintain and handle such projects in future. Dr. Eng. Harrison Mutikanga, the chief executive officer of the Uganda Electricity Generation Company Limited, said government has set the tariff for power from Isimba, Karuma, Ayago generation plants at about $5 cents. Currently, he said, the cost of power produced by independent power producers stands at about $ 11cents.

Mutikanga said there was improvement in the project management structure bringing in more experienced staff.

Uganda is undertaking a number of power generation projects because current power supply levels cannot support heavy industries. Also access to electricity currently stands at 20.4% while that of Kenya stands at 28%, Tanzania 14% and Burundi 3%.

The total current installed generation capacity is 850MW against a target of 3,885MW targeted by 2015 in the National Development Plan. The $567m (sh2 trillion) project is intended to increase affordable and reliable power supply for home and industrial use in Uganda.

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