

Tanzania to speed up hydropower project on UNESCO site

Tanzania's President John Magufuli plans to speed up the building of a hydroelectric dam in one of Africa's largest game reserves, despite criticism from environmentalists and UNESCO.



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The long-planned dam in the Selous Game Reserve, already listed as a UNESCO world heritage site in danger, could provide 2,100MW of power to a country where only 2% of rural people and 39% of urbanites have access to electricity, according to UN figures.

In a presidency statement issued Tuesday, 27 June, Magufuli called for "the dam to be built as quickly as possible ... so that we can produce electricity which is vital to industrialisation".

Experts from Ethiopia, which last year unveiled its own hydroelectric dam aimed at doubling its electricity output, were in Tanzania on Wednesday to consult on the project, the statement said.

Magufuli earned his nickname "bulldozer" during his time as public works minister, when he was credited with overseeing several mega projects and was elected on a promise to develop Tanzania, smash corruption and improve the lives of the poor.

However since coming to power he has been accused of riding roughshod over due process and being intolerant to

dissent.

UNESCO, which meets in Poland to review its world heritage sites next week, has repeatedly called for the dam project to be abandoned, saying it was "incompatible" with world heritage status.

Poaching, lack of funding and mining are other threats to the reserve which covers 50,000km² and is home to one of the largest concentrations of elephant, black rhino and other species.

"The reserve also has an exceptionally high variety of habitats including Miombo woodlands, open grasslands, riverine forests and swamps, making it a valuable laboratory for on-going ecological and biological processes," according to UNESCO.

Source: AFP

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