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Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name: MAURITANIA REGIONAL TRANSMISSION CORRIDOR

Project Number: 2022-0140

Country: Mauritania

Project Description:

The Project concerns the construction of a 225kV, 600km-long overhead transmission line between Nouakchott and Kiffa. The Project also includes the construction and extension of the substations in the localities of Nouakchott, Aleg and El Ghaira along the transmission line to improve power distribution and a rural electrification component to give access to electricity to rural villages along the line route and a technical assistance for project management, capacity building and studies.

The Project proposed under this operation is the first phase (Lot 1) of a wider project known as PIEMM (the 225 kV Mauritania-Mali Power Interconnection and Related Solar Power Plants Development Project) aimed primarily at interconnecting Mauritania and Mali as well as the construction of a solar power plant in Mauritania and enabling further connections of PV plants.

EIA required: yes

Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise¹: no

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

Environmental and Social Assessment

The transmission line route crosses the internal regions Nouakchott, Trarza, Brakna and Assaba in the south-west of Mauritania. From Nouakchott the route runs eastward to Aleg for circa 200 km and then 200 km to El Ghaira and then further 125 km to Kiffa. Most of the route of the powerline runs along of the existing "Route de l'Espoir" (RN3) and has been selected to minimize impacts on forest areas, on residential areas and to avoid areas reserved for future infrastructure projects.

The Project will be co-financed by the EIB, EU, AfDB, World Bank, AFD and JICA on a parallel basis. Although coordination will be ensured among co-financiers, EIB will retain the responsibility to monitor the environmental and social impacts of the parts of the Project it finances. These include the transmission line between Nouakchott and Aleg as well as the new 225/90/33 kV substation in Aleg and the extension of the 90/33kV substation in Aleg as well as the 18km-long 90 kV connection between these two substations. EIB financing can also include parts of the rural electrification component to be determined once associated technical, environmental and social studies are available.

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.



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The Promoter for the Project is the Société Mauritanienne d'Electricité (SOMELEC), the fully state-owned energy company of Mauritania.

Environmental Assessment

The obligation to carry out the environmental impact assessment in Mauritania is regulated by the provisions of Decree No 2004-094 of 4 November 2004 and Decree No 2007-105 amending and supplementing certain provisions of the previous decree. The Ministry of Environment, Sanitation and Sustainable Development (MEADD²) is responsible for the implementation of the country's Environmental Policy.

In accordance with the related national regulations as well as with the Environmental and Social Standards of the African Development Bank (Integrated Safeguards System (ISS) developed in 2013), Environmental and Social Impact assessments (ESIAs) and other E&S instruments for the multiple components of the PIEMM project have been updated and carried out in 2023. In 2024, some of the E&S instruments in Mauritania were updated to comply with the Environmental and Social standards of the World Bank. The ESIA and related documentation was approved by MEADD on 3 August 2023.

With respect to the rural electrification component in Mauritania, an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF) has been prepared and published in 2023 as well. An ESIA and a RAP will be prepared during project implementation when the technical studies are available.

When analysed against EIB standards, the ESIA and associated plans for the components included in the line section Nouakchott-Kiffa (the Project) are missing some project-related risk assessments, which will need to be addressed before construction can start. An update of the ESIA will be therefore required specifically for these components. The main gaps identified are in relation to baseline information, cumulative impact analysis and critical habitat assessment.

The project site for the transmission line in Mauritania spans various types of land including dune terrain and desert land with limited agricultural land, forest land, pastoral land and water bodies.

Among the environmental impacts identified in the studies is the loss of natural habitat, habitat fragmentation in the right-of-way and wildlife disturbance, in particular risks to avifauna (collisions with birds; electrocution of large-scale avifauna. Birds are mainly present near ponds and wetlands, particularly at the Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), Lake Aleg. There is an endangered species of vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and a vulnerable species of turtledove *Streptopelia turtur* that can be found in the corridor of the line. The habitat of these species is not limited to wetlands and mitigation measures will be applied throughout the route. The risk of electrocution of wildlife can be minimised to an acceptable level with tested technical solutions that reduce wildlife access to pylons and/or cables. Mortality will be monitored by the promoter along the entire route and in proximity of wetlands in particular.

The ESIA indicates minor impacts on forest due to the nature of the terrain (desert with occasional presence of oasis) and there is limited presence of fauna or vegetation in

² Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable en Mauritanie.



