

# Myanmar's hydropower study to be finalised soon

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38

AS MYANMAR needs more electricity to realise its development goals during the first civilian government's term, two ministries have been holding a series of discussions until the third week of January to finalise the nationwide strategic environmental assessment (SEA) on hydropower potential by March.

The series of discussions started with a stakeholder meeting in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, on January 5, led by two ministries - Ministry of Electricity and Energy and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, in cooperation with International Finance Corporation.

The second event in the series was held in Dawei, the capital of Thanintharyi Region, on Monday. It will be followed by Bago (January 10), Hpa An (January 12), Taunggyi (January 15), in addition to discussions with the authorities in Nay Pyi Taw and a stakeholders meeting in Yangon to be held later this month.

Vikram Kumar, IFC Country Manager for Myanmar, said in an interview the study could help generate higher quality investments in the nation's hydropower sector.

He added the initiative was one of several activities IFC worked on to encourage more sustainable hydropower development.

"Hydropower is a sector that has potential to contribute significantly to the power needs of the country but must first raise its standards to good industry practices. This is where our work on the SEA comes in," he said.

Kumar said the study focused on understanding and documenting the important environmental and social values that could be at risk from hydropower development. He considers it as the foundation to help develop Myanmar's hydropower sector more sustainably.

"Understanding environmental and social risks at the basin and sub-basin level is the first step to achieving this sustainability. With a better understanding of the risks at stake, more responsible developers that will bring international experience and good practice standards will be encouraged to explore investment

opportunities in Myanmar," he said.

According to Kumar, the organisation has funded the study as it wants to see the quality of investors improve, which will have a long-term positive development impact on how hydropower projects are designed and operated and contribute to the needs of the country.

In 2014, IFC began its support to the government to help advance environmental and social sustainability of Myanmar's hydropower sector. Since September 2015, the organisation has trained government officials on international standards in the sector.

In 2016, stakeholders took part in over 50 engagements to share their insights on environmental and social values related to riverine development in Myanmar, providing the foundation for the nationwide study.

Once completed, the SEA will illustrate areas of low, medium and high risk, better informing decision makers and improving hydropower planning. It will be available for the public in Burmese and English languages.

Kumar hopes the government to use the study as a high-level tool to determine whether projects should go forward. It could be a model for other sectors to follow, he said.

He insisted that the study is not a green or red light for development.

"It is not connected to any project and is not politically motivated. It is a country-level study to understand which river basins are most at risk. We recommend protection of Myanmar's key mainstream rivers including the Ayeyarwady," he said.

"Hydropower development that may choose to proceed in a higher-risk area would need to invest more in their mitigation to protect the environment and people dependent on water resources.

"A low-risk area does not mean hydropower can proceed. It means that the area could have potential if stakeholders are consulted, environmental risks are mitigated and good practices are established."

He believes the study plays a key role in the development of Asia Pacific region, as it has brought together stakeholders, investors and developers from across Asia to discuss about their environmental and social concerns over the past 12 months. -