

were continuing and still operating in Toungoo district were division, Southern Military Command, military command headquarters, light infantry battalions and infantry battalions with a total of 46 battalions.”³⁴⁴

Food Scarcity Due to Forced Labor

Forced labor contributes to a loss of food security by leaving the villagers insufficient time to work on their fields, or taking them away so that they were unable to prevent animals from destroying their crops. Often, forced labor left villagers too weak, sick, or injured to work when they returned. In addition, villagers are often taken for forced labor when they are on their way back from buying food from other villages. When this happens, the SPDC confiscates the food they are carrying, further contributing to food scarcity. Finally, when adults, especially women, are taken for forced labor and children are left behind, there is no one to care for and provide food for the children.

Because the SPDC control the area, they impose security restrictions and threaten the villagers in many ways. The villagers who are living in these white zone areas are forced by the SPDC to work for military construction projects and to cultivate cash crops for the military. The SPDC forces villagers to cut the brush and vines along the car roads without any payment when they are repairing the roads. Some villagers have been killed by SPDC landmines and some have been tortured during the forced labor.

The SPDC force elderly people, women, and children to work together. Some have to work for the military camp, carrying water, cooking, cutting wood for fires and building fences around the military camps. They also force the villagers to make festival ceremonies with the villagers’ own food. When the villagers get sick the SPDC does not take care of them and does not give them any food, water, or rest. If the villagers do not go for forced labor they have to give however much money the SPDC wants and the villagers cannot argue. They order the village headmen to find one person to work from each house. Because of the forced labor, the villagers do not have enough time to work on their own fields. This means that they cannot provide enough food for their families, leading to health problems.

“During 2007 the SPDC forced 296 people and 19 cars to work for them without payment or food.”³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

Portering

The villagers who are living in the SPDC-controlled lowland areas have to go porter 4 or 5 times a year. Sometimes they have to go for only 1 day, but sometimes they have to go for an entire month. Because the villagers had to go porter they lost the valuable time that they need to work in their fields. Sometimes, because the



SPDC soldiers forcing villagers to be porters.
(Photo by KHRG).

villagers were away, the wild animals destroyed the rice in the fields and when the villagers came back they saw only their damaged crops. When the harvest time arrives they get only a little rice and it is not adequate for the family anymore.

"In May 2007, SPDC Division 66 forced me to carry their rice and I had to carry a heavy rice load that weighed 15 viss and they recorded my name and took my photo before I went."³⁴⁶

The SPDC troops not only ordered the village headmen to find porters. They also had bad behavior when they saw the villagers traveling or buying other foods such as dry fish, fish paste, salt, or bread from another place or market. When they saw them on the road they took all of the villagers' belongings and forced the villagers to porter. Some people were very old and some people were very young but the SPDC didn't care about their ages. The villagers who went to porter couldn't eat well and had to go on long travels. Because they couldn't eat enough they had low energy and insufficient protein. Therefore, even food that the villagers bought didn't go to their families. Rather, it was confiscated by the SPDC. This caused the entire family to suffer from insufficient protein. This is another way that forced labor contributed to a lack of food security.

"On 18th of April 2000 SPDC Division 44 arrested me when I came back from Kler La and they took all of my things. They forced me to porter and tied my hand with my friends. They tied 5 people together with 1 rope and when they had fighting they forced us to lie down and it was difficult to sit down."³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Interview 6, 41 years old.

³⁴⁷ Interview 7, 27 years old.

The SPDC troops abused and tortured the villagers during portering time. They didn't give them enough food or take care of porters when they got sick. When the porters asked for medicines or foods they swore at porters, and sometimes slapped porters' faces. They intimidate the women and they sometimes rape the women and shame them. The women were the ones who took care of children and the house, and prepared food for the family. Some women were widows so when they went to porter no one was there to take care of their children. Therefore, sometimes their children couldn't eat normally and could get diarrhea or vomit. Sometimes widows had to porter for an entire month and when they came back their children were sick and thinner.

"I lived in my village and I had to porter and do other forced labor all the time, so I couldn't make money anymore. When my children got sick I couldn't give them good nutritious food and medicines and now my children and I together lost vitamins in our bodies."³⁴⁸

– a widow

The link between women and food security is very important, especially for children. When only the fathers go porter the mothers are left behind to take care of the children. She can cook for them, and when her rice is nearly finished they collect green vegetables with vitamins and cook porridge, and the children can get protein in their bodies. If the father is already doing forced labor and the mother must also go as a porter for one month, there is no one to look after the children and their nutrition and health will suffer.

"The SPDC arrested me with my friends named Saw —, 39 years old, from Thaw Kaw Saw village, Saw —, 50 years old, from Mae Wa Kaw village, Saw —, 16 years old, from Thaw Kaw Saw village when we came back for Kler La village. I saw the troops slap my friends' faces, kick their bellies, hit their faces with their fists, and kick their buttocks and one of my friends fell down and was unconscious. After that they took all of our things and forced us to porter. While I went they grabbed my hand to try to separate me from my friends but I also grabbed my friends' hands when they did that. They did that three or four times but I didn't follow them."³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Interview 35, 30 years old.

³⁴⁹ Interview 13, 36 years old.

