

Springboard Into the Future

The Grand Inga Hydroelectric Project

by Janet G. West

Sept. 17—After centuries of colonial looting, followed by decades of debt-enslavement, worthless foreign aid, and “sustainable” investment by their former colonizers, African nations are on the cusp of breaking into a new era.

The first step in reversing this process lies in large-scale economic development, and in particular in accessing abundant energy, without which no economy can exist. Over the recent period, African leaders have increasingly expressed a determination to end this continuing colonialism, and there is no development more front and center in this effort than the Grand Inga Dam project. A fight is now on to make this dream a reality in the near future. If anything is to break the deadlock which has held this project back for over half a century, it will be the *revolutionary* spirit now spreading throughout the Global South, and the type of physical-economic commitment to the future that students of Lyndon LaRouche understand.

The Grand Inga Hydroelectric Project (GIHP) site is situated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), located about 225 km (140 miles) downstream from the capital city of Kinshasa, and about 150 km (93 miles) upstream from the mouth of the Congo, where it flows into the Atlantic Ocean, as shown in **Figure 1**. First conceived of in the late 1950s, this project has been expanded conceptually over the years from its original plan of the Inga I and Inga II hydroelectric power plants (built in the 1970s and still operating). The enormous Inga III is Phase One of six additional dams now planned to be constructed in seven phases.

The Congo River Basin spans nine countries in West-Central Africa and the Congo

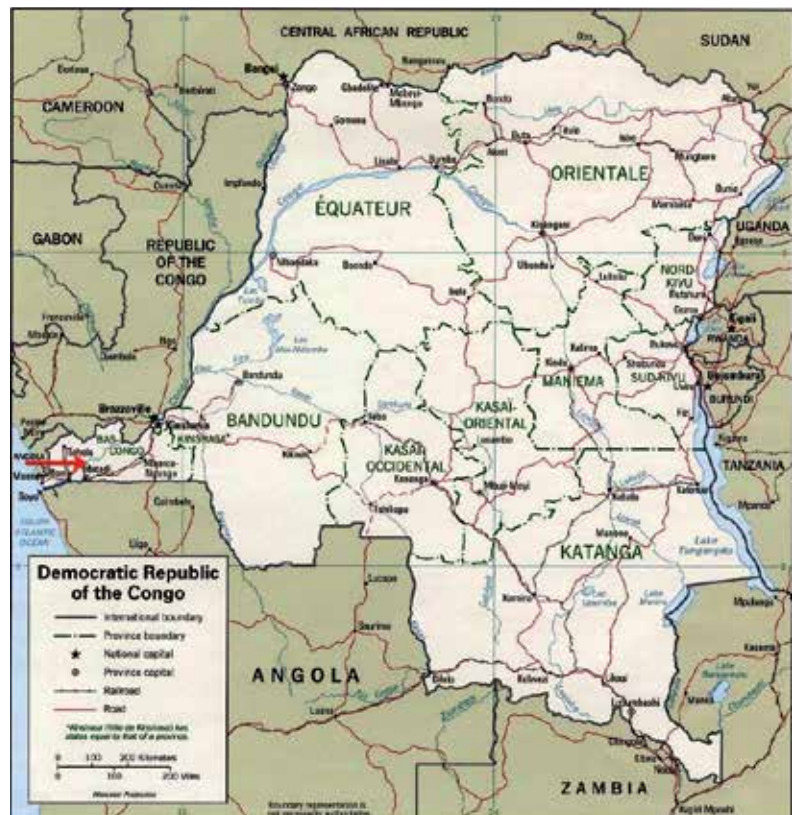


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Access to abundant energy is the first step in large-scale economic development. Shown: the Inga I Dam, with the feeding canal for Inga II in the foreground.

FIGURE 1

The Grand Inga Hydroelectric Project Is Near the Mouth of the Congo River (see red arrow)



CIA

River serves about 75 million people, providing food, water, and transport. As early as 1921, the U.S. Geological Survey's findings concluded that the Congo River Basin possessed a potential for more than one-fourth of the world's water power.

To understand both the necessity for and urgency with which the completion of this project must be implemented, it is vital that a proper conceptual foundation be laid first.

