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World Bank Approves Controversial Inga 3 Dam in DRC Despite Steep Human and Environmental Cost

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WASHINGTON, DC - The World Bank today approved \$250 million in financing for the first phase of the Inga 3 hydropower project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) despite glaring gaps in project preparation and major concerns from Congolese and global civil society.

The Inga 3 Dam, projected to cost over \$10 billion, poses immense environmental, social, and governance risks, while viable, cost-effective alternatives—such as solar and wind energy—remain underfunded and ignored. The World Bank recently resumed funding major hydropower projects after a decade-long hiatus.

“The Bank is returning to top-down mega dams that threaten communities and ecosystems, while sidelining community-driven, decentralized renewable alternatives,” said Josh Klemm, Executive Director, International Rivers

The World Bank first approved funding to develop Inga 3 in 2014, but withdrew over major governance concerns. The project has since attracted attention from a rotating set of actors who have tried and failed to get Inga off the ground. The World Bank’s re-emergence in Inga raises concerns among groups that have monitored the project for over a decade.

"We've been here before. This approval is a misguided effort by the World Bank to promote hydropower in the DRC after many years and millions of dollars have been spent with nothing to show for it," said Apollinaire Nsimbi, Chairperson of the Board of Directors, and Head of Advocacy for Initiative pour le Développement Local (IDEL).

While the project's stated goal is to address DRC's glaring energy deficit, where only about 20% of the population has access to electricity, the World Bank's plan to develop Inga 3 as a public-private partnership would incentivize developers to sell the electricity to industrial interests and regional offtakers at the expense of the Congolese public, and risk ballooning the national debt in the likely event of cost overruns and delays.

"Inga 3 threatens to deepen the DRC's debt burden without delivering promised energy access to the millions of Congolese who need it," said Emmanuel Musuyu, Executive Secretary of Coalition des Organisations de la Société Civile pour le Suivi des Réformes et de l'Action Publique (CORAP).

Inga 3's reservoir alone could displace over 30,000 people. Many families would be forcibly relocated for a second time while still awaiting compensation and restitution for losses incurred by the construction of the two previous dams, Inga 1 and 2. Communities have noted declining fish stocks and have experienced prolonged food insecurity after being forced to leave their lands. Community members and civil society in the DRC have criticized the consultation process on Inga 3 for excluding critical voices and downplaying the severity of impacts that the project would have on local communities.

"My family lost everything as they were among those physically and economically displaced by Inga 1 and 2, and we are not prepared to again sacrifice our land and livelihood for the construction of Inga 3," said Angelique Mvuezolo, Director, Femmes du Fleuve.

The World Bank's unsubstantiated claim that Inga 3 will deliver climate benefits does not stand up to scrutiny: Mega-dams are increasingly vulnerable to climate change and are prone to failure under extreme weather conditions. Inga 3 could also exacerbate climate change by releasing methane and CO₂ into the atmosphere from its vast reservoir.

"Mega dams are not climate solutions—they are climate liabilities," said Genny Ngende, Africa Program Senior Campaigner for International Rivers. *"It is long past time for the World Bank to promote mega dams like Inga as a silver bullet to address Africa's energy needs. The future of African energy must be decided by and for its people, not investors and corporations."*