

44 projects are planned as joint ventures with foreign investors, totalling approximately 42,150 MW," U Nyan Tun said.

Several dam projects have been suspended by the government because of mounting pressure from civil society groups, environmentalists and residents. Most notable was the suspension in 2011 of the Chinese-funded Myitsone dam in Kachin state. This was to be the lower most stage of a US\$20 billion seven dam project with around 90 percent of the power destined for China.

In 2013, the Myanmar Government approved a 7 dam hydropower project on the Salween or Thanlwin river, the second largest river in Southeast Asia. The proposed dams will be situated in Shan, Kayah and Kayin states and civil society groups are concerned that this will increase tensions between ethnic minorities and the government as well as having a severe environmental impact on the area.

"In order to meet the increasing demand of power supply throughout the whole country, the Ministry of Electric Power is implementing a large number of various kinds of hydropower projects in the country," said Myanmar's Energy Minister U Nyan Tun.



The Myitsone Dam, currently on hold, has proved a contentious issue. Photo: Mizzima

U Min Klaing from the department of Hydropower Implementation spoke at the summit and confirmed the construction of these projects was in progress and is seen as integral to the government's hydropower plans for the future.

Dr Aung Naing Oo of the Save the Salween Network told Mizzima Weekly that he thinks this project will have an untold social impact on the ethnic groups in the area. He added that many people rely on fishing in the river for their livelihoods and will be forced to move to other regions once the dams are built.

"We want no hydropower dams on the Thanlwin river. We would consider dams in smaller rivers and would discuss with ethnic groups and the government. Many times we've asked for transparency," he said

The government said that the development of micro-hydro power was also in their plans. Micro-hydro dams have a capacity of 1-10MW and have minimal social and environmental impacts. These can be developed in remote rural areas as they don't require connection to the national grid.

"At present about 3 percent of the country potential has already been developed and 26 percent

is under implementation. Small hydropower is expected to continue to be developed as a power source for small village electrification," said U Nyan Tun.

Keynote speaker Jean-Marc Brule, a member of the French Green Party and founder of NGO Green Lotus told Mizzima Weekly that there must be more focus on micro-hydropower dams over large scale hydro-power.

"Micro hydro-power has many good solutions, it utilises reliable technologies and there are a lot of villages, rural people all around the country who are actually already implementing these solutions. The first thing for the Myanmar government is to make micro hydro-power profitable for the people. Let's develop that a lot," said Mr Brule.

"The pressure for electricity is huge so there will need to be some large dams, but the less large dams, the less painful for the environment, the more profitable for the Myanmar people rather than for neighbours like China and Thailand and it's more safe from a geological point of view," he said.

A few large dams that meet the acknowledgement of the people and civil society with a focus on micro-hydropower can be achieved, Mr Brule added.