Although discussion of hydroelectric power on the Congo River is dominated by the massive Grand Inga Project, which could generate as much as 39,000 megawatts of power, construction of a series of smaller dams could create meaningful results much more quickly. The Grand Inga project has already encountered setbacks and attracted criticism, especially by environmental groups such as International Rivers. The groups argue that the continent lacks a distribution network capable of carrying power from a single mega-project to those who really need it. In addition, only 6% of Congolese have access to electricity, and they argue that the money for the project could be spent much more wisely. Luckily, in the midst of the debate over the massive project, work began on a dam at Kakobola, which is one of the first of up to 315 smaller dams planned for sites around the country. The dam will provide 9.3 megawatts of power for three built up areas in the southwestern DRC province of Bandundu. The region, which relies on kerosene lamps and candles for electricity, is eagerly awaiting the completion of the dam. Aside from providing electricity to residents and health facilities, the dam will also contribute toward securing regular access to drinking water for the city of Kikwit, where more than 800,000 people lack access to safe drinking water. The immense benefits of the small dam for local communities go to show that good things really do come in small packages.

Source: