Salween Dam cascade  Myanmar

**Sectors:** energy plants - dams

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About Salween Dam cascade

The Salween River (Nu River in China, Thanlwin River in Myanmar) originates in the Tibetan mountains and flows for about 2,800 kilometres through China and Myanmar and forms part of the border between the latter and Thailand. Until recently, the Salween River was the largest undammed river in Southeast Asia. In Myanmar, a series of seven dams are planned to be constructed. The Salween River is full of natural resources and its banks are home to many diverse ethnic groups.

The dam cascade is composed of the Kun Long, Nong Pa, Mong Ton, Ywathit, Weigyi, Dagwin and Hatgyi dams and has a total maximum capacity of over 15,000 megawatts. The Kun Long, Nong Pa and Mong Ton dams are to be built in the northern Shan State of Myanmar, while the others are planned further south near the Thai border. The dams combined price tag is estimated to easily exceed USD 10 billion.

There is fierce resistance from local communities against the dams, which is met with militarization of the dam sites and violence. All dams are located in politically unstable regions, where several armed groups are in conflict. The planned dams therefore also form a huge threat to Myanmar's fragile peace process.

**Brief history**

**Kun Long Dam** - Located in the north of Shan State, close to the Chinese border, the dam is planned to have a maximum installed capacity of 1,400 megawatts. Construction already started in 2015, but stopped when armed conflict broke out between Kokang forces and government troops. Construction has been suspended. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that was conducted by Hydrochina has not been made public. China’s Hanergy Holding Group was assigned to develop and operate the dam project.

**Nong Pa Dam** - Also located in the north of Shan State, the 1,200-megawatt-dam lies in a region controlled by the United Wa State Army (UWSA). Militarization of the region has caused tension and prevents access, so little is known about the current situation. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Chinese government in 2010 and Hydrochina is reported to develop the project.

**Mong Ton Dam** (website) - With a maximum installed capacity of 7,000 megawatts, the Mong Ton Dam (formerly known as Tasang Dam) is the biggest dam to be built in Shan State, again in a historically conflictuous area. The dam will consist of a 241-metre-high concrete wall and will cost around USD 8 billion. The dam project is owned and funded by a joint venture between China Three Gorges (CTG), China Southern Power Grid (CSG), the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand Int. (EGATi), the International Group of Entrepreneurs Co. Ltd (IGE) and Myanmar's Ministry of Electric Power (MOEP). In 2013, an environmentalists' visit revealed that for some months about a 100 engineers were already working on the dam. Australian Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation (SMEC) has been commissioned to conduct the EIA/SIA, but local resistance prevents completion.

**Ywathit Dam** - The Ywathit Dam is officially planned to have a maximum installed capacity of 600 megawatts, though information from project developer China Datang Corporation shows a capacity of 4,500 megawatts. Heavy conflict has tormented the region for decades, with continuous struggle between Karenni resistance troops and government military forces. Following the deaths of three Chinese engineers in 2010, who were working on preliminary constructions, military camps were built to protect the dam site.

**Weigyi Dam and Dagwin Dam** - Located on the Thai border, these 4,540- and 729-megawatt-dams are part of a cooperation strategy between the governments of Myanmar and Thailand. The bigger Weigyi dam lies within the Salween Wildlife Sanctuary. In 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Electricity Generating Authority (EGAT) of Thailand, who is now developing the project.

**Hatgyi Dam** - Located in Karen State, close to the Thai border, the Hatgyi dam is planned to have a maximum installed capacity of 1,360 megawatts and costs approximately USD 2.6 billion. Fierce opposition against the project is expressed by local residents, which caused the deployment of eight battalions of soldiers near the dam site. EGAT and Sinohydro are responsible for developing the project.

**What must happen**

All planned dams should not be built before Myanmar has managed to bring peace and stability to the region and previously fled residents have returned to their homes. Banks and investors must abstain from financing these dam project.

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**Issues**
Social issues
All seven planned dams are located in politically highly unstable regions. Now that a peace process finally has taken off and conflicting parties have reopened conversations, the hydropower projects pose a huge risk for Myanmar’s first steps towards stability. Local resistance is widespread and has led to violent conflicts in multiple cases. Several dams require residents to be resettled, while these regions are also originally home to hundreds of thousands of people that fled during the civil war. If these dams are being constructed, there is no option for them to return.

The plans for the seven-dam-project have been developed in relative secrecy. Affected communities have not been consulted nor informed about the projects’ dimensions or implications. At the Kunlong dam site, there have been reports of property being expropriated without any compensation for local residents.

Environmental issues
The Salween River was until recently one of the last free-flowing big rivers in Southeast Asia. The river has an abundant fish population and unique biodiversity sites. Several affected communities have reported the granting of logging concessions causing large-scale deforestation around the Ywathit and Mong Ton dams.

Several dams will have considerable reservoirs that will require the inundation of precious farmland and rainforest.

Human rights
Under the military regime, Myanmar's human rights situation has been regarded as one of the worst on the planet. The democratic reform process of recent years has eased conflicts in some parts of the country, while others have intensified. Although the democratically elected National League for Democracy-government is hoped to restore basic human rights, there is concern to what extent they will be capable. Ethnic minorities are often the victim of systemic discrimination and human rights violations, as reported by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in June 2016.

Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Asia. Indigenous peoples, usually referred to by the Myanmar government as 'ethnic nationalities', inhabit much of the areas affected by the planned dams. Especially Shan State is home to many ethnic minorities. An estimated 350,000 people are internally displaced in eastern Myanmar. Years of ethnic violence have compelled many to flee their homes. Dam projects in these conflict zones cannot be started before everyone has had the opportunity to safely return to their homes.

Myanmar has not ratified ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples.

Governance

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<td>UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights</td>
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<td>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</td>
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Updates

Related companies

**Changjiang Institute of Survey, Planning, Design and Research (CSPDR) China**
Conducted feasibility studies for Mong Ton dam.

**China Datang Corporation China**
Developer of Ywathit dam.

**China Southern Power Grid (CSG) China**
Developing Mong Ton dam together with Sinohydro and China Three Gorges (CTG) - part of joint venture.

**China Three Gorges (CTG) China**
Developing Mong Ton dam together with Sinohydro and China Southern Power Grid (CSG) - part of joint venture.

**Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) Thailand**
Part of Mong Ton dam's joint venture, linked to Weigyi and Dagwin dams and developing Hatgyi dam together with Sinohydro.

**Hanergy Holding Group Ltd. China**
Assigned for constructing and operating Kun Long Dam.
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<td>Hydrochina</td>
<td>China</td>
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<td>IGE Group of Companies (IGE)</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Part of Mong Ton dam’s joint venture.</td>
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<td>Sinohydro</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Developing Hat Gyi dam together with EGAT, developing Mong Ton dam together with China Three Gorges (CTG) and China Southern Power Grid (CSG) - part of joint venture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMEC</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Conducting EIA/SIA for Mong Ton dam.</td>
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