

U.S. Position on the AfDB Regional Investment in the “Gambia River Basin Development Organization”

September 30, 2015

The United States shares the objectives that this project intends to support – promoting regional power integration through developing power generation and transmission infrastructure to support broader access to reliable power among these four countries.

The project includes many positive components, particularly on the institutional support to ensure that the Gambia River Basin Development Organization (OMVG) has additional resources to implement and supervise this project.

Drawing on lessons from an earlier regional power project, the United States also appreciates that the project includes support to cover operational and maintenance expenses for the first five years, which the United States hopes will be enough time to have OMVG assume responsibility for operational and maintenance needs.

The United States also appreciates the discussion of the resettlement impact and the inclusion of NGOs as third party monitors to oversee the implementation of the resettlement action plan.

However, the United States’ main concern is that for a project of this scope in a region that is rich in biodiversity, the environmental and social impact assessments did not fully assess the extent of the possible impacts on biodiversity, which necessitates additional studies now and for which offsets are not yet known. Furthermore, in addition to inundating and fragmenting habitat in the national parks, the diversion of water for agriculture will change the salinity of water in the coastal estuaries, resulting in major, and, as of yet, unquantified changes. If the purpose of the environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) process is to inform decision makers, the United States does not understand how this project can go forward if additional studies still need to be done to determine these essential impacts.

Because of the concern on the limited environmental due diligence and domestic legislation on the transparency of military audits, which impacts any MDB financing for Guinea Bissau, the United States votes “NO” on this project.

For a project of this size and complexity, the United States urges the AfDB to continue close coordination with the other donors on project implementation.