

HARD TALK On Saturday

'Some processes had to be undertaken with caution'

ALICE KAUNDA: COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER AT SVTP



KAUNDA — The revised water delivery period is November 2024

was damaged during Cyclone Ana in 2022, secondly to protect the section of the Kapichira Dam which was destroyed during the cyclone and lastly to enable Egenco to generate electricity at full capacity.

There were expectations that the work would be completed by now, why the delay?

Some processes had to be undertaken with caution before the commencement of construction of the CSD of this magnitude.

We had to design the CSD which is a moderately new technology in dam construction and conduct environmental assessments to ensure dam safety and considering

that the Kapichira Dam is located in the Majete Wildlife Reserve, a protected area. Surveys had to be undertaken to determine the type of soil to be used for the CSD as the soil from the Kapichira Dam is high in mica content which reduces the comprehensive strength of concrete. We anticipate construction of the CSD to be completed by the end of September 2023, all things being equal.

What is the progress on the Shire Valley Transformation Program in general?

We have made considerable progress in different aspects of the project. Regarding infrastructure

development, we have almost completed the construction of structures on the 6kms stretch of the canal, including three bridges, the 396 metres-long flume, 13 drainage works, three siphons, the fish barrier structure and over 4km of the canal. We remain with the reconstruction of the intake and siphon structures that Cyclone Ana damaged in January 2022. The overall progress for this part is 70 percent. We have cleared 46km comprising the main canals 1 and 2, and excavation and construction are underway. We are constructing the canal for a distance of 52km for Phase 1 from Kapichira Dam to Lengwe National Park. The overall progress for this section is 35 percent. The canal will cover a stretch of 118km from the intake at Kapichira Dam to Bangula in Nsanje.

What have been some of the challenges the project has faced?

The project has faced some challenges during implementation. We had to close the site twice due to Covid-19, Cyclone Ana damaged our intake foundation and three sections of the first siphon. We suspended project activities at some point due to fuel shortage. The availability of cement is also proving to be a challenge as our sites demand many bags of cement daily.

When should farmers expect to start irrigation using the infrastructure you are putting up?

Initially, we had anticipated farmers to start irrigation in 2023; however, following the impact of Cyclone Ana, which damaged the intake works, the revised water delivery period is November 2024. The completion period was revised, considering the reconstruction of the damaged intake at Kapichira Dam.

The government, through the Ministry of Agriculture with support from the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is implementing the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP). The SVTP is a 14-year program (2018-2031) which will be implemented in three sequential but partially overlapping phases. Where are we thus far? SERAH CHILORA spoke with Alice Kaunda, Communications officer at SVTP. Excerpts:

What is the progress on the construction of a temporary coffer dam at Kapichira?

Progress on the construction of the cement-soil dam (coffer dam) at Kapichira Dam is currently at 39 percent. This translates into 39,000m³ out of 106,000m³ of cement soil material to be placed for the embankment construction. The construction of the foundation is completed, and the contractor is currently constructing the cofferdam embankment. The CSD (cement-soil dam) will be 362 metres long, top width of 6 metres, bottom width of 42 metres and a height of 11.5 metres, and will stand at 149 metres above sea level. Although temporary, this particular dam can stand up to 4 years. We are estimating the CSD to cost at least K17 billion. A maximum of 120 tonnes of cement is required daily during the construction of this structure.

Is it really necessary to construct this structure after Egenco has put up another structure ahead of you?

It is important to note that we are working jointly with Egenco on all issues concerning the CSD. We hold weekly meetings attended by teams from both SVTP and Egenco, the Minister of Energy Honorable Ibrahim Matola, Chief Advisor to the President, Principal Secretary from the Ministry of Energy, Engineer Alfonso Chikuni and the Principal Secretary responsible for Irrigation in the Ministry of Agriculture, Engineer Geoffrey Mamba.

The CSD is essential and beneficial to both Egenco and SVTP. The CSD has three main objectives. First is to assist the contractor of the SVTP in working on dry ground during the reconstruction of the intake which