A New Global Paradigm

In 2017, the Schiller Institute published a [Special Report](#) titled, "Extending the New Silk Road to West Asia and Africa." That report presented in great detail the relevant proposals for the full economic, political, and cultural development of all these regions, including the building of the GIHP. It also highlighted the introduction of a new spirit of development emanating out of China's Belt and Road Initiative—a spirit which has only accelerated since then. To situate such a conceptual foundation, I cite the report's Introduction:

Global media coverage of Africa and the Middle East (or, rather, Southwest Asia) typically focuses on war, terrorism, famine, epidemics, and mass immigration. Very seldom are these two regions associated with economic development, scientific breakthroughs, or cultural advancements. Unfortunately, this image of the region has a substantial basis in reality. The situation does have domestic causes, but is also largely related to global geopolitical factors and the attempt by major global powers to secure spheres of influence, natural resources, markets, and strategic and political advantages against other global and regional adversaries....

The good news is that a new paradigm in world politics has emerged, and is concretely changing the rules of the game of what can be called the old paradigm—the paradigm responsible for the above-mentioned problems in West Asia and Africa. This new paradigm is not a plan to be undertaken in the future, nor is it a hypothetical, academic speculation. It is a reality taking hold in the world now....

What these nations, especially China, have proven, is that *eliminating poverty, famine, and disease can only be achieved by full-scale indus-*

trialization and the utilization of state-of-the-art technologies to unleash the creative, productive powers of society, as the United States and Europe had done in previous centuries, and not by piecemeal small steps, as the United States and Europe have been proposing for Africa and Asia since at least the 1960s....

The BRICS nations, with China foremost among them, have even redefined what was called "sustainable development," using the phrase to mean industrialization, food security, and the eradication of poverty, rather than adjusting the living standards of people to immediately available resources and technology. Technological apartheid had for many years been a policy practiced by industrial nations, preventing developing nations from acquiring advanced technologies, under various excuses. Now, the BRICS nations, led by China, are breaking that "rule," making advanced technology available for nations in Asia and Africa. [Emphasis added.]

Such is the context for the renewed push for Africa's Grand Inga project.

The Congo River Basin Development

The Congo River is the deepest in the world (up to 220 meters, or 720 feet, in sections), and the ninth longest in the world at approximately 4,700 km (2,920 miles) long. It touches on parts of Tanzania, Cameroon, northern Angola, and passes through western Zambia, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It's the second largest river in the world in terms of average rate of flow—delivering 41,000 cubic meters (1,450,000 cubic feet) per second into the Atlantic. For comparison, the Amazon River's flow is more than 175,000 cubic meters (6,180,000 cubic feet) per second, and the Mississippi River's flow is only 17,000 cubic meters (590,000 cubic feet) per second.

The Congo River—which meanders its way toward the Atlantic for most of its journey—is suddenly squeezed into narrow chasms and gorges, forcing the acceleration of the flow for the final phase of its journey. Near its end, the river drops 96 meters (315 feet) over a length of 14.5 km (9 miles). This stretch alone (over 3.2 km or 2 miles wide at its widest) could generate at least 39.6 gigawatts (53,100,000 hp) of mechani-

cal energy, and nearly as much electrical energy, according to estimates—although some estimates put this figure much higher. It is this unique geological feature which would allow the GIHP to utilize both dams and run-of-the-river facilities (in-river turbines which don't require the building of a dam) to accomplish such an enormous energy output.

Figure 2 shows the site of the first two hydro-power plants—Inga I (350 MW, brought online in 1972) and Inga II (1.4 GW, brought online in 1982)—both of which are operating below capacity due to political unrest and disrepair. The Grand Inga project—once completed, as envisioned in **Figure 3**—will be the largest hydro-electric power-generating facility in the world—double the capacity of the current record-holder, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in China. It will provide more than a third of the total electricity currently produced in all of Africa.

