

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	BANDWIDTH AND CLOUD SOLUTIONS
Project Number:	2021-0065
Country:	CONGO (Democratic Republic)
Project Description:	The project concerns the second phase of the construction of a fibre optic backbone in DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), focusing on underserved areas of the eastern part of the country. The fibre links included in the project will enable high speed broadband in 9 towns and will be deployed along the railways (1,280 km long) and on poles along the road (139 km).
EIA required:	yes
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise ¹ :	no

(details for projects included are provided in section: "EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise")

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

The implementation of the project will consist of the deployment of fibre optic cable, mostly along the existing railway lines (1,280 km, deployed underground) and to a lesser extent along existing roads (139 km, deployed on poles). Implementation will be in line with current industry-standard mitigation measures, which aim to reduce significantly the risk of environmental impact due to the project implementation. The project sites will be restored to their original state as soon as the implementation is completed in each area.

If the project were located in the EU, the project activities would not fall under any of the Annexes of the EIA Directive 2011/92/EU as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU. However, according to DRC's environmental legislation (notably the law N°11/009 of 09 July 2011 on fundamental principles for the protection of the environment) an ESIA is required for the approval of the project by the relevant authorities. Two ESIA's were conducted by the promoter, approved by the relevant authorities and published in the Bank's webpage.

¹ Only projects that meet the scope of the Carbon Footprint Exercise, as defined in the EIB Carbon Footprint Methodologies, are included, provided estimated emissions exceed the methodology thresholds: 20,000 tonnes CO₂e/year absolute (gross) or 20,000 tonnes CO₂e/year relative (net) – both increases and savings.

Social Assessment

The nature of the works (low impact fibre cable deployment), their geographical scope (confined to areas already used for existing transport infrastructures or adjacent reserve land) and their short duration (the promoter will deploy between 2 and 4 km of cable per day) imply that the risk of relevant negative social impacts is expected to be low and manageable through the implementation of the measures included in the ESMP (Environmental and Social Management Plan).

At corporate level, the promoter has developed a Resettlement Policy Framework at corporate level which provides mitigation and compensation measures for land acquisition impacts which may be caused by the project as well as guidelines for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Resettlement Action Plans (RAPs) or Livelihood Restoration Plans (LRPs) for sub-projects, if applicable. A copy of the Policy to the satisfaction of the Bank will be provided before signature of the finance contract.

Located in an unstable area, the project could also be subject to security-related risks due to ongoing conflicts in the project area. The promoter has prepared a comprehensive Security Management plan, including arrangements consistent with international human rights standards and principles, including the UN Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. The promoter has also developed a comprehensive training program which is based on the IFC Good Practice Handbook: Use of security forces. The promoter will implement an inclusive and participatory approach to the project, ensuring different groups in society are engaged. The common and multi-community benefits that the project may bring are important elements to stimulate inter-community alignment and collaboration, overcoming potential conflict.

The project is expected to have positive social impacts, by expanding the potential coverage of high-speed broadband networks to reach currently underserved rural areas acting as an accelerator and enabler of several United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project is expected to contribute mainly to SGD 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SGD 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). In addition, as the project will provide state of the art fibre optic connectivity to 96 schools and 36 hospitals enabling their digitalisation, it is expected to contribute to SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and SDG 4 (Quality Education).

Contribution to gender equality

DRC scores 0.652 on the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index, ranking 152 out of 160 countries. A significant gender imbalance in all the domains of economical, social, cultural and political development persists in DRC. Although the contribution of women to food security for the survival and running of the society is undeniable and internationally recognized, studies show that female participation in several domains of national life remains significantly low in comparison with men. Access of women to decision-making tables, as well as to national economic resources and production factors remains very limited. Very few Congolese women have access to decent jobs, and in general women and girls have less access to education than men and boys, as well as higher rates of illiteracy. The situation has deteriorated also due to the effects of decades of armed conflicts as well as persistent insecurity.

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Recognizing this imbalance, the Promoter has developed a Gender Strategy to mainstream gender into the work place, including – amongst others – measures related to compensation and access to leadership positions.

Currently, 44% of the promoter's senior managers and 34% of the promoter's staff are female. The promoter has committed to reaching 40% female staff by end of June 2022 and 50% by end of 2024. Based on these numbers, the project complies with the 2X Challenge criteria and therefore it has a "significant" contribution to gender equality.

Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Given the project's low impact, the public consultations conducted as part of the ESIA processes did not raise any particularly problematic concern from the communities in the project area. The promoter will establish a grievance redress mechanism coordinated by the Health, Safety and Environmental Officer to address possible concerns during project implementation. During the public consultation, the communities expressed interest in job opportunities related to the project. The promoter is planning to hire local workers, at least for activities that do not require high technical expertise.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the ESIA conclusions, the implementation and operation of the project should only have minor environmental and social impacts during the construction activities, which will be mitigated by specific measures that the promoter has committed to implement. Before signature of the finance contract, the promoter will provide the resettlement policy framework to the satisfaction of the Bank. If physical or economic resettlement occurs, the Resettlement Action Plans (RAPs) or Livelihood Restoration Plans (LRPs) for sub-projects will be conditions for disbursement. Located in an unstable area, the promoter intends to use increased security management arrangements. These arrangements are consistent with international human rights standards and principles. In particular, the promoter undertakes to conduct trainings on issues relating to Security and Human Rights to the public and private security forces. Overall, the project will improve the availability and performance of high-speed broadband services in currently underserved rural areas, leading to a wide range of socio-economic benefits.

Therefore, the project has been classified as acceptable in environmental and social terms for the Bank's financing.