

Cumulative Impact Assessment and Management of Renewable Energy Development in the Myitnge River Basin, Myanmar

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA)?

A CIA is a multi-step process that analyzes and estimates the total sum of the direct and indirect impacts of proposed activities on the environment, and on communities. This CIA looks at existing and proposed renewable energy developments in the Myitnge River Basin.

The cumulative impacts examined in this study are the sum of the incremental effects of past, present, or future activities, in addition to the impact of the proposed projects. Though these impacts may often be considered negligible at the individual project level, when added together over time they can have significant impact on environmental and social factors.

What is the difference between a Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA) and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?

Both a CIA and an EIA assess the impact of development activities on the environment and communities. However, they take different perspectives: EIA's are project-centered and CIA's are Valued Environmental and Social Components (VEC)-centered. In an EIA, the focus of analysis begins with the project. In the CIA, the focus then shifts to the selected VECs.

Why is this happening now?

The Myitnge CIA follows and builds on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Myanmar Hydropower Sector, finalized in 2018. IFC partnered with the Myanmar Ministry of Electricity and Energy (MOEE) and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) for the SEA study, designed to support planning for hydropower at a basin-wide scale taking into account environmental and social values and potential cumulative impacts.

The Myanmar hydropower sector has enormous potential, and development of this sector offers considerable potential for Myanmar to better meet domestic demand, increase electrification rates (from 40% at present), and power economic growth.

The Myanmar's SEA of the Hydropower Sector recommends system-scale planning and CIAs of multiple renewable energy development projects at the sub-basin level. The Myitnge CIA will be the first pilot CIA study at the sub-basin level to demonstrate how risks and opportunities that are often not captured in individual project Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) can be identified and managed, leading to more holistic and sustainable basin development.

Why the Myitnge River Basin?

The Myitnge River Basin is a major tributary entering the Ayeyarwady River just downstream of Mandalay. The Myitnge basin is already well developed with respect to hydropower, supporting the largest amount of installed hydropower generation capacity of any catchment in the country, with 906 MW installed, and another 280 MW under construction. There are five hydropower projects currently in operation, one under construction, and a further five at various stages of planning, as well as other potential renewable energy generation options.

There has been no CIA of the power development proposals in the basin. Completing a CIA of renewable energy in the Myitnge is consistent with the recommendation of the SEA to pilot catchments with both advanced hydropower development and without any developed hydropower resources.

What does this study seek to achieve?

The vision for the Myitnge CIA study is that sustainable planning for renewable energy development options in the Myitnge River Basin is founded on a clear, multi-stakeholder commitment to assessing and managing cumulative impacts, and collaborative monitoring and management.

The study will deliver an integrated assessment of the cumulative impacts of renewable energy development in the Myitnge River Basin, including power development and optimization scenarios. Based on these integrated CIA findings, the study will propose a participatory framework for ongoing river basin co-management in the Myitnge, including collaborative environmental and social impact monitoring and management. An important objective embedded into delivery of these two components - the integrated CIA and the basin co-management framework – is to strengthen the capacity of Myitnge River Basin stakeholders in CIA and co-management.

Who will be asked to contribute to this CIA?

The CIA will consult with local stakeholders in the Myitnge River Basin, as well as hydropower developers, the government at national, state/regional and local levels, researchers, NGOs/CSOs and local communities in the basin. A Coordination Group has been created to obtain and share information related to the environmental and social impacts of developers' projects, help engage key stakeholders, and provide guidance and feedback throughout the process.

What is IFC's role in the CIA?

The Myitnge River Basin CIA has been commissioned by IFC as part of its activities to promote environmentally sustainable renewable power planning globally and in Myanmar. IFC provides the Government of Myanmar, the consulting team, and all stakeholders with the tools and expertise regarding CIAs according to the IFC Good Practice Handbook on CIAs (2013). IFC is in an advisory role only; it will not recommend or endorse specific projects for development. The CIA is being funded by the Governments of Australia and the UK.

Will the results of the CIA be used to decide what projects will be approved in the Myitnge River Basin?

The CIA is an evidence-based tool that outlines the environmental and social risks and impacts of a variety of power development scenarios. It is then up to the government, in consultation with developers and other stakeholders, to decide how to proceed.

Is IFC planning to invest in hydropower or renewable energy projects in the Myitnge River Basin?

IFC will make future decisions on investments based on the recommendations from the SEA. Any project for possible investment by IFC will need to go through rigorous environmental and social impact assessments to determine specific project impacts and include outcomes of the basin-wide CIA.

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