



Lesotho Highlands Development Authority

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LHDA CELEBRATES SENQU RIVER DIVERSION TUNNEL MILESTONE

The LHDA, the Polihali Dam consultant and contractor, other consultants and contractors, the Mokhotlong District Administrator, and other major stakeholders representing the affected communities, local authorities and partner institutions on 10 August 2023 celebrated a significant milestone in the construction of Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project: The Senqu River closure and diversion and the first use of the Polihali Diversion Tunnels.

The river diversion began from 04 August 2023 following the successful completion of the pre-coffer dam construction. The mighty Senqu River, the main tributary to the Polihali Dam was diverted for the first time through a 960 metre long (m) diversion tunnel of 09 metre (m) diameter, one of the twin diversion tunnels constructed between 2019 and 2021 to divert the river's natural flow and create a dry area. This will enable the construction of the permanent coffer dam upstream of the 165m Polihali Dam, one of the three key components of LHWP II.

The LHDA Chief Executive who witnessed the diversion congratulated the teams that worked hard to ensure that the work was completed during the dry season as planned. "River diversion is key in the implementation of a dam project, and we are proud of everyone who has had a hand in this work, which is indicative that Phase II, just a couple of months after being officially opened by our principals, is indeed now going full steam ahead," Tente Tente, LHDA CE stated.

Ivano Vanzanghi, Chief Resident Engineer from Matla a Metsi JV, the firm supervising the Polihali Dam and appurtenant works construction, expressed gratitude to all stakeholders who worked many years towards this key moment. He said the diversion signals the start of the major works on the dam. "I believe that the teams are ready to make the project a success and will work hard towards realising the next milestones which include the start of impoundment in 2026."

The successful completion of the pre-coffer dam creates the dry conditions for the construction of the permanent coffer dam and the main dam. Speaking at the celebration on behalf of the contractor, SUN JV, Site Manager Hou Fu Qiang, pledged to focus on safety and quality as they embark on the construction journey of the Polihali Dam.



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“We are here to build a dam that can stand the test of time. I hope that as partners and employees working on the project, we will find common ground and work with passion to deliver the results that the LHDA expects through collaboration and the mutual exchange of skills and experiences. We also take our contractual obligations of developing small to medium enterprises, fostering skills development and job creation for the benefit of the local economy, very seriously. We will do what needs to be done to achieve our preference targets,” Fu Qiang confirmed.

For many job seekers and those looking for business opportunities on the Project, the river diversion is not just an engineering milestone, but a signal that more opportunities will open as construction activity intensifies. The LHDA Polihali Branch Manager, Gerard Mokone, explained that measures are in place to enhance the participation and support of small- to medium-sized local firms and farming activities in the Project.

“We are implementing livelihood restoration initiatives to mitigate the effects of the Project on communities. We can confirm that our contractors are ready to purchase fresh produce from the local farmers, especially those in the Project area. We appeal to the local authorities to collaborate with us in sensitising communities to these opportunities rather than relying on job prospects which we know will not accommodate all job seekers,” Mokone confirmed.

Mokone further indicated that the LHDA is working around the clock to ensure that contractors apply the principles of transparency, fairness, quality, and cost effectiveness in procuring their goods and services and that auditable processes guided by the labour recruitment guidelines are also employed in the recruitment of labour on Phase II.

Mr Ntsoeleng Mohale, the Resident Engineer from MSKC JV the consulting firm that supervised the construction of the Polihali diversion tunnels, was at the celebration to share the experience of working on Phase II under the challenges of COVID-19 and the January 2021 floods. He indicated that other than the engineering aspects, they pride themselves on the successful skills transfer programme - the Young Professionals Programme - which produced competent young professionals three of whom are currently engaged on the Transfer Tunnel contract as engineers.



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Meanwhile, construction on the permanent coffer dam has started with completion planned for October 2023. It is expected that the main dam construction will begin in earnest before the end of 2023, once the coffer dam is completed and the riverbed is drained of water as the dam construction will require dry access to enable extensive excavation of the foundations.

End.