

# Where the Change Has Yet to Reach

Exposing Ongoing Earth Rights Abuses in Burma (Myanmar)



*Voices from the EarthRights School Burma 2010-11*



Each year, students of the EarthRights School Burma venture into the field and collect stories and information about human rights and environmental issues in their home communities. Their fieldwork provides practice in skills such as interviewing, map making, report writing and research planning, but it also raises the voices of local people in Burma so that they may be heard globally. These are voices which speak of land confiscation, the perils of dams and mines, the impacts of armed conflict and other earthrights abuses which might otherwise remain invisible.

These are true stories.

Find out more about the Burma School and EarthRights International at [www.earthrights.org](http://www.earthrights.org).





# Where the Change Has Yet to Reach

Exposing Ongoing Earth Rights  
Abuses in Burma

A collection of reports by students of the  
EarthRights School Burma

# Where the Change Has Yet to Reach

Copyright © 2012 EarthRights International

[www.earthrights.org](http://www.earthrights.org)

US Office  
1612 K St. NW  
Suite 401  
Washington, DC  
20006

tel: +1 202 466 5188  
[infousa@earthrights.org](mailto:infousa@earthrights.org)

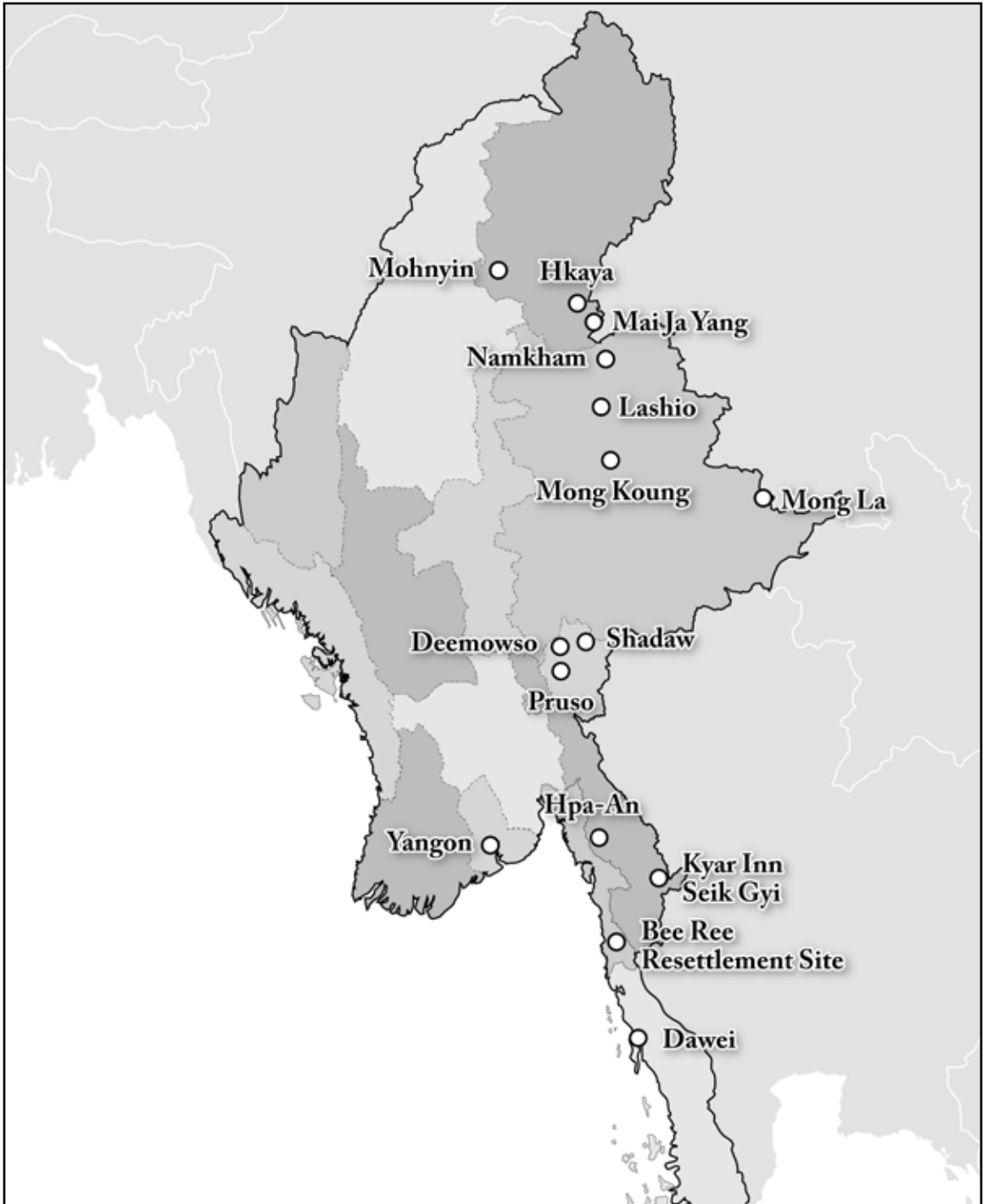
Southeast Asia Office  
P.O. Box 123  
Chiang Mai University  
Chiang Mai 50202  
Thailand

tel: +66 81 531 1256  
[infoasia@earthrights.org](mailto:infoasia@earthrights.org)

