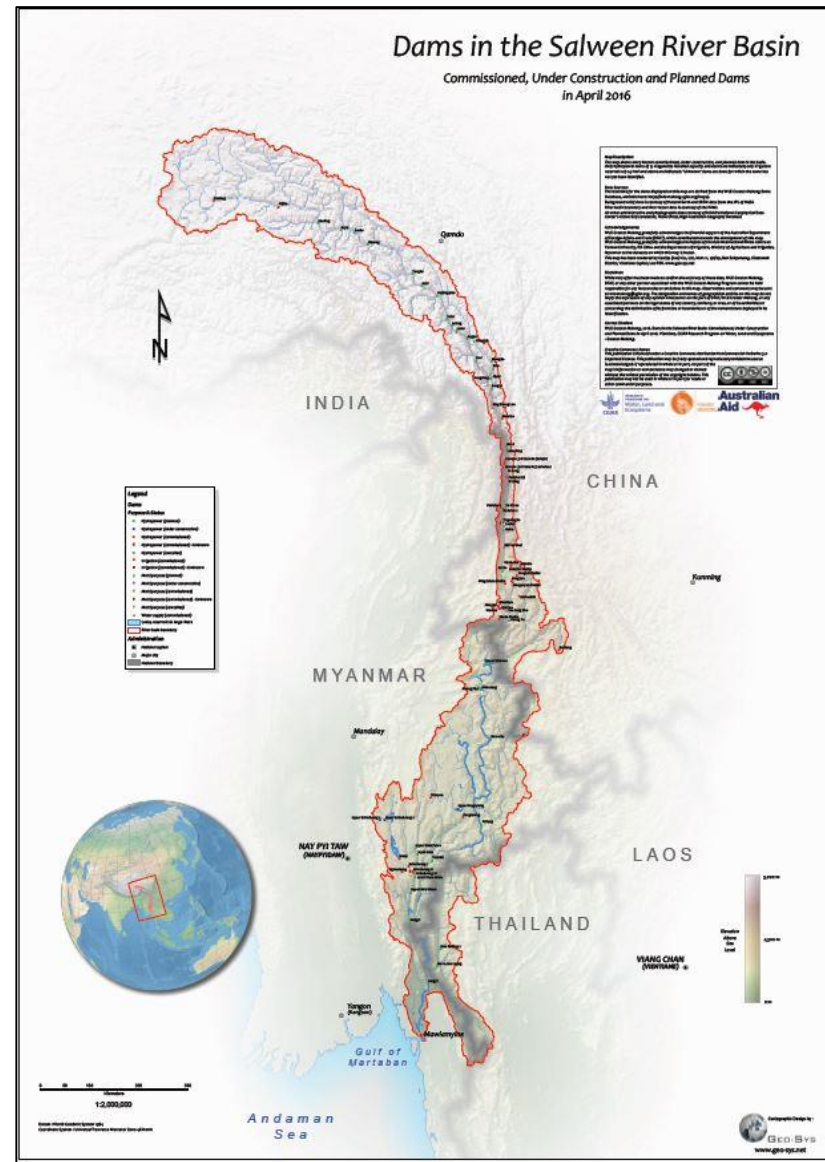


# Politics of water, energy and peace on the Salween River, Myanmar: A pathways analysis



# Introduction

- Nu-Thanlwin-Salween River is a transboundary river shared between China, Myanmar and Thailand
- A recent history of conflict in the territory of Myanmar
- A cascade of mainstream dams proposed in China (15), Myanmar (5).
- The future of the river basin is contested, with divergent visions, discourses and practices.



# Three pathways

- Pursuit of large hydropower dams before a political agreement for peace between the central government and ethnic groups is complete
- Political dialogue and genuine peace followed by deliberation on resource governance
- A local development pathway, such as the Salween Peace Park in Karen State





# Making sense of contrasting visions and policies: A “pathways” approach

Analysis of a development pathway entails analyzing how different actors' visions for the basin are being formulated and acted upon, including the narratives produced, and the decision-making processes invoked

- Type of government institutions, policies, and extent of democratization
- Role of non-state actors
- Types of business, and their accountability
- Choice of technology
- What knowledge is valued in decision-making? (science? Local knowledge?)
- How are assessment tools, such as EIA used or misused?



