

Congo power outages

A surge of plastic waste clogging the Ruzizi hydroelectric dam in eastern Congo is causing regular power outages, disrupting lives and businesses in several cities. The dam, situated at the southern end of Lake Kivu, provides electricity to the city of Bukavu and its surroundings. However, its operations are increasingly hindered by the mounting waste, prompting urgent calls for solutions.

The issue stems from the region's rising use of plastics and inadequate waste collection systems. During heavy rains, plastic waste washes down from the mountainous terrain into Lake Kivu, where it accumulates and blocks the dam's machinery.

"This waste effectively blocks the water. Water has difficulty entering the forced conduits to provide the pressure and speed required for the machines," explained Ljovy Mulemangabo, provincial director of the national power company, SNEL.

Every day, workers attempt to remove plastic bottles, jerry cans, and other debris, but the sheer volume overwhelms their efforts. The waste not only collects on the surface but also sinks to depths of up to 14 meters, requiring divers to clear the riverbed to prevent turbine blockages.

The frequent power cuts are taking a toll on local businesses. "Our bosses are pressing us because of delays in completing their orders, and we don't know what to do," said Alex Mbilizi, a metalworker in Bukavu. The outages disrupt production schedules, leaving businesses struggling to meet deadlines.

Authorities are exploring measures to address the crisis. Didier Kabi, provincial minister of environment and green economy, emphasised the need for households to take responsibility for their waste. Requiring households to join a waste collection organisation could help stop plastic from accumulating in the lake. "This will enable us to see to what extent everyone needs to collect their own waste at household level," Kabi said.

However, surface-level cleanup alone won't suffice. Divers must continue their efforts to clear submerged debris to prevent future turbine failures, highlighting the complexity of the problem.

The plastic waste crisis at Ruzizi dam underscores the urgent need for sustainable waste management solutions in the region. Without decisive action, the dam's operations--and the livelihoods of those dependent on it--will remain at risk.

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Power outages in Congo can happen for a variety of reasons, from routine maintenance to unexpected emergencies. Our goal is to provide timely updates to keep you informed about any changes.

Scheduled maintenance is essential for improving the reliability and safety of the power grid. These outages are planned in advance, and we'll notify you so you can be prepared. However, emergencies, such as severe weather or damage to power lines, can lead to unexpected outages.

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