Messengers & Night Sentries

The SPDC troops forced the villagers to work as messengers and sentries at night. They did not ignore children and the elderly: even the oldest people over 70 years old and the children under 13 had to go. Four people had to go each day and night. When the villagers were messengers, they had to carry their own food, to dig holes, collect fire wood, and carry water. Some times the SPDC troops ordered messengers to collect chicken and pork from the villagers without paying them. When the villagers were absent they had to hire others to work for them. However, some were widows and some were orphans who could not pay anyone else, so they had to go themselves. Like portering, being forced to work as messengers and night guards also has a negative impact on food security because it takes away the time they need to work on their farms. If they stay to work on their farms and pay someone else to go work for them, they are unable to buy the extra food they needed. When they are forced to give domestic animals to the SPDC they are unable to get enough protein.

"The villagers had to be messengers or night sentries at the military camp. If they didn't go they had to pay 1,000 kyat per day and 1,500 kyat per night. When the military major or commander came the villagers had to guard and sentry alongside the car road. The villagers had to do this without payment." ³⁵⁰

Road Building

When the military government fixes or constructs new car roads they use the villagers as tools. They force the villagers to cut brush along the car roads. In addition to taking people away from their farms and families like other forced labor, building roads presents the added danger of deliberate exposure to landmines. The villagers are forced to walk in front of bulldozers to protect the bulldozers from land mines. This is extremely dangerous since if the landmines explode, the villagers die. When villagers step on the land mines the SPDC troops do not take any responsibility. When they are injured, they have to go to the hospital which is very expensive, leaving insufficient money to feed their families. People injured by landmines are left disabled, and they cannot survive, be healthy, or get protein in their bodies anymore. Thus, landmines also contribute to food security by killing some members of families, and leaving others disabled. Hospital stays for people injured by land mines are an added financial strain.

³⁵⁰ Interview 16, 74 years old.

"The SPDC troops from IB 75 with strength of 60 soldiers forced me to cut brush and vines along the car road. While I did it I had to sleep in their camp and I had to carry water and cook for them in the morning and the evening after I finished my work. I had to clean for three days and I was also afraid that landmines would explode."³⁵¹



Villagers forced to make a road by the SPDC. (Photo by KHRG).

Many children were forced to carry stones and sand for the road. Sometimes it affects their studies and their health. Children do not have time to go to their fields or gardens, where they can learn what good food is and where nutritious food comes from. Some children, after enduring much forced labor, develop changed ideas and they do not want to go to school. They do not want to think about their futures because they do not see any relief from a life of forced labor and poverty. These children do not know how to make money and cannot buy good food. Thus, forced labor causes children's food security and education to suffer. A lack of education will almost certainly contribute to continuing food insecurity in the future.

"In 2005 April, SPDC Battalion 73 ordered me and other villagers including women, men, children, and the elderly, to carry stones for the car road. When I went I saw the oldest person was 70 years old, the youngest was 12 years old and we had to carry our own food. I saw in all that there were a total of 90 people there and two or three of the soldiers came and checked us each time."³⁵²

³⁵¹ Interview 11, 38 years old.

³⁵² Interview 15, 19 years old.

Building Military Camps

According to my research the SPDC troops built their camps in indigenous villages or between two villages. The local people who are living in those villages are forced to build military battalion frontline camps, cut down bushes or vines, fell trees, uproot shrubs, make fences, dig holes. The commanders order each household to send one person to work on these projects.

"In my village I saw the military troops build their camps in six places. These were Htee Lo, Play Sher Lo, Tar Ba Kee, Htee Nya Pay, Moo Moo Kee, Yie Sha and the troops who were living in there were IB- 40, 20, 30. I had to build it four or five times each year."³⁵³

The military built more of their camps and forced labor, extortion and unofficial taxes increased. As forced labor increased, the villagers were faced with more food insecurity. For example, if a villager in the relocation sites does daily hire work he/she gets 500 kyat each day. The money they get day by day is just barely enough for his/her family. There is none left over to save after fulfilling basic needs. Therefore, if he/she has to go to forced labor for five or ten days, he/she will lose 500 kyat each day and his/her family will not be able to eat and can starve.

"SPDC Battalion 48 based in Sha Shi Bo ordered me to build their military camp and I had to collect bamboo from the forest. It was so hard to get and carry that. When I took it to the military camp they forced me to dig holes and I started from 8 AM to 11 AM without taking a rest. When my hand hurt I asked them if my friends could change with but they didn't allow me. I had to build their camp two times and other times my wife went or my children, sometimes I hired someone else."³⁵⁴

The military government has already signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.³⁵⁵ However, right now, many children in Burma are enduring forced labor and no action is taken or punishment given to the SPDC. When children worked as forced laborers they couldn't take any rests and the SPDC didn't give them food. Sometimes they had to work in the rain and

³⁵³ Interview 10, 55 years old.

³⁵⁴ Interview 20, 36 years old.

³⁵⁵ www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm

sometimes when the sun was hot. Sometimes the children got sick and when they came back from the work they had to go directly to the hospital. The parents in Toungoo district are ordinary farmers and don't have the means to save money for emergency spending. While their children were in the hospital they had to sell some domestic animals or paddy for daily food. This would just cover hospital or medicine costs. Some parents developed debt and when the harvest time came they would repay it. Because they repaid their debts with paddy, they were left with inadequate food.

