



The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
The State Department
Washington, D.C.

December 20, 2013

[by fax and e-mail]

USAID Support for Grand Inga Phase A Project

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We understand that USAID is considering financial support for Phase A of the Grand Inga Project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (also referred to as Inga 3). We believe the United States government should not support this project, for the following reasons:

Benefits will bypass the local population:

We note that the bipartisan Electrify Africa Act encourages USAID to prioritize “the deployment of technology and grants to expand electricity access for the poorest segments of the population.” Inga 3 is in direct conflict with this mandate.

After donors have invested billions of dollars in the construction and rehabilitation of the Inga 1 and 2 dams, more than 90 percent of the DRC population remains without access to electricity, and 85 percent of the country’s electricity is consumed by high-voltage industrial users. Building on the model of Inga 1 and 2, Inga 3 will completely bypass the local population and generate electricity for the DRC mining sector and the South African export market.

Project will likely deepen the resource curse:

It is no coincidence that the DRC, a country rich in natural resources but poor in governance, has been beset by corruption and civil wars for decades. In spite of repeated promises, the country’s governance has not improved in any significant way in recent years according to Transparency International. The project to rehabilitate Inga 1 and 2 has been mired in endless delays and cost overruns. Inga 3 will generate revenues in a highly centralized fashion. It is likely that the project will be affected by rampant corruption, and may further entrench the country’s resource curse.

Environmental risks are neglected:

The Inga 3 Dam will likely impact the endemic fisheries of the Congo River. Maybe more importantly, the project – and the Grand Inga scheme at large – will block sediments and may thus interrupt carbon sequestration in the Congo Plume, one of the world’s largest carbon sinks. For this reason, a peer-

reviewed article has warned that “plans to divert, store or otherwise intervene in Lower Congo River dynamics are truly alarming.”

Inga 3 is a stepping stone towards the Grand Inga scheme, and the DRC government has repeatedly stressed that the project is part and parcel of Grand Inga. In spite of this, there are no plans to carry out a cumulative impact assessment for the scheme or an integrated basin management plan for the Congo River. This does not express willingness to learn from the mistakes of past dam building.

Better options are available:

The International Energy Agency has found that 70 percent of rural areas in developing countries are best electrified by mini- and off-grid renewable energy solutions. This is particularly true for countries such as the DRC that have vast territories, low population densities and underdeveloped central grids.

Decentralized renewable energy technologies benefit under-served populations, reduce the likelihood of resource conflicts, and usually have a negligible environmental footprint. They have become commercially competitive, but their deployment is still being hampered by market failures. We submit that USAID and Power Africa should focus their support on the decentralized renewable energy solutions of the future, not the failed development models of the past.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,



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cc. Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, USAID