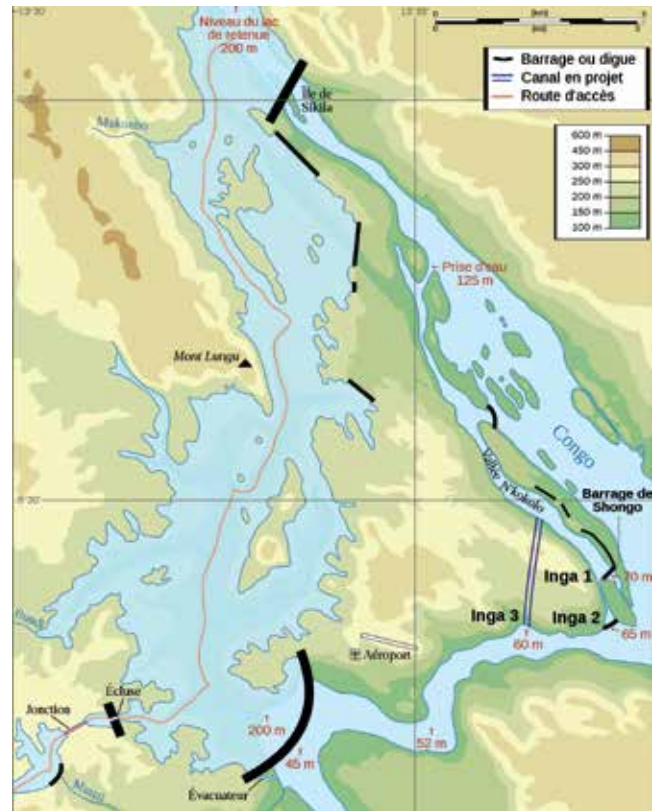
The GIHP has been supported by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP), and the World Energy Council, in an effort to bring increased stability to the DRC and to the region. The NEPAD in particular has promoted regional economic integration, and has put a spotlight on the Inga III dam as a potential source for job creation, increased international trade, and economic growth.

In May 2013, the South African and DRC governments signed the [Treaty](#) on the Grand Inga Hydropower Project, for cooperation in the development of Inga III, as well as making South Africa the principal purchaser of the electricity that will be generated. The DRC ratified it in 2014.

At the Paris Climate Summit in June 2023, Presidents Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa and Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo [urged](#) world leaders to invest in the Grand Inga Dam Project. Referring to its estimated 40,000 MW capacity, Ramaphosa said:

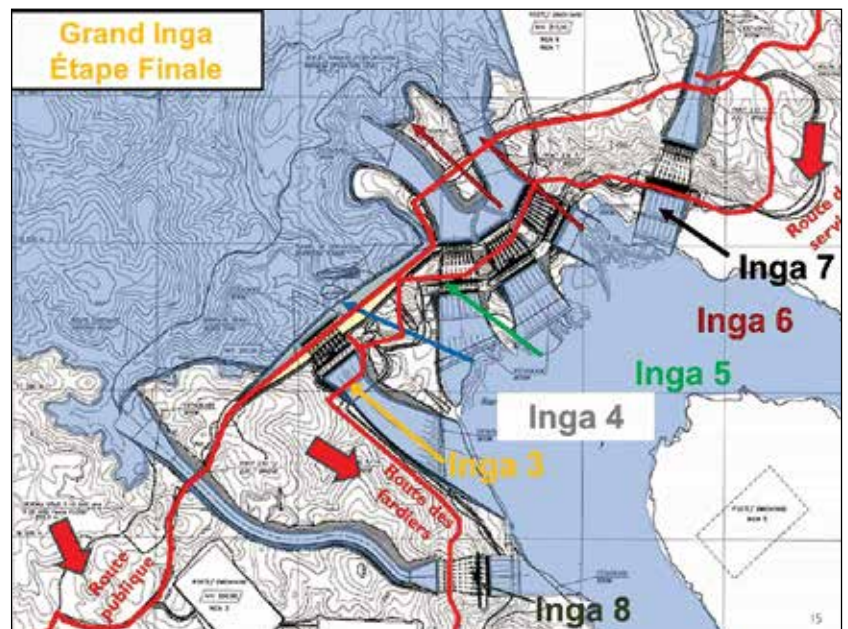
Let us now put money on the table and collectively say we are going to address this mega project; a mega project which will, in the end, gener-

FIGURE 2
Sites of Inga I and II Hydro-Power Plants



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FIGURE 3
The Grand Inga Project, as Completed



Source: Govt. of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

ate electricity for up to 12 to 15 African countries.

This was underscored by Dilma Rousseff, President of the BRICS New Development Bank, who [addressed](#) the BRICS Summit, August 24, 2023:

Here on the African continent ... we have the largest untapped hydroelectric potential on the planet, the Grand Inga Dam [project], which can guarantee renewable, continuous, basic, safe, and affordable energy. It has three times the capacity of the Itaipu Dam in Brazil and twice the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam in China. The Grand Inga Dam is capable of serving as an energy source for an entire continent.

It is also worth noting that the Global South needs to seek to add value to its wealth and its source of sustainability. It is also time to seek a reindustrialization with new characteristics.

