

Ivory Coast inaugurates huge China-funded dam

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The Soubre dam is to boost Ivory Coast's power capacity while helping it reach emissions goals

President Alassane Ouattara on Thursday inaugurated a huge Chinese-funded dam in southern Ivory Coast designed to boost the country's power capacity by nearly 14 percent.

The four-turbine, four-kilometre (2.5-mile) -long Soubre dam is expected to add 275 megawatts of power to the network's present annual

supply of 2,000 MW, said Amidou Traore, managing director of the electricity firm CI-Energie.

China has provided 85 percent of its cost, estimated at 331 billion CFA francs (500 million euros, \$583 million). Construction began in 2013, and the first turbine went online in June.

Large dam projects are widely attacked by environmentalists for their impact on river flow, which affects habitat.

But Outtara, in his inauguration speech, noted the country's commitments under the 2015 Paris climate-change agreement to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions by 28 percent by 2030, across all sectors.

"The Soubre hydroelectric dam, by producing renewable energy, will help us to reach this goal," he said, adding that companies would also get a boost in "competitiveness".

The Chinese embassy described the initiative as "emblematic" of bilateral cooperations.

A major economy in West Africa, Ivory Coast launched a scheme to rebuild its electrical infrastructure after a bout of violent political upheaval in 2010-11.

Production will double by 2020 according to the plan, which foresees investment of nearly 16 billion euros, funded mostly from the private sector, by 2030.

As the country's biggest hydro-electric scheme, Soubre will boost the share of renewables in Ivory Coast's energy mix to 45 percent, Traore said. The rest is provided by fossil fuels.

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