
POWER ARB 11 (11) 31/12/1974

Mozambique

One of the greatest man-made lakes in the world started to form on December 5th when engineers closed the sluices in the wall of the Cabora Bassa dam on the Zambezi river. The river had been flowing through the coffer dam at the rate of 2,000 cubic metres a second. Now it is rising rapidly up the face of the nearly completed concrete wedge built between two hills. The dam has taken six years to build at a cost of £170m.

The lake will cover nearly 2,000 square miles with an average depth of 75ft. It will stretch back about 150 miles to a point near the Zambian border. Though the dam will take two years to fill it is hoped the turbines set in its base will start producing electricity in April, 1975. The first stage will yield 2,000 megawatts a year, and if the second power-house on the north bank is eventually constructed the power will double. South Africa has signed a ten-year contract to take part of the power output, and will receive its first commercial supply in August 1975, though a test supply will be received next May.

Over the past two years authorities have been resettling most of the 25,000 African villagers whose homes will be flooded, but reports from Chicoca, about 40 miles from the dam head, say people there are refusing to move as they do not believe the waters will reach their village. Hundreds of men are standing by to go ahead with a massive rescue operation which may be needed to save tribesmen and wildlife, and dozens of boats are ready at strategic points between Cabora Bassa and Zumbo, on the Zambian border, packed with food and fuel that might be needed for rescue operations.

Meanwhile technicians of the Zambez Planning Cabinet, the Government body responsible for development around the dam, are going ahead with plans which include the introduction of lake sardines. These could form the basis of a big fishing industry. Cabora Bassa will also allow the establishment of large agricultural and mining industries. Traces of many minerals including copper, nickel, iron and gold have been found in the area and already experts of France's Office of Geological and Mining Research are at work in the region taking rock samples and plotting in detail the shape of the lake to help in future mining development.

Earlier this year Frelimo was striving to wreck the scheme, but that risk is now past and the barbed wire, landmines and guns have disappeared.

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