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the project areas. The ESIA did not identify any legally protected areas or classified forest along the route of the line. The report indicates some potential impacts in terms of destruction of flora due to vehicle movements and clearing along the right-of-way, and that the majority of the route is located outside areas of fauna and flora interest. Mitigation measures proposed include to ensure avoidance of existing oasis in the final routing, to avoid the clearing of the near-threatened species *Dalbergia melanoxylon*, to carry out replanting and reforestation in particular around substations.

A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) established for the project in 2023 was further updated in 2024. Despite avoidance and mitigation efforts some residual impacts are expected in terms of habitat loss and fragmentation which are unavoidable. To compensate for residual impacts, the BAP proposes biodiversity offset, including habitat restoration project, conservation program, community-based conservation efforts and the expansion of protected areas. As the BAP does not sufficiently tackle the process of screening out key species and may underestimate the impacts and risks it will need to be revised based on more targeted and detailed surveys required to either confirm or exclude the critical habitat classification whilst ensuring that vulnerable species are not overlooked in the evaluation process and to ensure that avoidance, mitigation and compensation efforts are correctly tailored.

The conclusions of the ESIA and the provisions of the Environmental and Social Management Plan (including mitigation and compensation measures, labour management procedures, occupational health safety management plan, security plan roles and responsibilities etc.), must be strictly followed by the implementing entity. Close monitoring through Promoter's, implementation consultant and EIB will be ensured.

The Project was subject to a Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA), which was undertaken by external consultants in 2024 financed by the AfDB. Climate risks affecting the Project area are flooding, high temperature and wildfires. These risks are mitigated via appropriate planning, design, and operation of the Project facilities.

The source of CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e) emissions for the Project is the ohmic losses of the network resulting from the increase in demand enabled by the Project. At Project completion the corresponding both absolute emissions are estimated at 9 kt CO₂e per year. The net gains in CO₂ emissions from avoided thermal production in Mauritania correspond to a reduction of approximately -8 kt of CO₂ equivalent per year for a typical year of operation.

The Project has been assessed for Paris alignment and is considered to be aligned.

Social Assessment

Overall, the project is expected to bring about positive economic and social impacts and presents an opportunity to improve the resilience of local communities as the proposed activities will increase efficiency, reliability and availability of electricity supply for the population, create employment opportunities in the project areas and boost the economies of the country. However, the Project also has the potential for some adverse social impacts as described below.

Involuntary Resettlement



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In Mauritania, the expropriation of property for public utility electricity transmission lines is governed by the country's electricity code (2022) and related laws, including the decree of November 25, 1930, which promulgates the practical provisions applying to expropriation for public utility.

The construction and operation of the 225 kV transmission line involves the establishment of a 40-meter wide Right of-Way (RoW) along its entire length (30-meter wide for the 90 kV line). Although the route and the position of the pylons have been selected to minimise social impacts, project activities will result in physical and economic resettlement mostly related to the acquisition of land and clearing of vegetation that could lead to restrictions on land use, temporary and permanent loss of land, loss of structures, loss or disruption of income or livelihood activities within the RoW. As per the national regulatory framework, the transmission line will be subject to a Public Utility Declaration (DUP). Following technical surveys, once the proposed route is finalized, an investigation will be carried out on all properties or land to be affected by the easement and construction RoW. The results of these investigations will be used to update the RAP and will be submitted for approval to the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Urban Planning.

In terms of land acquisition impacts, according to the available studies, the project is expected to result in the temporary and permanent loss of land within the RoW of construction works of the power line, substations and associated access roads. Agricultural or pastoral activities will be able to continue under the high-voltage line after construction, therefore, the permanent loss of land is considered minimal and limited to the land required for the pylons, substations and access roads. The works may result in the temporary destruction of sources of income for the local population including loss of pasture, loss or damage to crops. Mitigation measures proposed include avoidance where feasible of cultivated areas, compensation for crops and restoration of livelihood.

Given the routing of the powerline away from residential areas, physical displacement appears to be limited. According to the ESIA and the RAP, within the final RoW, all structures which cannot be avoided, whether permanent or temporary, such as houses, huts, sheds or farm buildings, will be removed and compensated. With regards to affected dwellings, residents will also be offered the option of relocation outside of the RoW. This impact is assessed as minor given the preliminary identification of less than 40 structures within the RoW, and the availability of land in the project area for the relocation of affected residents.

In terms of the rural electrification component, further assessments will be required to fully assess physical and economic displacement impacts.