"On January 2007 I had to build up the military camp. All of those were older and I saw the people the same age as me was in there. I estimated that oldest could be 55 years old and the youngest, 12, could be me and one of my friends. I had to carry bamboo in the forest that would take 3 hours there and back on foot. I carried the bamboo that weighed 7 viss (1 viss = 1.6 Kilo). When I got to the soldiers' camp I had to carry water because I couldn't build a fence around the camp. The unit was battalion – 48 with strength of 20 soldiers based in Htee Nie Lu."³⁵⁶

Property & Livelihood Destruction

Since the villagers depend upon their farms and animals for food, the destruction of their property has a direct and negative impact on food security. The military regime wants to destroy the KNU opposition group and force the upland villagers to move to relocation sites. The villagers and the KNU opposition group depend on each other. They figure that when the upland villagers move to the lowland areas they can exercise more control and they can increase their militarization. Next they can destroy the KNU opposition group secretly because once their livelihoods are destroyed, the villagers are not able to support the KNU at all.

When the SPDC come up to the upland areas they destroy all the belongings of the villagers. When they enter the villages they kill animals and burn up villages and when they leave they plant landmines to deter the villagers from returning home. They wanted to kill the villagers and find the villagers in their forest hiding places. It is not only to find the villagers; they are also looking for villagers' hidden food stores. Many villagers cannot eat when this happens and most of the children, women, and the elderly have seen big problems.

The SPDC also destroy cultivation fields, cut down betel nut trees and coconut trees and burned up everything in the gardens. Good fruit comes from the local

³⁵⁶ Interview 21, 12 years old.

communities' plantations and delicious, nutritious foods came from that area. It is not expensive and has a good taste. The people are very happy when they get to harvest time. After they collect all the fruits, vegetables and meats, they have a festival together. However, after the SPDC destroyed the villagers livelihoods the villagers' lives are far away from peace and justice.

"In 2006 the SPDC burned up my paddy barn including 10 baskets of paddy. At that time the wood I had prepared for building a house, which cost 45,000 kyat was all burned up. My betel nut garden was also burned."³⁵⁷

According to KORD's relief documentation, "in 2006-07 the SPDC destroyed 610 cultivation fields, 25 wet fields, 49,000 baskets of paddy, 922 baskets of rice, 775 viss of betel nut, 8,220 viss of cardamom seed , 1 motorcycle, 1 solar panel, 1 video machine, 2 cars , 1 bullock cart, and 41 villages."³⁵⁸



Rice destroyed by SPDC troops. (Photo by KHRG).

³⁵⁷ Interview 4, 30 years old.

³⁵⁸ KORD Relief Report 2006 2007.

The situation has very seriously changed since 2006. The SPDC treated the villagers badly and some villagers had to flee to the forest for the whole year, so there were no more domestic animals in the village. In April 2008, the SPDC Southern Military Commander ordered his soldiers to keep operating everywhere, to burn up forests such as the villagers' hiding place and when they see villagers they must kill them all without limitations, even the children and oldest.

"The SPDC burned up my hidden cache including 60 tins of paddy, rice, betel nut, clothes and pots."³⁵⁹

Destruction of Fields

Between 2006 and now the SPDC burned the forest in Toungoo more often, especially alongside the car road in order to clear out the landmines planted by opposition groups and also so that opposition groups or villagers crossing the car road can be seen by the SPDC more easily. On the 5th of April, 2008 they started burning the forest the cardamom, betel nut, durian plantations and hidden food caches of villages east of the Day Lo River such as Thay Ya Yu village, Ler Ker Der Kho village and west of the Day Lo such as Ker Weh village, Ler Gi Kho Der Kho village, Ler Gi Kho Der Kah village, Htee Bu Khee Der Kah village and Htee Bu Khee Der Kah were burnt up.

"This year on 5th April of 2008 the SPDC troops burned up the forest including six villages."³⁶⁰

Before they SPDC soldiers enter the forest they fire mortars to kill opposition group members. They also fire mortars into the villages and sometimes the shells hit houses and a few villagers have been injured.

The information obtained from interviewees was that many rice fields have been destroyed all the time. Some rice fields are not damaged only by the SPDC but also by wildlife because the villagers have to flee and cannot look after them. When the villagers return they see that it is too late to fix their lost crops. This also had a negative impact on food security.

³⁵⁹ Interview 1.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

"When I harvested paddy with my family the SPDC troops shot at us. One woman died and one got injured. After that the SPDC troops broke down fences and let the animals enter my fields. There were seven fields destroyed in the same way."³⁶¹

Destruction of Animals

When the SPDC enters villages the villagers have to flee to the forest. When they flee they cannot bring with them every household item, and they can only bring some important clothes and foods. If they know whether the situation will be good or bad they can eat some domestic animals such as chickens right away. Domestic animals such as pigs or other large animals cannot be eaten because there is not enough time. No one wants to buy meat when this happens because they are not able to store it when they have to hide in the forest. One woman was arrested by SPDC Infantry Battalion 20 and Divisions 66 and 55 headed by Commander Maing Thang and Major Pra Chan. She said, "When I went with them I saw the SPDC troops did many bad things to the villagers. When they entered the village and they shot and killed pigs, bulls, and buffalos but they didn't eat them. They kill freely like that without any pity. When they left the village they planted landmines to deter the villagers from returning."³⁶²

"When the SPDC troops entered my village they shot and killed four bullocks and three buffalos that belonged to the villagers."³⁶³

Destruction of Households

There have been many people who have become poor because of the SPDC's violence to the villagers. The people interviewed for this report were facing problems when the SPDC took away their households or destroyed them. They had to build their new lives without any resources and it was too difficult. The SPDC often burnt villagers' houses and stole people's gold



*Villager's house burned by SPDC troops.
(Photo by KHRG).*

³⁶¹ Interview 18, 27 years old.

³⁶² Interview 21, 41 years old.

³⁶³ Interview 16, 27 years old.

rings, necklaces, or earrings so they did not have anything to sell and no way to buy food. All of their precious things went to the SPDC's plan so they couldn't do anything in their future lives.