Printed in Thailand

Cover photos courtesy of EarthRights School Burma alumni

# Project Sites



# Table of Contents

## *Education & Child Rights*

- 10**      The Defenselessness of Street Children in the Townships of  
Yangon  
*by Lay New*
- 26**      The Social and Economic Impacts of an Inadequate  
Educational System on Kachin Youths in Mohnyin Township,  
Kachin State  
*by Seng Seng*
- 46**      The High Cost of Education  
The Plight of Pa-O Children  
*by Khun Robert*
- 62**      Challenges and Opportunities for the Future of the  
Monastic Education System in Rangoon, Burma  
*by An An Hti*

## *Poverty & Health*

- 87**      The Impact of Poverty Among Mon IDPs at the Bee Ree  
Resettlement Site in Northern Ye Township  
*by Mi Thuzar*
- 101**      Economic Hardship in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, New  
Mon State Party Region, Burma  
*by Mi Goe Chai*
- 109**      Social Impacts of the Government's Insufficient Health Care  
System and Lack of Awareness about HIV/AIDS for People  
Living in Hpa-an Township, Karen State  
*by TT*

- 124** Major Health Problems from Lack of Health Care and Health Education in Pruso Township, Karenni State, Burma  
*by Rose Lone*

*Development vs. Human Rights and the Environment*

- 137** Dawei Development Project is Creating the Negative Impacts of Land Confiscation, Changing Lifestyles, and Lack of Livelihoods for Local People East and West of Dawei  
*by Thukha Thakhin*
- 155** Negative Impacts of Deforestation on Indigenous People in Bangshau, Kawngmu, Hohap Villages in Lashio Township, Northern Shan State  
*by Jhon Zau Shan*
- 170** The Impacts of Rubber Plantations on the Ceasefire Area in Mongla Township in Eastern Shan State  
*by Sai Lieng Lem*
- 184** Environmental and Social Impacts of Commercial Rubber and Banana Plantations on Local People in Hkaya Village, Northeastern Kachin State  
*by Myitsu*
- 200** Social Impacts of a Casino on the Community of Mai Ja Yang Village on the China-Burma Border in Southeastern Kachin State  
*by Pisi*
- 221** The Negative Impacts of Burma-China Natural Gas and Oil Pipelines on Local Villagers through Land Confiscation in Western Namkham Township, Ta'ang Area, Northern Shan State  
*by Mai Mao Dang*

## *Conflict & Displacement*

- 240** Villagers in Ho Kai Villages, Southern Shan State Continue to Suffer the Effects of Having their Villages Burned Down by Armed Forces

*by Mune NOUNG*

- 254** The Impacts of Emigration of Karenni Youth in Deemowso Township

*by Khon Poe Hlone*

- 273** The Causes and Effects of Displacement in Pasaung and Shadaw Townships in Karenni State

*by Lae Moo*



# Acknowledgments

The students of the EarthRights School Burma (ERSB) classes of 2010 and 2011 would like to express our deepest gratitude for the unique opportunity awarded us to attend this school. Our lives have been touched by many people both within and outside of EarthRights International who together made it possible for us to further our education and gain valuable experience as students in this school.

We want to thank all of our instructors, guest teachers, and advisors at the school, whose excellent guidance and suggestions assisted us both in and outside the classroom through our coursework and field research which resulted in these reports. The care and patience we received during the times we struggled will never be forgotten. We cherish the warm friendships that were made along this journey. The knowledge and experience we have gained has prepared us well to go forward and serve our communities throughout Burma in the ongoing struggle for peace, justice, and the dream of human rights for all.

Many caring people worked hard and made sacrifices on our behalf. First and foremost, we would like to thank Mr. Ka Hsaw Wa, the Executive Director of EarthRights International, whose boundless energy and vision of training young people from Burma to become grassroots activists for human rights and the environment gave birth to this school and its ongoing development. We would also like to thank everyone at ERI, including the board of directors, management, and all of the staff in Thailand and the USA for all you do in support of the school. In particular we would like to thank the ERSB program staff, who work tirelessly to make sure the school runs smoothly and are always willing to help and offer suggestions. Your professionalism and support helped make our experience a success!

We know that this opportunity would not have been possible without the financial support of our generous and thoughtful donors. We would like to thank Trocaire, Oxfam HK, ICCO, North-Star, along with another organization and individual donors who wish to remain anonymous. Your interest in Burma and the generous support you provide is an inspiration to all of us and we are forever grateful for the opportunity we have been given to help bring change to our communities and to Burma.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the interviewees for graciously sharing their stories that made these reports possible. We have been inspired by these people, many of whom are facing overwhelming challenges each day just to survive. We are honored to share their stories with you and hope when you read their words you will also be inspired by their courage and perseverance.



# Preface

In the past year, many exciting changes have been underway in Burma. The five-year suspension of the Myitsone Dam, the release and election of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the loosening of media restrictions have gained worldwide praise for the Burmese government. After more than fifty years of brutal military dictatorship, it seems that positive political changes are finally starting to reach Burma.

The reports contained in this book, however, describe places in Burma where this positive change has yet to reach. These reports detail human rights and environmental abuses such as forced labor, land confiscation, extreme poverty and the destruction of the environment, problems that are widespread throughout Burma and sources of much suffering. For the people of Burma living under these conditions, the changes made by the nominally-civilian Nay Pyi Daw government have little meaning if they do not have enough money for food and medicine for their families, must live in the constant fear of being forced to porter for the military or are forced to leave their homes to make way for mega-development projects.

This book is a testament to what has not changed in Burma, a portrait of the places where military rule and negligent governance is still a living, oppressive presence. Still, these reports are written with hope, hope that by creating awareness of these problems, the positive changes will not remain restricted to select areas of Burma but will reach all people in the country.

While supporters of human rights and democracy everywhere are celebrating Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's and the NLD's historic victory in the parliamentary bi-elections, it is important not to forget the places in Burma described in this book. In the months and years to come, it is crucial that Daw Suu Kyi and the NLD raise the human rights and environmental issues described in these reports to the Parliament in order to bring an immediate end to these abuses. It is also important to realize that lasting peace between the government and ethnic groups can only occur once people's basic needs and human rights are realized. Any peace agreement without these basic human essentials will be short-lived.

The students of the EarthRights School Burma (ERSB) classes of 2010 and 2011 represent fourteen different ethnic groups and from all across the country. They spent eight months studying with each other in order to bring their newly learned knowledge of community development, human rights and environmental protection back to their communities in Burma. Through their time together, they formed bonds that lasted not only through the school term but also after graduation, helping to create an inter-ethnic, nationally united civil society.

The voices of these brave young people represent the possibility of hope for Burma's future. I hope that these reports will gain the attention of both the international and Burmese community and create awareness that will lead to positive changes for a better Burma and a better world.

*Dr. Cynthia Maung, Founder of Mae Tao Clinic*





## Education & Child Rights

Since the military coup in 1988, the education system in Burma has gradually deteriorated. Virtually all universities and colleges remain closed, with only some short term openings, which has obstructed the emergence of new student movements. Though many have since re-opened and the Burmese Government claims to provide free education to their citizens, the overall government expenditure on education is less than 2% of the national budget

This also means an increased financial burden for families that want their children to have access to education, making poverty more and more a limiting factor. The education situation is even more dire for ethnic minority communities and children living in Burma's many conflict areas, where survival is the number one priority.

# The Defenselessness of Street Children in the Townships of Yangon

by Lay New

## Introduction

Since Yangon is a commercial city, people think that the job opportunities and the lives will be easy in it. In reality, the gap between the rich and the poor is getting worse and worse. Yangon is like heaven for the rich but it is like hell for the poor. The society is facing social problems there. Among the problems is a serious lack of child protection. Poverty, instability, economic crisis, a weak educational system, the irresponsibility of some parents and instability of families can lead to children living on the streets and these children are facing child rights abuses.



Children are the generation of the future age. Everyone has to pass through childhood. As children are very vulnerable and fragile, children need to get enough protection from their social environment. Thoroughly, they should be supported in a place where they can develop creative thinking. In Burma, street children are still common, especially in a crowded city like Yangon. In Yangon, these street children often live in the remote Townships like South Oakalarpa, North Oakalapa and South Dagon. They mostly live in Kyayttar Township where they can easily beg for money from many foreigners and there are free public places like parks, the Yangon train station and the Yangon harbour. They are also found at Hlaing Tharyar, an industrial city where they can easily support their survival with cheap food and shelters.

*"There are visibly street children in Yangon. Approximately more than 100 children, many of whom were apparently under 10 years of age, were present around the central market areas at communities. Some children had to work and contribute to their family income. Some of them lived on*

*their own and took the markets as their shelters. A UNICEF's report pointed out that some homeless girls around 13-14 years of age have become child prostitutes.”<sup>1</sup>*

- 1995 UNICEF report

Nowadays, street children's situation is similar to the statement reported by UNICEF. The poverty of families urges children to earn money for the family. Subsequently, street children face destructive abuses from other street children, local people or exploitation by traffickers for different purposes.

The street children are very defenseless from sexual abuse, drug addiction and being child soldiers; government action is necessary to help solve the problems of the street children. Even though the government branch of the Ministry of Social Welfare takes some action for these kinds of children, it is too weak to be effective at solving this problem. There are about six NGOs that are working on street children projects in different townships in Yangon. However, NGOs working on their own cannot help all street children. The collaboration of NGOs and Government will be more effective at ending this problem.

This research aims to share the vulnerability of the street children. The street children in Yangon city are facing child rights abuses such as lack of education, lack of health care and exploitation because of the irresponsibility of the government. Given how defenseless street children are, not only parents but also the government is failing in its responsibility to protect these children.

## Methodology

I used several kinds of methods to research about the street children. The information about the street children cannot come from the formal interviews so I had to use informal interview techniques, like discussion or sharing sections and chatting with the children most of the time. Since I could not interview directly with the children on the street and at their houses, I observed and approached NGO street children centers from the three townships, including Hlaing Thar Yar, and Kyattar in Yangon Division. Moreover, this report involves interviews with the children from Government Detention Center. My interviewees are teachers from the street children centers, some local people and the street children. I also received information from discussion with the parents and teachers. I have taught and helped the children in centers and through that, I had a chance to inquire closely about the circumstances of the children and I got the clue for the future information. This report also relies on the internet websites, reports and other secondary sources.

## Background

Myanmar is divided into seven central divisions and seven ethnic minority states by the regime. Before the construction of Naypyidaw, Yangon was the capital city of Myanmar. Yangon has many industrial zones, an International airport and the Yangon Train Station which is connected

---

1) The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization SEAMEO  
[www.seameo.org/vl/combat/3chap1.htm](http://www.seameo.org/vl/combat/3chap1.htm)



with the other stations of the whole country. Migrant people from rural areas have moved to Yangon for their education as well as economic and job opportunities. That is why Yangon is a very crowded city. Mostly ethnically Burmese people live in Yangon but so do many other ethnic groups. Naypyidaw has become the capital city of Myanmar so while Yangon is no longer the capital, it is still the commercial center of the country.

Myanmar regained independence in 1948, then faced a multiethnic insurgency and civil war among the political parties and the ethnic groups. In 1962, the military regime seized power and made Myanmar an isolated country. 1988 was the memorable year for the whole of Burma because many students came out on the streets of cities and demonstrated against the one party political system. Many students, aged between 13 and 18, were shot and killed by the army. Starting from that time, the military has tried to preserve its power by making the army



*Poverty in a remote area of Yangon*

bigger and bigger. The government the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) spent a disproportionate amount of the national budget on military affairs while only a small percentage is spent in the education and health sectors.<sup>2</sup> A 2007 study by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies found that spending on education amounted to only 0.9% of the national budget. By contrast, the country spends between 40% and 60% on national defense, the study found.<sup>3</sup> By holding two fake elections, the Burmese government changed the name of the government to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) but maintained the same military system. To maintain its power, the regime committed human rights abuses against minority ethnic groups and child rights abuses such as having child soldiers, killing the children of the insurgent groups and only providing insufficient education. Because of the long duration under the military regime, the country is unstable with the civil wars and an economic crisis that has lead to poverty and the deprivation of education. The poor education and economic situation has forced many children into the work sites, war conflicts and the streets of the cities like Yangon and Mandalay.

The Myanmar Government signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 16 July, 1991 and became a member in United Nation Convention on the Right of the Child on 15 August 1991. The government has so far been unable to fulfill its obligations under the CRC, but fortunately there are also some positive changes occurring in the area of child rights by collaborating with the local NGOs and International NGOs.

2) All Burma Federation of Student Union ( August 2003) [http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.36/myanmar\\_ABF-SU\\_report.pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.36/myanmar_ABF-SU_report.pdf)

3) Danielle Bernstein, a pseudonym, a journalist.

## The Definition of Street Children in Myanmar

The definition of street children varies from the different countries. According to the UN and WHO, some criteria of street children are laid out by the Definition of NGOs and Researchers based in Egypt by Dr. Mehdi Ali (Regional Representative for the Middle East and North Africa):

- » Children less than 18
- » Males or females
- » Who spend all or most of their time on the street
- » Who maintain minimal contact with their family or have no contact all and,
- » Lack of protection, guidance and supervision which makes them vulnerable to a wide range of health and psychological hazards
- » If the child has any connection with the prostitution, gambling or drugs
- » If the child has no permanent place to sleep and usually sleeps on the street
- » If the child collects cigarette ends or other items from the wastes
- » If the child has a bad behavior and is delinquents from his guidance
- » According to a Yangon UNICEF report,
- » In Myanmar, street children include “those who are without family, or whose family ties are so weak that they are only frequently to be found at home”

The term “street children,” or *lanpawkala* in Burmese, identifies children who have chosen to spend most of their time on the streets in various “livelihoods.” Between the ages of 5 and 18, they work on the street in a desperate attempt to drag out whatever they can to bring home to their families for food or money. Many find food and eat from the garbage and sleep in public places. Most of them are the children of poor parents who lack education and jobs. Some of them are the children of parents who do not take responsibilities for the children and some parents are immigrants from the rural area. Some parents are addicted to gambling and alcohol.

Most people may think that street children are homeless and parentless and only live on the street. According to the research, there are various kinds of street children and not every street child can be regarded as a homeless and parentless child. Some children work on the street collecting plastic bottles and selling postcards and birdfeed and have contact with their family and even have a home. Their parents ask them to work. Other children work at the industries and sometime work at the harbor and markets carrying the loads. When children cannot find these jobs, they work on the street. These children have to help the family economically instead of attending schools. Some lucky children are able to attend the school half day and then earn money after the school.

Some children differ with the above street children who have regular contact with the families.

These children are homeless and they think of the streets as their home. Some children ran away from home and they have become street children. Some are ignored by the families. These children search for income, food, shelter, and a sense of family among companions. Most of the time, they live at the train station as their home and sometime they sleep at the other people's houses secretly. The street children usually live as a group and the group will often have a leader.



*The situation of street children who survives by collecting recyclable rubbish*

## Street Children and Child Rights Abuses

Living on the street without guardians and protection is obviously risky for children and even for adults. Children are working, living and surviving on the street for different purposes. They usually beg, collect recyclable things, sell birdfeed and find food from the rubbish bin. When these children are surviving on the street, they become the victims of crime. Street children in Yangon city are suffering child rights abuses such as:

- » Lack of education and life skills
- » Health problems and glue addiction
- » Sexual abuse
- » Exploitation by others, such as police and traffickers, for labor
- » Community condemnation
- » Lack of education and life skills

According to the results of 25 interviews with street children, only 5 children can access education from the different centers from different Townships. Almost all street children are losing educational opportunities and life skills to survive in the future. Lack of education for the street children leads them to be exploited for the economy and committing crime. Without education,



they cannot get permanent employment or they will be forced to find a dangerous job. Every child should get either formal education or vocational education. According to the CRC, street children should have the right to education, as well as survival rights, development rights, protection rights and participation rights. Providing education for the street children is good protection to them. Lack of education can lead them to be in a worse situation socially, morally and in terms of job opportunities. Street children seem to have a broken down character. They are led into dangerous conditions if they are out of school. Without nurturing the children and equipping them with knowledge, society will cause them to commit more crime. Children still need vocational education even though they are out of the formal education. A girl from Hlaing Thar yar who used to be a street child mentioned her feeling:

(I interviewed 9 children from each Street children Center in September 2011.)

(8 Interviewees from the street of Hleden Township)

*"I dropped out the school because of my mother took me out. I tried to attend school again but I failed it because I was away from the school for two years. Sometimes my job is collecting recycle at Kandawgyi National Garden. I want to be educated instead of abused by my step father"*

A boy who lives at the Yangon train station wanted to attend the school when he saw other children wearing school uniforms and going to school. His stated:

*"I really want to attend school and want to earn a lot of money because I have dream to rent a house for my mother. We have no home so my mom sometimes sleeps in the cemetery"*

A 2005 U.S. State Department Human Rights report on Burma stated:

*"In Burma, children under the age of 18 constituted approximately 40 percent of the population. Children were at high risk as destitute parents took them out of school to beg or to work in factories and teashops. Some were placed in orphanages. With few or no skills, increasing numbers of children worked in the informal economy or in the street, where they were exposed to drugs, petty crime, risk of arrest, sexual abuse and exploitation, and HIV/AIDS. "*<sup>4</sup>

## Health Problems and Glue Addiction

The street children are being denied their rights regarding access to health care. It is clear that children cannot be healthy if they eat food from the rubbish bin and sleep without shelter. Because of the hard life on the street, children can face physical and mental health problems. Street children are also suffering health problems from living in unhygienic places, eating unhygienic food and not having access to health care. The street children may suffer malnutrition because they have inadequate food in daily life. Some street children often get injuries when they collect recyclable things from the landfill by stepping on broken glass or other sharp things.

---

4) U.S. Dept. of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 8, 2006  
[www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61603.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61603.htm)

However, there is a lack of treatment for their injuries. In Hlaing Thar Yar, street children who work at the biggest landfill usually get the injuries because of broken glass on the ground and sometimes for other reasons.

A teacher from a street children center at Hlaing Thar Yar shared this about the children:

*“Most of the street children and some of their families in this quarter work at huge rubbish tips, the collection of the rubbish from the whole city and industries. Sometimes they get the big injuries and they continue to work there. Their injuries are worse because injuries are infected by the virus from the rubbish. They do not get any treatment for those injuries. This rubbish is very smelly and people cannot approach it without mask but street children and their parents are finding the things without mask.”*

There is also a big problem of glue sniffing which can lead to health problems. Glue sniffing is a kind of drug addiction. Most of the street children are sniffing glue. When they sniff the glue, they can cope without eating. They do not feel hungry and they always want to sniff it at a corner. When they get money, they spend spare money by buying glue.

The negative impacts of the sniffing glue for physical and mental health are mentioned from Thailand’s Drug Rehab Center below:

*“Substances like glue and solvents like nail varnish and paint thinners among others give off fumes that contain several toxic chemicals that have a mind altering effect if inhaled. Glue sniffing induces a state of hallucination not unlike an inebriated condition marked by incoherent speech, inability to maintain balance and discern things clearly. The immediate effects of glue sniffing can lead to suffocation and unconsciousness which could be fatal as the fumes depress the respiratory system and rate of heart beats; also as one is not in control of one’s senses one can easily get involved in accidents and injure oneself. Long term abuse of the substance results in damage to the kidneys, liver, brain and overall nervous system”<sup>5</sup>*

One of the local shopkeepers from Kamayut Township, Heledan condemned the glue addicted street children who work as beggars

*“Do not give money to them. They are just liars and they spent money by using drugs. When they get money; they immediately buy the glue and sniff it at a silent corner. Girls also sniff the glue. When they are really hungry for sniffing, they even steal from the shops.”*

There are about over 20 children that are addicted to glue in Kyattar Township, according to an interview with a girl from Kyattar Street Children Center. She shared:

---

5) <http://www.blurtit.com/q168636.html>

*"Living on the street is very dangerous for me and for other girls. I have many friends, boys and girls. They are sniffing glue. They cannot stand not sniffing. They do not eat food and they just sniff it [glue] at a silent place. They are very skinny. So they try to get money as much as they can. If they cannot get money to buy glue, they just sniff dry glue again and again. They buy new glue box if they have money."*

## Sexual Abuse and Violence

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) reported:

*"Generally, the street kids are largely engaged in destructive, exploitative and abusive working conditions. Life on the street is very risky, polluted, and easy to be suffering from sexual abuse, violence and drug addiction." (Derks 1997: 24-28)<sup>6</sup>*

In Yangon, sexual abuses and violence exists among the street children against each other; members of the surrounding community also commit sexual abuse against street children. Some street children are interested in sex. They commit sexual abuse with the children of the same sex or opposite sex. The older children abuse the younger street children. Some street children absorbed the sexual behavior or emotion from their families. They often practice with the other street children.

A teacher from Hlaing Thar Yar Street Children Center, an NGO-run center, talked of the sexual abuses that street children face:

*"In Hlaing Thar yar, the families of the street children are very poor and they live in a very small house of about 10 feet with big family. Mothers often marry again and again and parents have no private place to have sexual intercourse with their spouse. Through that, children get misbehavior and have sex with the other street children, the same sex or different sex. Some children come to enjoy sex. Some street girls are abused. Once, there was a girl in my center who was 12 years old. She often had sexual intercourse with the street children and sometime with the rickshaw men. She left the center."*

A teacher from Kyattar Township street children said,

*"The street children are at risk from the sexual abuse. Sometimes they are abused by their peers and sometimes by the adults who tend to exploit them. On May 2011, at the train station, a 12 years old street girl was raped by a man who later escaped. The street child's family could not get justice for the victim. The street girls at the train station used to being raped in the past years and there were no criminals [caught] for raping [and no justice]."*

---

6) The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization SEAMEO  
[www.seameo.org/vl/combat/3chap1.htm](http://www.seameo.org/vl/combat/3chap1.htm). Accessed 12 April 2011.

## Labor Exploitation

Street children can be exploited for the different purposes such as being child soldiers, beggars, workers and prostitutes. Sometimes the street children are collected by the municipal police to the police station and then sent to detention center. There are also gangs in Yangon who oppress the street children by asking them to beg. These gangs are mostly found in the downtown areas. They catch children and order them to earn money for them. Some children are trafficked for different jobs.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization SEAMEO reported:

*"The street children are the ones most likely to be trafficked across border. For instance, many street children in Cambodia were found to be trafficked to Thailand by begging gangs. Furthermore, some were likely to be trafficked for criminal purposes by organized crime networks in Thailand (Derks 1997: 24-28)."*<sup>7</sup>

Myanmar children have the similar situation in Cambodia. A 1994 Asia Watch Report (Archavanitkul and Koestsawang 1997) mentioned that the child prostitutes in Thailand are mostly from Burma.

*"The majority of foreign child prostitutes in Thailand are from Myanmar with an estimated 10,000 women and children from Myanmar entering prostitution in Thailand yearly."*

Moreover, street children are exploited to be soldiers in army. Being child soldiers negatively affects the children's physical and mental state.

Citing a recent UN report, Agence France-Presse AFP in Bangkok stated:

*"He said that the government was picking up street children or those without national identity cards and offering them the choice of arrest or joining the army"*<sup>8</sup>

Marianne Bray, Cable News Network (CNN) Hong Kong also reported,

*"While some children are recruited voluntarily for Myanmar's armed forces, others, especially orphans and street children are vulnerable to what is called 'forced recruitment'. Under this scheme, local authorities in Myanmar are required to provide the government with a certain quota of recruits, the report says, and are fined if they fail. A lot of these children are street children."*<sup>9</sup>

---

7) The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization SEAMEO  
[www.seameo.org/vl/combat/3chap1.htm](http://www.seameo.org/vl/combat/3chap1.htm). Accessed 12 April 2011.

8) [afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5i5sgDe5nc\\_q0BvgvxtVLr5YCKNA](http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5i5sgDe5nc_q0BvgvxtVLr5YCKNA). Accessed 25 January 2011.

9) Marianne Bray, Cable News Network CNN, Hong Kong, June 13, 2001  
[archives.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/06/13/child.soldiers/](http://archives.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/06/13/child.soldiers/)

## Community Condemnation

It is very rare for street children to be warmly welcomed by their communities. Street children lack encouragement not only from their parents, but also from surrounding communities. Children cannot blossom well without the praise from the community. Some people are blaming the children and not trying to help them. For example, the street children center operated by local a NGO in Kyattar Township has had to move to many places because some people from the township did not want the street children to be near their houses. They worried that the street children would steal from them. That is why some people inform the local authorities not to allow the street children center in the quarter. This center had to stop for a while. This causes the street children to have a lack of child rights and survival rights.

One street child stated,

*"I am gradually afraid of collecting recyclables on the street because I feel so small. People usually scold me not to come near houses even dogs bark me."*

As the situation mentions above, street children in Yangon are obviously losing their child rights like development rights and survival rights. These children should get adequate security according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## The Government's Poor Responsibility for Street Children

A government is the head of country and it should listen to the citizenship. The government is the foundation to resolve the public problems. Government should take strong responsibility for the public needs. Nowadays, Myanmar is in a so-called transition to democracy, and the new government, named Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), is announcing to the international community that they are giving full rights to citizens. With the new government, there have been some positive changes related to child protection by collaborating with the local NGOs and International NGOs. However, government still needs to strongly implement policies concerned with the insecure street children in Yangon. The new government still needs to comply completely with the Convention on Rights of the Child. The government's child laws work well on paper but the operation and implementation is so poor.

Interviews with the street children from the children's center run by a local NGO and interviews with three street children show that children dropped out the school or did not go to the school because street children families could not afford to send the children to schools.

A street boy who is from North Oakalarpa Township mentioned,

*"I lived on the street and I earned money by collecting plastic bags, bottles and other things to support my family involving four siblings and my mother. I had no father. My family had hard on the street and I earned money by collecting plastic bags, bottles and other things to hard life and we all could not attend school. I used to work and live around my Township."*

Education is vital to protect the street children from insecure situations and free primary

education should be provided for the children according to Article 28 of the CRC.

In Article 28, States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

1. Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
2. Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
3. Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
4. Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
5. Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

In order to implement the rights of the child embodied in the Convention, the Child Law was promulgated on 14 July 1993. (CRC/C/70/Add.21, 5 November 2003)<sup>10</sup>

In the child's all-round development sector, section 20 (a) of the Child Law prescribes as follows:

(a) Every child shall:

(i) Have opportunities of acquiring education;

(ii) Have the right to acquire free basic education (primary level) at schools opened by the State.

Section 20 (b) of the Child Law prescribes the functions and duties of the MOE as follows:

(b) The Ministry of Education shall:

(i) Have the objective of implementing the system of free and compulsory primary education;

(ii) Lay down and carry out measures as may be necessary for regular attendance at schools and the reduction of untimely dropout rates;

(iii) Make and lay down arrangements for the literacy of children who are unable for various reasons to attend schools opened by the State

The government still needs to implement many articles from CRC and the child law completely. Government has to give attention to the regular attendance at schools and the reduction of untimely dropout rates.

Danielle Bernstein, a journalist from Asian Times Online, stated:

---

10) Committee On The Rights Of The Child Consideration Of Reports Submitted By States Parties Under Article 44 Of The Convention

*"Children in Myanmar are only required to complete primary school under Myanmar law, but more than half drop out before they graduate, according to data from the United Nations Children's Fund. A UNICEF country report further notes that the costs associated with compulsory education, which is supposed to be free, add to the burden of families legally required to send their children to school."*

*"Many school expenses must be borne by students' families, presenting an insurmountable financial obstacle for many impoverished households," the report said. "Classroom facilities are often poor and under-equipped, and attrition rates among teachers are high due to low pay, poor working conditions, and long separations from their families."<sup>11</sup>*

In reality, every child still cannot get the compulsory free education. Most street children whom I met and interviewed are not able get education. Parents usually blame the cost of the education fees at the school. A teacher from street children center at Hlaing Tharyar, run by local NGOs explained:

*"Most street children at Hlaing Thar yar dropped out the school or did not go to school because the economic hardship of the family, even though children want to attend the school like other children. At the beginning of the center, last year, the budget for the street project was very strong so that we offered money to the parents and asked them to send their children to school. We successfully sent 25 children to the school and we saved many children not to be on the street. Unfortunately, this year we cannot still provide financial assistance to the children's families to send them to school because of poor budget for the project. Our project now has a limited amount money for the nutrition so that now we can [only] afford to feed the pure rice soup instead of rice and curry. I am so worry about the future of the children and they will be again on the street when our project will be withdrawn."*

According to article 18 of the CRC, the government has to be accountable to provide for the families of the street children who cannot go to school:

#### Article 18

1. States parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principal that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child, parents or as the case may be legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.
2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, State party render appropriate assistance to parents or legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institution, facilities and services for the care of the children.