The RAP for the transmission line and the RPF for the rural electrification component were prepared in accordance with the requirements of the African Development Bank's (AfDB) Operational Safeguard 2. Pending the completion of powerline technical surveys and the rural electrification technical studies, the RAP(s) will be updated (including a vulnerability assessment and a livelihood restoration plan) to ensure full compliance with EIB standards once the footprint of each project component is finalized. The compensation scheme under the updated RAP(s) will include specific assistance for vulnerable persons affected by the Project.



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Health, Safety and Security

These risks are primarily linked to hazards associated to construction works, high risk of extreme heat, traffic, dust and noise nuisances, exposure to electromagnetic field (EMF), presence of security personnel, transmissible diseases related to the influx of labour force during the construction phase as well as contextual risks on the prevalence of gender-based violence in the country. As construction works will attract workers from different areas in the communities along the route of the transmission line, this may pose several public health and safety risks.

Health and safety of the workforce and communities will be ensured through implementation of good practice for carrying out electrical work and the development of Health and Safety Plans including traffic management plans, code of conducts for contractor's employees and awareness raising campaigns. The ESMP includes requirements on mandatory training and capacity building of employees and workers on environmental, social, health and safety aspects, as well as on gender specific initiatives aiming to prohibit discrimination, ensure equal pay, and prevent harassment and gender-based violence. As part of its security management plan objectives described in the ESIA, the project will apply the Voluntary Principles for Security and Human Rights (VPSHR).

Considering the data available from technical literature, at the boundary of the 40-meter-wide right-of-way the EMF generated by the 225 kV transmission line is expected to be far below the limits of exposure set out in the ICNIRP Guidelines.

Labour Rights

Mauritania ratified ILO labour standards, however, effective enforcement has been inconsistent (especially in relation to ILO conventions number 29- forced labour, 87- freedom of association and 98- collective bargaining). To ensure that the core principle and standards of ILO conventions are upheld throughout the project, the promoter will be expected to prepare Labor Management Plan and procedures (LMP) including aspects on gender, worker accommodation and transport, prior to the mobilization of project's workers, consistent with the national regulations and EIB Standards. The promoter will be required to include provisions for their respect in the procurement documents for works and contract an independent labour auditor.

Furthermore, as the project foresees a potential influx of workers external to the project area during the preparation and construction phases of the project, the promoter will be required to develop a project-induced migration risk assessment as part of the updated ESIA and ESMP.

Gender

The project will provide adequate resources (through technical assistance financed by AfDB) on mainstreaming gender equality and a human rights-based approach. The following activities will be implemented (i) target access to electricity for women-headed households in like manner as for other households; (ii) promote women's access to training, internships and employment and (iii) implement a capacity-building programme for women's organisations (organisational, entrepreneurial, technical and social skills - leadership, GBV, health, functional literacy, construction of cold stores and acquisition of production equipment for organized women's groups).



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Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

The reports of ESIA and ESMF studies and associated RAPs and RPF include a summary of public consultations carried out in May and June 2023 with representatives of local authorities and affected communities including Néma, Timbedra, Tintane, El Ghaira, Aleg, and Nouakchott.

Main concerns addressed by different stakeholders include access to electricity in particular for public services and vulnerable groups, training and local employment, fair compensation, risks associated to influx, preservation of natural resources that can be impacted and importance of coordination with other ongoing project and the establishment of a grievance mechanism.

A Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Grievance Mechanism (GM) procedure covering the wider PIEMM activities in Mauritania was developed in 2024 in accordance with the requirements of the World Bank ESSF. An update of the SEP and associated schedule will be required specifically for the components included in line section Nouakchott-Kiffa (Lot 1), including an accessible grievance mechanism, to be duly implemented throughout the project's duration. Following the update of the ESIA and RAP, the promoter will be required to carry out stakeholders' consultations and to incorporate the results in the final documents.

Other Environmental and Social Aspects

Monitoring of ESMP and associated E&S instrument implementation will be under the responsibility of a Project Management Unit (PMU) with the support of an external consultancy company financed by the AfDB. The PMU is currently being set up and will include specialists in various areas including environmental protection, gender, socio-economic development and health and safety. As per ESIA requirement, the Project Management Unit (PMU), the Promoter and the Contractors will have to implement an Integrated Environmental, Social, Health, and Safety System in accordance with ISO 14001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 standards. This system will include monitoring and continuous improvement procedures for environmental, social, and health-safety (ESSHS) aspects.