"In 2006 SPDC Division 66 burned down my house and things made of wood including household things such as pots, plates, blankets, and rice."³⁶⁴

Restrictions on Communications & Transportation

The SPDC's restriction of communications and transportation has a negative impact on food security because villagers are often not allowed to tend their fields outside the village, or to go and watch over their fields so that they wouldn't be damaged by wildlife, or to go to markets to buy extra food. When they were allowed to go, the SPDC required expensive letters of recommendation, which left the villagers with less money to buy supplementary food. These restrictions also prevented the lowland and upland areas from trading with one another, which has a further negative impact on food security.

Starting from 2005 and continuing until now, the villagers who living in the brown and white areas are restricted by the SPDC. The villagers who have cars or motorcycles are not allowed by the SPDC to go to the city from their village. If people leave the city illegally and the SPDC sees him/her they put the person directly in jail and they confiscate all of their things.

"In May 2007 they arrested the villagers in the relocation sites. Saw —, 15 years old, from Taw Goo, Saw — age 28 from Taw Goo were arrested and put in prison when they were looking after their bullocks. Saw —, age 24 from Ta Yar Lu, Saw —, age 50, his wife Naw —, age 48, his sons Saw —, age 25, Saw —, age 14, his daughter Naw — age 18 were arrested and put in prison when they went to the field. They had to stay in the prison for 3 years. Naw —, -18 years old was pregnant and she had to give birth in the prison. The 2 teenage children were sent to Toungoo prison. They were all farmers and weren't doing anything wrong, but the SPDC sneakily arrested them when they went to their fields. The reason was that those villagers didn't have passes when they were arrested. The others villagers gave a lot of money to the SPDC to get them out of prison but they would not allow them to go back to their home."³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Interview 33, 25 years old.

³⁶⁵ Interview 2, 42 years old.

When the villagers in the SPDC controlled areas go to the city they have to take with them a testimonial and one letter of recommendation obtained from the village headman, who is appointed by the SPDC. These cost 100 kyat, and sometimes 500 kyat. When the villagers pass through the checkpoints the officers in charge interrogate him/her and if they see contraband such as batteries, flashlights, clothes, or medicines they arrest them directly without any questions. Some villagers are very poor and cannot buy letters of recommendation all the time, which means that they cannot collect vegetables and find food outside the village. The villagers do not have enough gardens or markets in the village to get enough food for every meal. They depend on their fields outside the villages, so when they cannot buy letters of recommendation they are unable to look after their fields and the plants can be damaged by wildlife. When harvest time comes the villagers can't collect good fruits and paddy.

"When I went to Nah Yaw I had to bring with me a testimonial and I had to pay 100 kyat and sometimes I had to pay 500 kyat. I could buy only food and they limited it so that one 1 person can carry one viss of fish paste. If we carry more than that they say, 'You will give it to KNU.'" ³⁶⁶

The villagers have to build fences around the villages and they cannot go out wherever they want. The SPDC troops also plant landmines to deter the KNU or villagers in the upland mountain area from coming. After they build the fence the villagers have to be messengers and night sentries.

"In 2007 in my village, SPDC Infantry Battalion 48 forced the villagers to build a fence around the village and their camp. The villagers had to fence in three lines around. In the village fence they build two gates, just for entry and exit. They are opened from 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening." ³⁶⁷

The SPDC troops have bad behavior: when they see the villagers go with travel passes they give troubles to the villagers. According to the interviews in Lay Tie village the villagers took travel passes with them before they went out but when the other troops saw them they asked 1,000 kyat to get permission to go.

"SPDC Battalion 73 headed by Officer Taing Oo disturbed me when I sold my betel nut to Toungoo city. He extorted from me one pack (1 pack = 3 big tins) worth 3,000 kyat. At that time I had six packs and I couldn't give him any because they are too expensive for me and in my purse I had only 3,000 kyat for traveling cost."

³⁶⁶ Interview 24, 48 years old.

³⁶⁷ Interview 10, 55 years old.

He told me, 'if you know someone in this area, go and ask for help.' I told him I didn't know anyone, and then he couldn't make a decision and took my money in my purse. He also said, 'If someone asks you, don't speak about this.'"³⁶⁸

Restricted Trade from Lowland to Upland

In 2007 the SPDC was restricting trade and collecting the number of family members in each house. The villagers in the mixed area have to take photos and sign their names for the SPDC. They were making sure that the village population does not decrease or increase. One commander ordered that if he saw guests in the village he would punish the villagers. The villagers do not have a chance to go to the upland mountain area. They cannot collect vegetables from the forest anymore. They have a small opportunity to go to the wet rice fields but they have a travel pass with them. When they go to the fields they can only take with them a knife and pack of rice. They have to go in the morning and come back in the evening. If the villagers tell the SPDC that the wildlife will destroy their paddy the soldiers allow them to sleep in the field huts but only one person and one or two buffalos can stay. During the time they sleep in the field hut they cannot use a flashlight. His or her family has to prepare a pack of rice and send it to him or her every day. Many people in the lowland areas in Than Daung Township have to eat only porridge. The porridge is eaten when there is almost no more rice. When the villagers' rice is nearly gone they cook it with a lot of water and some vegetables to make it last longer. This just barely controls their stomachs and prevents starvation.

