

Myanmar boosts electricity access with renewables

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MYANMAR has intensified a five-year project to provide electricity to rural areas by using off-grid solutions including solar and wind energy. The move comes amid rising demand for power.

Khant Zaw, director general at the Department of Rural Development (DRD), said recently that US\$90 million would be spent to implement off-grid projects between 2016 and 2021.

The project aims to implement solar home systems in 8,400 villages and mini-grid projects in 350 villages situated at least 16 kilometres from the national grid.

"Nearly 100,000 households will benefit from the project that can also provide electricity to 16,000 public buildings and 40,000 streetlights. We will continue our efforts until we reach the nationwide electrification target by 2030," said the official.

Khant Zaw said more than 80,000 households in 1,300 villages would have access to electricity by solar home systems and mini-grid projects to be implemented in 34 villages in the 2017-18 fiscal year.

During the 2016-17 fiscal year, the project connected solar home systems for 140,000 households in 2,708 villages. Additionally, mini-grid projects were implemented in 10 villages to expand electricity access in remote areas.

According to the official, solar home systems has been installed with contributions with the involvement of communities and the private sector. For the mini-grid system, the DRD contributed 60 per cent while community and private investors contributed 20 per cent each of the total cost. Public facilities were fully provided with the compliments of the DRD.

World Bank statistics show more than 70 per cent of Myanmar's population have no access to electricity. To address this, the organisation has been working closely with the government to expand the national grid and implement off-grid projects. The Ministry of Energy and Electricity oversees on-grid projects while the DRD is responsible for off-grid solutions.

The World Bank has approved \$400 million for Myanmar's national electrification project, \$310 million of which will go to the expansion of the national grid with the remaining \$90 million to be spent for the DRD's off-grid projects. The project also assures funding and technical assistance from other development partners including the Asian Development Bank, the German International Cooperation Agency and Japan International Cooperation System.