Foxes Guarding the Henhouse

The GIHP has faced many challenges and setbacks over the years which are indicative of the kind of strategic brawl going on across the world and in Africa, specifically, today. Although the GIHP was being developed by AEE Power, China Three Gorges Corporation, and Sinohydro, in June 2021, the DRC announced that it had tapped the Fortescue Metals Group to lead the entire project. At the time, DRC President Félix Tshisekedi's top infrastructure advisor, Alexy Kayembe De Bampende, [told](#) Reuters,

Fortescue will be the sole operator for the entire Grand Inga (3 to 8). Chinese & co [sic] are welcome to join Fortescue.

Reuters also reported that a memorandum of understanding had already been signed in September 2020.

Fortescue Metals Group was founded by Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest, whose family made their fortune in the early 1800s in Australia through cattle/sheep ranches and processing plants. In April 2003, he bought Allied Mining and Processing, and renamed it Fortescue; it is now the fourth-largest iron ore producer in the world, with its own fleet of seven ore carrier ships (with an eighth under construction).

In 2020, it created a subsidiary, Fortescue Future Industries, which specializes in green energy and is dedicated to promoting "zero carbon-footprint" technologies. The increased pressure from financial institutions and think-tanks on developing nations to "go green" is part of the agenda of the Anglo-American oligarchy, which includes depopulation and preventing advancement of Third World countries.

"Twiggy" Forrest's C.V. and those of the board of directors of Fortescue Metals Group read like a "who's who" of Anglo-American oligarchs—he himself has a PhD in Marine Ecology from the University of Western Australia, and has served as an International Union for Conservation of Nature Patron of Nature, a World Economic Forum Friend of Ocean Action and a member of the UN's Environment Program's Scientific Advisory Committee on the Assessment of Marine Litter and Microplastics.

Two examples of the board members will give a flavor of Fortescue's governance:

Lord Sebastian Coe, CH, KBE (Companion of Honor, Knight Commander of the British Empire) (a Non-Executive Director) is a former parliamentarian (1992), and the Non-Executive Director of the Vitality Group of health and life insurance companies.

Yifei Li (a Non-Executive Director) is the President of the QiBin Foundation and currently serves on the board of BlackRock China (hedge funds) and is a Global Trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation.

This control by Fortescue, along with extensive activity and meetings in several African nations by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Blair Institute, illustrates the challenges and pressures by the imperialist interests of the Anglo-American oligarchs and their financial tentacles that African leaders face who dare to want to uplift their populations. At a Bloomberg conference in Morocco earlier this year, "Twiggy" said "we've wound down the production [cut it in half—ed.] in order to make sure the environment is fully protected." Even worse, a significant remainder of the project's energy output would now go to producing "green" hydrogen for export, leaving only 12 GW for Africans. Possibly as a result of this, as well of other complications, the GIHP has been stagnant for the recent couple of years.

However, the presidents of South Africa and the DRC met in early July and signed a joint declaration recommitting to the GIHP, and also created a new com-

mission to study the next steps needing to be taken. During the press conference following their bilateral meeting, DRC President Felix Tshisekedi distanced himself somewhat from Fortescue, saying Forrest “did not meet the conditions we were expecting,” and instead insisted that more international partners should be involved, emphatically African ones. Tshisekedi went on to say that the World Bank had again expressed interest in the project, as had China’s Xi Jinping in a recent discussion they had had.

A Bright Future

Over the recent years, the usual ignorant protests about “damaging the environment,” “displacing too many people,” or “it’s too expensive” have erupted as impediments to the progress of the development of the GIHP. But, these kinds of arguments have frequently preceded the construction of any major dam or hydro-electric project (there were even protests in the U.S. against the construction of the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933, which built 16 hydroelectric dams between 1933 and 1944—a major eco-

nomic and cultural boon to America which continues today); and such alleged “negative impacts” have rarely materialized in the forms feared by the protesters.

With increased support from the recent Aug 22–24 BRICS Summit in South Africa, there is the potential of the GIHP moving forward without further delays. The need for its power generation is great. Whereas the population of the entire continent of Africa is approximately 1.5 billion, only 42% have access to electricity—a sharp contrast to the developed nations’ rate of 87%.

One need only review a full-color geographical map of Africa, and envision in the not-so-distant future, the potential combination of the GIHP, the GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam) project in Ethiopia, the Transaqua project in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other planned infrastructure developments, which will not only bring mighty rivers into the deserts, but will light up hundreds of new cities, and illuminate the minds of Africa’s 650 million youth.

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