"When I lived in the relocation area I had to eat porridge several times because the SPDC troops didn't allow me to go out and work in the farm full time."³⁶⁹

Due to the SPDC taking action like that the villagers in the mountain area cannot go and buy food. When they go they are scared of landmines, and if the SPDC see them they shoot to kill them immediately. Due to the SPDC's actions the villagers in the mountain area hiding sites have lost their ability to trade and cannot get enough food day by day. Thus, food scarcity and hunger have increased due to the SPDC cutting off local community trade.

"This is a true experience; Saw Tha Say was 54 years old when he hung himself because he couldn't eat."³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Interview 20, 35 years old.

³⁶⁹ Interview 3, 39 years old.

³⁷⁰ Interview 32, 35 years old.

Cutting Off Communications

Many people, especially those who are living in SPDC controlled areas are faced with the problems associated with revolution and political resistance. Some have families living in the mountain areas and they are communicating with each other. In the villages the SPDC is using spies to observe the situation. If the opposition groups or guests enter the village the spies send messages to the SPDC commander immediately. When the officers hears about the situation he enters the village with his troops and checks which house the visitors have gone to. When they find out they arrest the owner who is then tortured and put in jail. Sometimes if the soldiers receive got seriously bad information from the spies, the owner of the house is killed. Before they take the people out of the house they enter the house and search for valuable property such as money or gold rings. After stealing those things, they burn the house. This not only affects the one who was sent to jail, it also affects the whole family's livelihood and the village economy. When the SPDC get information like that they restrict the whole family and they always check them, so those families do not have any freedom. The villagers and the KNU lose communication. The SPDC is trying to oppress them in many ways.

"On September 15, 2006, the SPDC ordered us to go and take photos as rebel KNU. When we went they gave us red cloth [to wear as headbands]. On the red cloth they wrote down Rebel KNU. They recorded everyone's names with house numbers. They took 10 people in each picture. They also recorded one leader in each picture to make sure that when they came and checked the leader had to collect their members. I had to pay 1,000 kyat for one picture. In my house my family had to eat porridge. I had to feed the SPDC first and ignore my family's problems."³⁷¹

The village head men have to solve conflicts between villagers and the SPDC troops several times. If the situation became bad they had to negotiate with the SPDC troops. Sometimes the village headmen had to collect money from the villagers for corruption to pay the SPDC. Sometimes the village headmen were tortured if they could not collect enough money. Most of the men who were over 20 have to flee from the village in fear but the problems do not finish when they hide. The SPDC troops cause trouble for the left behind families. Applied to the food security issue, when the father of the house is hiding in the forest, he cannot work in the field. Another problem is that when the father flees to the forest, he is unable to have a job so his family will have to send money or food secretly to him. All of those problems have a negative impact on food security.

³⁷¹ Interview 20, 35 years old.

"I was the village head starting from 1995 till 2006. The SPDC also used violence against me because they heard I had contact with the KNU. On March 17th 2006 Major Soe Win of SPDC Battalion 48 wanted to arrest me so I couldn't stay in my village anymore. When he came to arrest me he entered my friend's house and asked about me. When my son in-law told me about that I fled immediately and he didn't see me. When I escaped in the forest I had to be afraid of poison snakes. My friends Saw Pyeh Soe, age 40, Saw Shway Thay, age 60, Saw Wah Say, age 40, Saw Sher Tay, age 32, and Saw Loe Htoo, age 46, have been killed by poisonous snakes biting them. When we lived in my village I had to do forced labor always and the SPDC wanted to kill us and when we fled to the forest we had to work in the dark without flashlights, so the poisonous snakes became our enemies."³⁷²

Food Scarcity Due to Confiscation

As the SPDC increases their troops they also need more vehicles to carry their troops. They are also building many military base camps and constructing car roads for transportation. While they are constructing the camps and the roads they do not care about the natural environment, or about local people and their property. They build their camps wherever they want and do not ask permission from the villagers. Sometimes they cut down all of the betel nut trees and coconut trees for posts without payment. They confiscate the villagers' land without any compensation. They forcibly ask money, animals and household possessions without warning. They forcibly ask for bamboo and wood for construction with limited time.

"Land confiscation not only violates the political, social, and economic rights of ethnic people throughout Burma, but also has had severe environmental, economic, and social impacts. The Burmese Army is the primary conductor of the land seizures throughout Burma, often under the guidance of the Myanmar Agricultural Produce Training."³⁷³

According to a KORD relief report, the SPDC demanded money from the villagers. In total they took 4,739,000 kyat, 4 buffalos, 4 goats, 5 pigs, 65 chickens, 6,550 poles of bamboo, 300 shingles of leaves for roofs, 650 wood poles, and 4 acres of land."³⁷⁴ The confiscation of land destroyed the villagers' livelihood that depended upon farming. The extortion of animals destroyed the villagers' main source of protein.

³⁷² Interview 24, 58 years old.

³⁷³ 'Natural Light', NEED Report, page 16.

³⁷⁴ KORD Relief Report 2006 2007.

Confiscation of Animals

Especially in the villages which are in the SPDC controlled areas, the village headmen have to collect chicken, pork and sometimes goats without money. The SPDC Light Infantry Battalion and Infantry Battalion front lines troops come and set up their camps in the villages and extort villagers' domestic animals two or three times a week so the villagers have a serious problem with regard to their domestic animals. The extortion started in 1997 and continues now, so the villagers are poor and lack their domestic animals. Some people do not want to raise animals because they think that if they raise animals, they will only go into the SPDC hands. Some villagers cannot eat meat for five or six months and their health suffers. They do not look good and their skin complexion is not smooth.

"When my husband went to porter the SPDC troops based in my village came and asked me for chicken. At that time I told them I didn't have any, but they were not satisfied and shot my chicken under my house. At that time they got three chickens and I estimated that one chicken would be 2 kilos." ³⁷⁵

Confiscation of Household Possessions

The SPDC construction of car roads and their front lines camp has had a negative impact on the local people who are living in Tantabin Township. Many houses lost possessions and land, and many people became displaced people. For example, one villager has only one knife to cut brush in his flat field. When the SPDC takes it away, he can't use it, and the brush in the flat field gets taller than the rice and the rice dies. When the rice is dead, the villager has to borrow rice from other people. The next time, if the SPDC does the same thing again, that villager will not get adequate food.

"In 2006, SPDC Light Infantry Battalion 48 entered my village when one couple was having a happy wedding. Immediately they entered and searched the house of the person holding the wedding party and took 1 battery." ³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Interview 8, 38 years old.

³⁷⁶ Interview 20, 35 years old.

Confiscation of Land & Construction on Land

In Tantabin Township the villagers in many areas such as Sha Kyi area, Ta Pyin area, Thay Char Say area, Myaw Yaw Thay area, Nah Yaw area, Lay Tie area, Chaw Jar area, Nie Ta Goe area, Lae Ka Lay area, Aye Kyaw area, Sway Ta Saw area, Peh Kaw Day area, Sha Shi Bo area, Yie Sha area, Zie Pyu Goe area, Pyie Khah area, Taw Ma Aye area, Taw Goe area were faced with food security problems because of the SPDC development projects. In 1998 the SPDC built a dam on the Per Tha Taw River. They opened the water gates in August every year without giving warning to the villagers. When they let the water out it flooded the area for one month. Flooding the fields in August destroyed the people's crop for the year, making it very difficult for them to find food.

"I had 7 acres of wet paddy farm and 4 acres was destroyed by flooding so I didn't have enough money for my family."³⁷⁷

Many villagers in Yie Sha had to move from their homes and leave behind their land and gardens. The SPDC troops built their camps and a helicopter landing field, and immediately took the villagers' houses and land without any compensation. The construction on the land construction takes away food resources from the villagers, because the forest is the villagers' life and the land provides the villagers' food.

"I had an experience in my village in 2007. The troops forced 10 families to move and they destroyed 9 wood houses and built their military office. One house they didn't destroy because that house's roof was made of zinc, so they used that house as a store room."³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Interview 24, 58 years old.

³⁷⁸ Interview 10, 55 years old.

Forced Relocation

The junta tries to destroy the villagers in many ways. Many villages in Tantabin and Than Daung Township have been burned and the villagers relocated. When the SPDC troops force the villagers to move they also mandate the date villagers must leave, and often give very little warning. When the villagers move they cannot carry everything. Their domestic animals and some household items are left behind. When they enter the relocation site they do not have any land and they have to work for hire too, day by day. They cannot earn enough food for the next morning and they also have poor nutrition and insufficient protein. Many villagers are faced with problems such as heavy debts. Other problems are, they have to do forced labor for the military commanders several times a year, so they lose their precious time for hired work. With no land to farm and forced labor preventing people from making money by working, families are unable to get enough food.

Situation in Relocation Sites

When the villagers live in relocation sites they can't go anywhere. The villagers look like the fish in the pot with no hope. In the research many villagers expressed their awful experiences when they lived in relocation sites. The villagers are always concerned about their food and their lives are in the SPDC's palm. A saying goes, if we leave the village, we will be poor for 3 months, if we leave the country, we will be poor for 3 years (this sentence means, if you leave your village by force or because of bad things happening, you cannot carry all of your household possessions, but if you leave your country you have to leave your land, which is your food resource).

Many villagers in Toungoo District had to leave their villages because of the SPDC forced relocation. If they do not leave, they will be shot and killed. When they leave they cannot carry everything and the main food like rice is left behind. They do not have a chance to go back and take it, because the SPDC eats it without giving the villagers any compensation, so when the villagers enter the relocation sites they do not have any food. They have to do forced labor and they do not see any way to provide good food for their families.

"When I lived in relocation sites I couldn't go out and I depended on my clan and my neighbors. When they had less food and couldn't help me I had to eat porridge."³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ Interview 3, 39 years old.

Immediate Outcomes

Starting in 2005 and continuing now, the villagers in Toungoo District have lost their valuable things that they depended on and they are becoming poorer. They all are internally displaced people and the main problems that continues on to the next generation are poor health and debt. They cannot provide nutritious food for their children and they cannot support their children's education. Many children can't go to school and have to struggle for their lives with their parents.

They do not have a chance to make money to buy food either. Some people ask their neighbors for food, and if their neighbors cannot give them anything they have to eat rice porridge. Rice porridge is a mixture of rice, water and vegetables to make the rice last longer. It does not have enough nutrition and the people have to share one person's serving of rice amongst several families.

Health Impacts

The situation right now is that the villagers suffer health problems. This is caused by hiding in the forest when the weather changes. Sometimes rains too much and sometimes it is too hot. They do not have enough clothes or mosquito nets to protect them in the night time. They cannot eat normally like before and sometimes they cannot cook. Especially children, women, and the elderly have fared worse than others.

All the people in Toungoo District have to face things like this but many people get illnesses for other reasons. Many unlucky villagers are arrested, tortured, raped, or killed. For those reasons some have mental health problems and some have permanent physical injuries. Those horrible injuries are still affecting their livelihood and survival. It also affects their ability to find food.