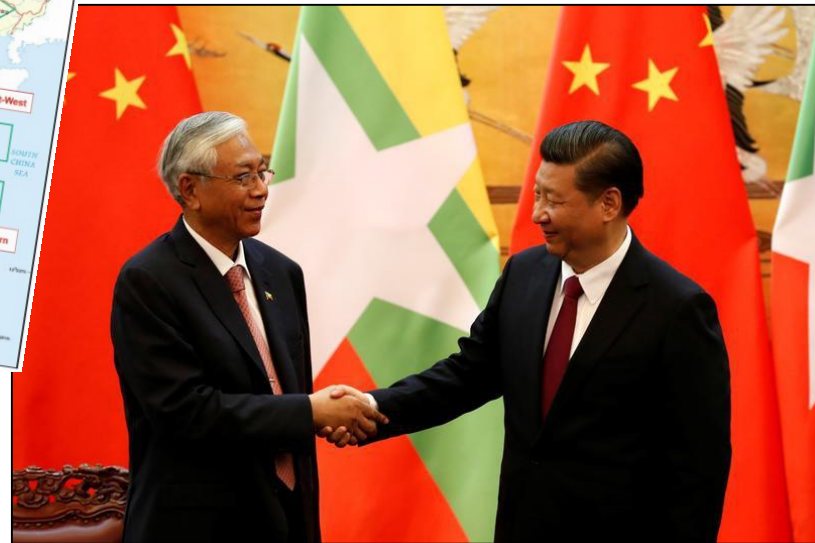
# Fragmented Sovereignties of the Salween basin

- Never since independence in 1948 has the Union government been the sole sovereign within the country
- A complex mosaic of claims for political authority, legitimacy and territory have emerged in the ethnic states of the Salween basin (and beyond) producing a form of “mixed” or “fragmented” sovereignty
- The boundaries of these territories are not clearly demarcated, nor officially sanctioned in the law or constitution (Jolliffe, 2015)



# Context: regional economic integration

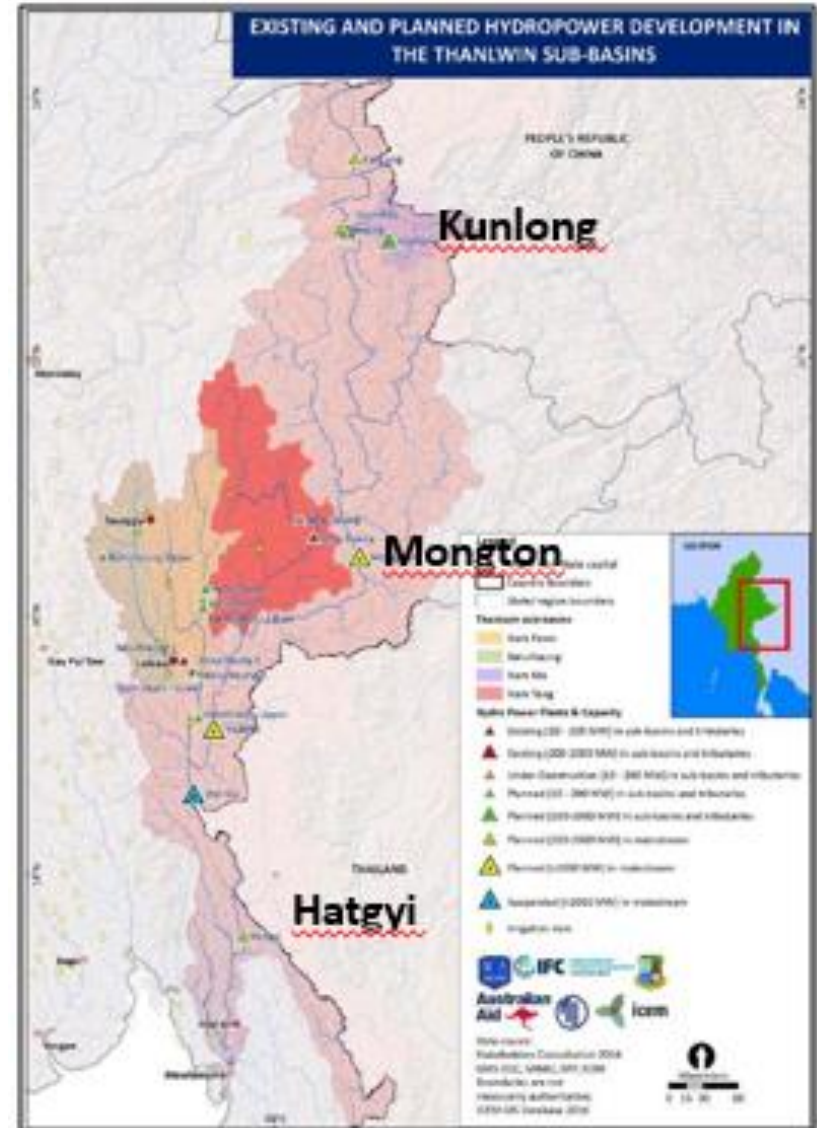
- Deepening regional economic integration since 1990s
  - ADB's Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) program
  - ASEAN Economic Community
  - China-led Belt and Road initiative





