

Tanzania

A mega construction goes into operation in Africa

Julius Nyerere Dam supplies electricity for 60 million inhabitants

by Ruy Barbosa

The “Julius-Nyerere-Dam”¹ in Tanzania is practically completed and is due to start generating electricity these days. The new dam is a genuine pan-African project. The construction costs of 2.9 billion US dollars were financed entirely by the Tanzanian government, and the dam on the Rufiji River was built as part of a partnership between two Egyptian companies: the state-owned “Arab Contractors” and “El-Sewedy Electric”.

The aim of the mega plant is not only to produce electricity, but also to make the water flow on the Rufiji River safer. The dam is expected to produce 5920 GWh of electricity per year. This will enable the Tanzanian government to find a solution to the country’s electricity shortage. The *Julius Nyerere Dam* will supply electricity for over 60 million inhabitants in the country and contain flooding on the Rufiji River during periods of heavy rainfall.

Significance of the project

Why is the much-needed Nyerere power plant project much more than just electricity? The

World Bank, based in Washington D.C., had tried to prevent the mega power plant by denying the project, which had been planned since the 1960s, the necessary financial resources. Their reasoning was that there was no great demand for electricity in Tanzania. To date, only 40 per cent of the country’s 63 million inhabitants have an electrical connection.

However, the country also urgently needs more electricity for its economic development. Tanzania is planning to build two large industrial estates:

One, covering 2.5 million square metres, is in the capital Dar es Salaam. The other is to be an industrial city: *Elsewedy Industrial City* (EIC). It is to create 50,000 jobs on 2.6 million square metres with a strategic industry. Residential areas and facilities are also planned. The developer of the two industrial areas is also the company *Elsewedy Electric*, which is already involved in the construction of the Julius Nyerere Dam.

Government prevails against foreign resistance

In addition to the American-dominated World Bank, the UNESCO World Heritage organisation



The Julius Nyerere Dam in Tanzania. (Picture Elsewedy Electric)

and green NGOs such as the *International Union for Conservation of Nature* (IUCN) also tried to prevent the realisation of the Nyerere power plant. The IUCN is funded by the USA to the tune of 534 million US dollars. The dam is in the Nyerere National Park (formerly named Selous Game Park after the British big game hunter *Frederick Selous*), which covers an area of around 30,000 square kilometres (the size of Belgium) and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. UNESCO had threatened to remove the national park from the list of natural sites because of the construction of the dam. However, the government managed to prevent this.

The Julius Nyerere Dam has been under construction since 2019; it has a total length of 1025 metres and a total storage volume of around 34 billion cubic metres. This will make it the fourth largest reservoir in Africa and the ninth largest in the world. The power plant has been equipped with a total of nine turbines, supplied by the Chinese company *Dongfang Electric Corporation*. The state-owned company had also supplied the turbines for the *Three Gorges Dam* on the Yangtze River, which generated the world's largest amount of hydropower in 2014.

In total, the Julius Nyerere Dam employed over 9,000 people, 8,000 of whom were Tanzanian and 1,000 Egyptian nationals.

¹ The project goes back to *Julius Nyerere* (1922–1999), who commissioned an initial feasibility study in 1976. At the time, it was known as the "Stieglers Gorge Project". The dam project was later renamed in honour of the popular Prime Minister and President (from 1961 to 1985).

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

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