"On 15th July 2000 the SPDC Guerrilla Retaliation Unit 124 saw a landmine explode in the Tha Daw area, so they arrested the village headmen and women, men, teachers – in total 100 people including me. They checked everybody and forced us to find 1 gun and 1 walkie talkie from the KNU. At that time I promised them I would find it for them. They kept us in that office for 5 hours without drink or food, so when they gave me peanuts I thought they were being kind but when I ate them they slapped my face, and then they sent us back home. Three days later they again arrested me because I couldn't find the gun and walkie talkie as they ordered. They tied our hands behind our backs and took me to their office. They said that in the night time around 12 or 1 AM they would check us. About 12

o'clock they checked me, and during the interrogation they tortured me, tied my hands and hung me on a tree. They questioned me for 1 hour. When they released me I couldn't move my hands and they had been broken 6 of my teeth. I also couldn't eat anymore and they sent word to my family to come and take care of me. I also saw my friends Saw —, 30 years old from Pa Weh village, Saw —, 30 years old from Ler Ker Der Kha village, Saw —, 35 years old from Pa Weh, and Saw —, 30 years old from Ler Ker Der Kha village. They all had to face the same things as me. The SPDC did this because they didn't believe me, and they also said they were very happy when they tortured us because we belong to the KNU. The current situation right now is that I am still suffering from the harm and I cannot survive anymore."³⁸⁰

Debt

According to the interviews almost all the villagers in Toungoo District lost economic and sustainable livelihoods. The current situation right now is that they do not have a chance to find economic security and go back to their homeland. They are becoming displaced people and cannot imagine where they will go tomorrow. Many villagers have debts because the SPDC extorts property, confiscates land, destroys livelihoods, extracts unofficial taxes, and cuts communication and trading.

*"In 2007 I had a heavy debt of 100,000 kyat. If I cannot pay it back soon the company will take my land and whatever they want."*³⁸¹

Conclusion

There is a food security crisis for the people living in Toungoo District because the military junta is increasing their troops and security since 2005. The military junta wants to control every area but they are not able to because Toungoo also has an opposition group to protect the villagers' livelihoods. The SPDC needs to eliminate the KNU and create strong security in order to establish their camps.

They use their strong power to abuse the local people's rights in Toungoo District and to ignore the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The military government is a member of the United Nations and also has signed the International Labor Organizations, (ILO), Convention on the Eradication of Discrimination

³⁸⁰ Interview 22, 56 years old.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

Against Women (CEDAW), Child Rights and Environmental conventions but they do not implement them and there have been no positive consequences for their country and the local people. The SPDC ignores all of those conventions that they already signed and they have not done any of the promised implementation.

The people in Toungoo District cannot cope with the SPDC strategy. When the military junta enters Toungoo District they demand forced labor, confiscate land and property and crack down on communications between villagers and the KNU. They set fire to the forest, causing a negative impact on the environment, and the villagers cannot depend on the forest or the gardens. They take away food sources and precious time from the villagers. The villagers have to move to relocation sites or hiding place without any guarantees for the next morning. The latest consequence for the villagers is high debt. Villagers are also becoming disabled, orphans, widows, and widowers.

The current situation right now is that the villagers cannot imagine where they will go tomorrow and where they can find sustainable livelihood. They are almost hopeless and the children do not know what education is, or how to get peace and justice. They cannot stand by themselves and do not know how to solve their problems. A very sorrowful thing that that a villager in the IDP camp said was, "We are expressing our suffering, but we only show our injuries and bad experiences to each other. We don't have any power to sue or persuade the military. When NGOs or international groups hear or read about our bad experiences what do they think and what do they do to find opportunities for us?"

The villagers really hope the NGOs will try to become a gate for telling their experiences to the international community so that people will pressure the military government to stop the human rights abuses and to respect and promote human and environmental rights because our economy comes from the forest.

They want their livelihoods to be sustainable again and for their nutrition to be as good as it was before. The villagers in Toungoo District hope living in Kaw Thoo Lei will become as before the SPDC came.

The people are oppressed by the SPDC but they are strong and struggled to express their experiences. It is very sorrowful to hear their experiences. For that reason it is hoped that people reading this report, such as NGOs, the international community, and the SPDC will have empathy, sympathy, and particularly will negotiate and pressure the SPDC to stop all human rights abuses.

Recommendations

To the State Peace and Development Council:

- Stop violence against people living in Toungoo District.
- Withdraw the militarization from Toungoo District.
- Sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and enter it into binding force because they are a member of United Nations (UN).
- Implement Burma's Constitutional Law.
- Promote human rights in Burma.
- Stop forced labor in Burma.
- Evaluate economic policies and development project policies.
- Promote the indigenous people's livelihood.
- Evaluate an international principle of law that is relevant to food security and improve food security in Burma.
- Stop confiscation of the villagers' land.
- Evaluate state development projects.
- Stop burning the forest, this is the villagers' food resource.
- Stop forced child labor and follow the Article of Child Rights.
- Stop violence against women's identities and follow the Article of Women Rights.
- Put the right to food into practice to bring adequate food to the people in Toungoo District.
- Follow the articles of the International Labor Organization.

To the International community:

- Pressure the SPDC to sign the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Culture Rights (ICESCR) and enter them into binding force.
- Pressure the SPDC to follow the Conventions they have already signed.
- Pressure the SPDC to stop forced labor in Burma.
- Pressure the SPDC to stop all human rights abuses in Burma.
- Pressure the SPDC to change the Constitutional Law that they already drafted without civilian participation.
- Stop lending money until the SPDC changes their policies.
- Stop investment and trade imports from Burma until policies change.
- Pressure the SPDC to not create policies without civilian participation.
- Pressure the SPDC to sign and ratify the International Principle of Law such as ICCPR and ICESCR article that are relevant to Food Security.
- Encourage the SPDC to create a sustainable economy and contribute adequate food for their country.