# 1. Large dams pathway

- Pursuing hydropower dams before a political agreement for peace between the central government and ethnic groups is complete



## 2. Political dialogue, genuine peace, resource governance deliberation

- The current peace negotiation process began in 2011
- Two coalitions:
  - Burma Army, the government and parliament, and;
  - Ethnic Armed Organisation (EAOs), Ethnic Political Parties and CSOs
- Stated goal:
  - “... [B]uilding a democratic federal union in line with the result of a political dialogue ... fully ensuring the right to democracy, national equality and self-determination”





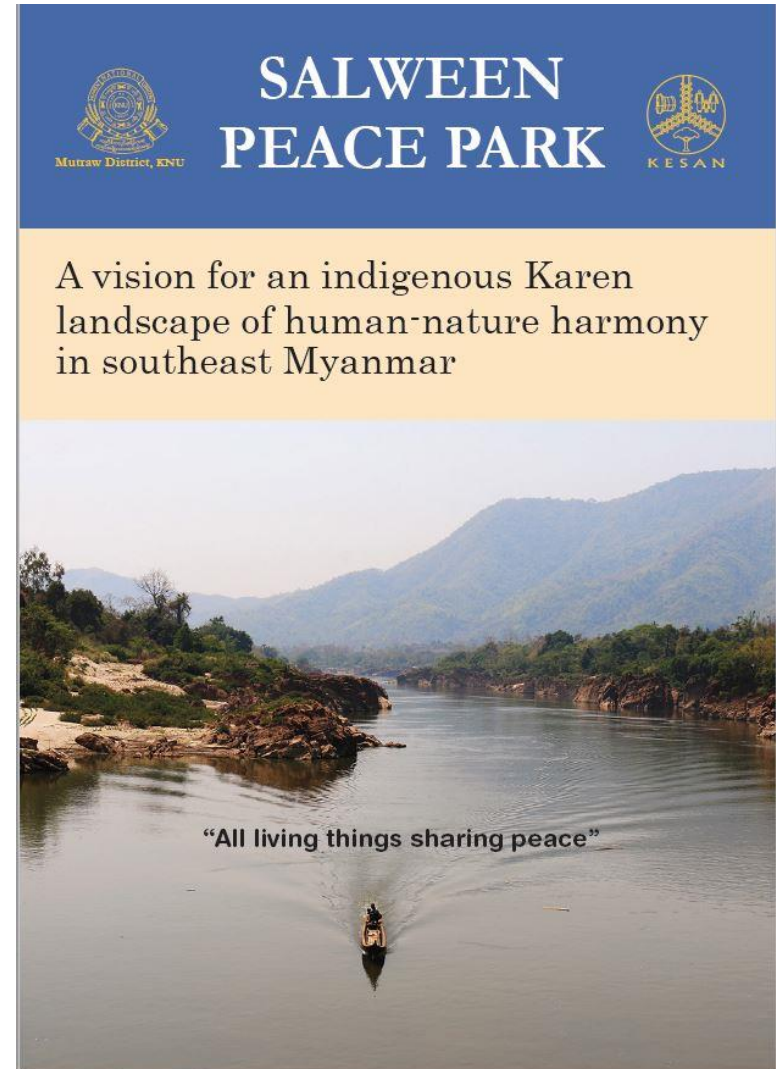
# 3. Local development pathway



- Community-centered development
- Ethnic customary natural resource management
- Local administrative systems into decision making processes
- Local right to conserve the environment and secure livelihoods at the centre of development

# Salween Peace Park

*“The Salween Peace Park is a grassroots, people-centered alternative to the previous Myanmar government and foreign companies’ plans for destructive development in the Salween River basin. Instead of massive dams on the Salween River, we see small hydropower and decentralized solar power. Instead of large-scale mining and rubber plantations, we call for eco-tourism, sustainable forest management, agroforestry and organic farming. Instead of megaprojects that threaten conflict and perhaps the resumption of war, we seek a lasting peace and a thriving ecosystem where people live in harmony with the nature around them.”*



# Conclusion

- There are divergent visions for the future of the Salween Basin
- The pathways discussed tie intimately to the ongoing peace negotiations in Burma
- Depending on the pathway followed, there will be a greater or lesser impact on the environment, and just or unjust in terms of the distribution of benefits and costs in society.





# Thank you for listening

