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MORE WATER FOR SOUTH AFRICA

New structures of Lesotho Highlands Water Project completed

LESOTHO, 26 October 2001: The first completed structures of Phase 1B of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project – a weir on the Matsoku River and a tunnel connecting it to Katse Dam – were opened by the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Mr Ronnie Kasrils, MP and his Lesotho counterpart, Minister Moleleki, today.

In his address, Minister Kasrils lauded the co-operation between South Africa and Lesotho as a manifestation of the New Africa initiative and called on Lesotho to preserve the peace in the run-up to the elections, which are expected in 2002. He also called for additional development in the project areas to ensure that the socio-environmental aspects of the project were as successful as those in construction.

The Structures

The colourful ceremony on the banks of the Matsoku River celebrated the successful completion of a 20m high concrete structure, 180 m long that straddles the river upstream of the confluence with the Malibamatso River on which the Katse reservoir is built. The weir, which has no retention storage above the flood plain, will divert excess flows (up to 55 cubic metres per second) through a 5,6km horseshoe-shaped tunnel, to increase the current 16,8 cubic metres per second transferred to South Africa to an average of 19 cubic metres per second.

Positive social impact

No arable land or households were affected by the construction of the Matsoku Weir. Labour-intensive construction methods were given preference on the weir and in the tunnel, which provided jobs for 300 local villagers at the

peak of construction. The local population will benefit from two fully equipped clinics, used during construction, that will be transferred to the Lesotho Ministry of Health.

Environmental impact

A continuous basic flow of 600 litres per second through the structure will maintain the integrity of the river, ensuring that environmental impacts are kept to an absolute minimum. The structure will also release accumulated sediment during floods to ensure normal scouring of the riverbed.

Contractors

The R242-million construction contract was awarded in February 1998 to a partnership between Hochtief (Germany), Impregilo (Italy) and Concor (South Africa) and was completed for R7-million less than budget. A partnership of South African and Lesotho companies formed the design and engineering consultants. The South African partners were Ninham Shand, VKE, SRK, Keeve Steyn and Knight Piesold, while Lescon and FM Associates were from Lesotho.

Funding

The European Investment Bank provided funding for the contract through a loan to the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA).

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