To the Non-government Organization:

- Represent the local people, demand that the SPDC respect human rights and stop abusing the people in Toungoo District.
- Demand that the SPDC stop burning the forest because villagers depend on it.
- Demand that the SPDC stop their huge projects that are having a negative impact on the villagers' food security.
- Document all human rights abuses perpetrated by the SPDC and submit them to the international community.
- Visit the local area and discover what problems the local people face.
- Participate with the local people and try to help local people figure out how to solve their problems.

To the Local people:

- Express your bad experiences yourselves.
- Try to find someone who you trust and believe to become your representative and speak out for you.
- Don't be depressed and keep standing up for your rights that are abused.
- Try to express your feelings, keep going and struggle for your life.
- Think about your future and make an effort for your generation.
- Participate with leaders and other organizations to solve your problems.

International Law

Some international laws are relevant to food security. The SPDC regime has not signed these but it is a member of the United Nations, so it should respect and accept any law that is passed by the United Nations members. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are very relevant to this report. The villagers who are living in Toungoo District are also humans so they should have the same rights as other countries' people. The SPDC should sign those international laws and put them into practice so that there will be adequate food for the people in Toungoo District and the villagers in Toungoo will have an adequate standard of living.

ICCPR Article 6: The right to life and survival.

ICESCP Article 6: Everyone has the right to work, including the right to gain one's living at work that is freely chosen and accepted.

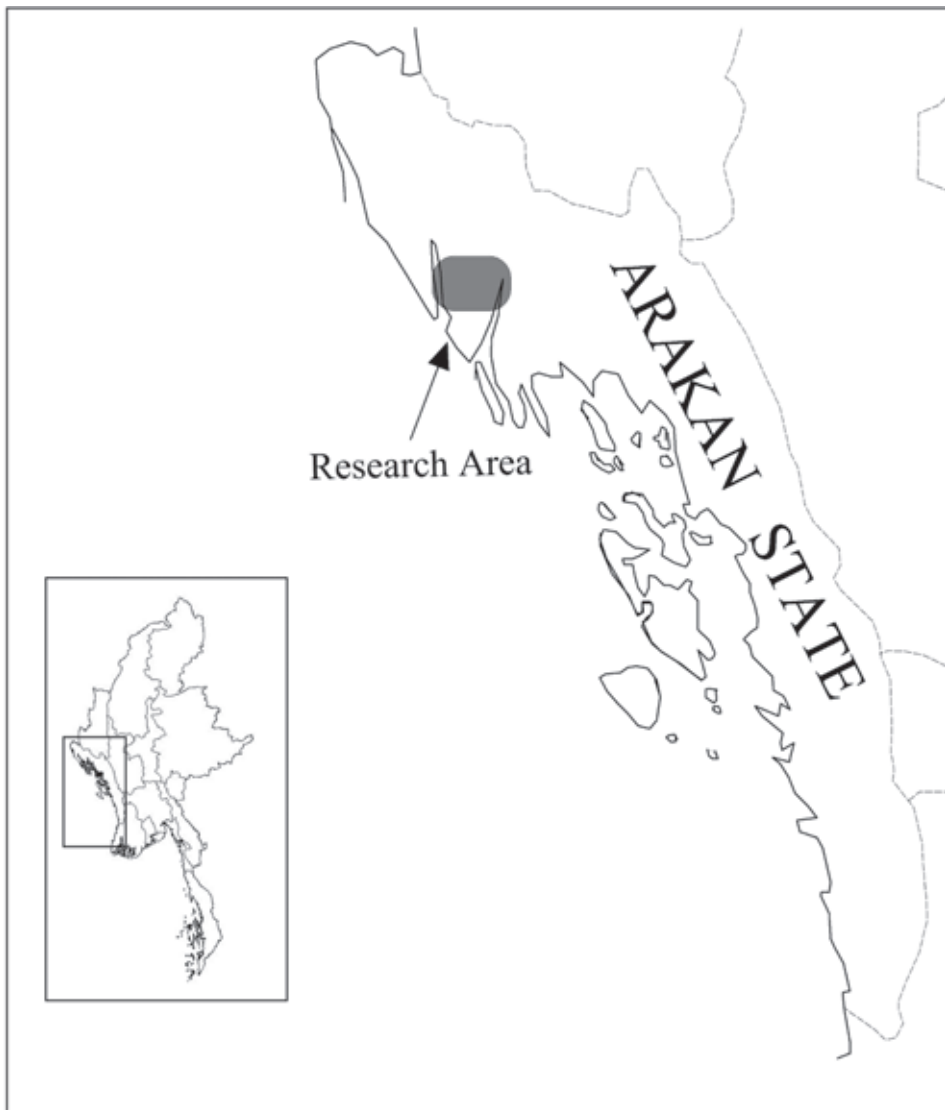
Article 8: Everyone has the right to form and join trade unions, the right to strike.

Article 11: Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing. Everyone has the right to be free from hunger.

Causes of Food Insecurity in Rathidaung Township, Northern Arakan State

By Zaw Zaw

Map of Arakan (Rakhaing) State, Burma



‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or any other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.’

(Article 25, (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Map of Rathedaung Township, Arakan (Rakhaing) State

