

PRESS RELEASE

AECOM provides social services for Malawi graphite project

11 April 2018: Integrated infrastructure delivery company AECOM produced the winning bid for social services for Sovereign Metals' Malingunde graphite project in the Lilongwe District in Malawi.

AECOM received a request for proposal from Sovereign Metals' Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP), Dhamana Consulting of Perth, Australia. The EAP had approached three consulting firms, namely two in South Africa and one in Malawi, based on industry intelligence and recommendations from other professionals in the field.

Dhamana Consulting is the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) service provider, while AECOM is conducting two of the more than ten specialist studies, in addition to the stakeholder engagement for the ESIA process.

"This makes us, with support from our local consultant, the sole provider of social services for the project," AECOM Senior Specialist **Karien Lotter** comments. Not only was the scope of work in line with the company's core business, it also has a dedicated team of professionals in this regard.

"We are well-situated in South Africa to serve our clients' needs in Africa. Travel-expedient and affordable, we have an intuitive understanding of the African business and social milieu, making it easier for us to conduct business and relate to project-affected people," Lotter stresses.

AECOM's scope of work encompasses stakeholder engagement, social impact assessment, and the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP). These components, comprising part of the ESIA process, are regulated by Malawian legislation, meaning there are specific legal requirements to be met in this regard.

In addition, Sovereign Metals opted to conduct its studies to conform to the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Performance Standards as well as Equator Principles, in the event of applying for funding. These standards serve to mitigate investment risks for financial institutions.

"Conducting studies to these standards is usually an indication that the environmental and social assessment considered everything it should have, and that appropriate mitigation and management measures have been developed to minimise the project's impact on the people and their environment," Lotter elaborates.

The ESIA process, which AECOM's scope of work forms a part of, will run for about a year, as from November 2017. "The aim is to submit the ESIA report to the Malawian Environmental Affairs Department by late this year, in support of an application for environmental authorisation," Lotter reveals.

The RAP will be submitted to the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development for comment and approval. This sets out the plan according to which displaced people will be compensated for losses, physically relocated if required, and how livelihoods will be restored.

The extent of physical and economic displacement is currently being investigated, in collaboration with Sovereign Metals. The aim is to minimise displacement through, inter alia, working with the team undertaking the feasibility studies to ensure that social and environmental impacts are considered during the design phase.

The RAP serves as a mitigation measure to address the impact of land acquisition required by the project. During the RAP process, all land owners and users who stand to be affected by land acquisition, as well as their assets, are identified. Assets are mapped in collaboration with the Department of Lands. Full replacement costs are calculated by means of a market-asset valuation assessment.

“Resettlement planning is a very interactive process because you negotiate and reach agreement on every aspect of resettlement, so as to promote a common understanding and consensus of the conditions under which project-affected people will be moved out of the project area,” Lotter highlights.

The AECOM team comprises **Mark Westbury** and **Alessandra Awolowo** from the UK conducting the Social Impact Assessment; independent South African consultant **Anelle Lotter** leading the stakeholder engagement; and Lotter herself as resettlement expert. Additionally, Lilongwe-based consulting firm, C12 Consultants, is supporting the ESIA process and AECOM’s activities.

“Challenges associated with the remote location, in particular, are being mitigated by the good working relationship with Sovereign Metals’ in-country team and our local consultant. Both groups provide on-going support to enable us to conduct our work, even when we are not in-country,” Lotter concludes.

Ends

Notes to the editor

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