Conclusions and Recommendations

With the following conditions in place, the Project is acceptable for financing in environmental and social terms.

Conditions:

Conditions for First Disbursement

- Provide to the Bank a copy of the Public Utility Declaration (DUP) decree adopted by the Government formally declaring the project as one of public utility which allows for acquisition of the land and other necessary permits

Conditions for Second Disbursement

The promoter will send copies of the documents below as and when available and satisfactory to the Bank:



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- The revised ESIA (including ESMP), with updated baseline, details on cumulative impacts, details on influx risk assessment, details of the main plans and programmes that constitute the mitigation and compensation measures provided for in the environmental and social impact assessments in relation to the line section of Project (Lot 1)
- The revised BAP, based on accurate determination of critical habitat and ensuring that avoidance, mitigation and compensation efforts are correctly tailored
- The final RAP inclusive of a vulnerability assessment and livelihood restoration plan, in relation to the line section of Project (Lot 1)
- A detailed plan of compensation/reinstallation compatible with the final RAP and clearly outlining the phasing of activities to ensure works on any section of the transmission line or at any substation site do not start before compensation/reinstallation of the related PAPs has been completed
- The updated project (Lot 1) specific SEP and communication plan, outlining the past, ongoing and foreseen consultation process with the Project Affected Peoples (PAPs), including an accessible grievance mechanism
- A Labor Management Plan and procedures, inclusive of, workers grievance arrangements, and applicable requirements for contractors, subcontractors.

Condition for disbursements related to rural electrification component

The promoter will send copies of the documents below as and when available and satisfactory to the Bank:

- A SEP specific to the rural electrification component outlining the ongoing and foreseen consultation process with the Project Affected Peoples (PAPs), including an accessible grievance mechanism
- A ESIA (including EMSP) specific to the rural electrification component if applicable. If the project is screened out submission of justification on the screening decision in line with the Bank's environmental and social standards.
- A Labor Management Plan and procedures and Health & Safety management plan specific to the rural electrification component, and related update of the ESMP.
- A RAP specific to the rural electrification component inclusive of vulnerability and livelihood restoration plan for the Project area

Condition for all disbursements

The promoter will send copies of the documents below as and when available and satisfactory to the Bank:

- Evidence that the Project Management Unit (PMU) is staffed with environmental, social, health and safety resources satisfactory to the Bank, including support from external consultants, when required.
- Evidence acceptable to the Bank that compensation/reinstallation has been completed as defined in the RAP for each line section and substation location as soon as completed and before disbursement against relevant line section/substation.

If compensation/reinstallation in any specific section/sub-station could not be completed, provide to the Bank with:

- Evidence that the funds related to the outstanding compensation/reinstallation have been deposited into a dedicated account or entrusted to a third party acceptable to the Bank.



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- Evidence that the situation has resulted from:
 - The impossibility to identify one or more of the PAPs;
 - An ongoing litigation involving one or more of the PAPs that affects the compensation/reinstallation process;
 - Any other reasons beyond the Borrowers control as discussed with and accepted by the Bank.

Undertakings:

The Promoter shall undertake to:

- Prepare and submit to the satisfaction of the Bank regular monitoring reports on the environmental, social, health, safety and security performance of the Project, including any unexpected events, any updates to E&S safeguard documents, and a detailed planning of upcoming project E&S activities.
- Implementation of the project in accordance with the Bank's environmental and social standards.
- Satisfactory evidence that the Grievance Mechanism for the Project is operational before the start-up of project activities.
- Incorporate the relevant aspects of the ESIAs and corresponding ESMPs, the SEP, the BAP, the Labor Management Procedures, and Codes of conduct, into the E&S specifications of the procurement documents and contracts with contractors and supervising firms. Thereafter ensure that the contractors and supervising firms comply and that they require their subcontractors to comply with the E&S specifications of their respective contracts.
- By the end of the first year of construction activities, the Promotor will undertake and submit to the satisfaction of the Bank an Independent Labour Audit report prepared by a qualified labour specialist
- Upon completion of all resettlement activities, prepare and submit RAP(s) implementation audit report satisfactory to the Bank.
- The Promoter shall store and keep updated the E&S documentation that may be relevant to this operation and shall, upon request, promptly deliver such documents to the Bank.
- Incorporate the relevant recommendations of the CRVA (Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment), into the specifications of the procurement documents and contracts with contractors.