---

11) Copyright 2010 Asia Times Online (Holdings) Ltd [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/LK06Ae02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LK06Ae02.html)



3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible

As a contrast, a street child who is 10 years old from detention center shared his feelings and difficulties as follows:

*"I came to that center one year ago. I lived in Dala. I have never been to school. I am fatherless child because my father left my family and he married with new one. I was with my mother and my two younger siblings. My mother was also pregnant when I was with my family. That's why I had to earn money for the whole family and for my mom's health care. My job was being a beggar at Yangon. I could earn money at least 2000 kyats and at most 4000 kyats per day [\$2-4 USD]. One day, I went back to home after finishing my work. I took a bus toward Yangon harbor. On the bus, a man without uniform asked me to follow with them and later on I learned they were police. I realized I was trapped. I did not get any chance to deny to the police and I did not understand the reason to catch me. Firstly, I was sent to Hantharwade Station. The police did not inform to my mom. Until now, I have no contact with my mother. I am really worried about my mom, how she will survive with the new baby and the other kid. My mom was also sick when I left her on my last day because she had malnutrition. I have no education too. I am very sad to live here."*

The example mentioned above also shows that children lack free speech and no ability to complain to the authorities. There are also other children who arrived to the center and did not get the chance to explain the police their situation and their feelings. According to the child law, (CRC/C/70/Add.21, 5 November 2003):

Section 15 of the Child Law prescribes: Every child:

- (a) Has the right to freedom of speech and expression in accordance with the law.

In the real situation, this section is not fully practiced. The interview with a 13 year old boy from the detention center situated in Kawmoo Township, Yangon shows this:

*"I lived in the Detention Center for one and half years. Before I came here, I lived in Insein Township with my family. My family economics was good. One day, I came to DanyinGone market with my brother and my brother asked me to wait somewhere. Then my brother left me to buy something. While I was waiting for my brother, a municipal police came to me and arrested me. Then I was sent to Hantharwady Municipal Police Station. After that, I was sent to the children's detention center. I did not have any trial and the police did not listen to me. I have a home and a family. I did nothing to be detained. I now lack of connection with my family. I cannot see the way of my future. Here sometimes I do get some vocational training."*

That kind of child above has no contact with his family and his mother. Staying away from the family is a kind of destruction for the children. Similar stories are also found at the government



detention center situated in Kawmoo Township, Yangon. Some children in this center do not know their families. For example, one child said:

*"I was here for six months. My family was homeless. We all moved from the rural area to Yangon city for some reason. My family used to live in the harbor and sometimes train station. My parents earned money by working small jobs. One day, my family slept at the Maw Tin port, we all were caught by the local police and they sent my parents to the police station. Then I was sent to Hantawady Station. We had no trail by police and my family was separated in this way. I also did not know what happened to them. Now I do not know where my family is, how they live and when I will meet with them."*

Regarding family reunification, section 12 of the Child Law states as follows: (CRC/C/70/Add.21, 5 November 2003)

Every child:

(a) Shall have the right to live with and be brought up by both parents and anyone parent if they are alive;

(b) Shall not be separated forcibly from his or her parents, except in case where, in accordance with law, separation is necessary for the best interests of the child

For data and research mentioned above, the government Ministry of Social Welfare has some conducted poor action to complete the CRC and Child Rights Laws, even though the government is claiming positives changes concerned with the children protection and rights.

## Poor Treatment at the Child Detention Center

The Children Detention Center is situated in Nyatawwsan village, Kawmoo Township, Yangon Division. Ranging in age from 5 to 18 years, children from the whole country are arrested and sent there. In this center, there are street children and also children who committed crimes. Street children are brought to this center usually without having committed any crime. According to an interview with a teacher, children can be arrested if they are found with weapons. That is why children from the insurgent groups are also detained in this center.

Some children do not have any contact with their families and some were collected without families' knowledge. In the center, they provide some vocational training but it has become weaker and weaker and it cannot really provide the children with the life skills required for when they are released from this center. They just provide education to the children who have contact with the parents. There is no exact time for release from this center and most of the children do not know when they will be released. When the municipal police catch the street children, firstly, they send those children to the detention area of Hantawade Municipal Police Station where there is very bad treatment of the children. The detention center, one of the government actions so-called protection programs for street children, has a negative impact instead of cultivating the children.

According to a teacher who used to work at this detention center, the vocational training provided to the children is not effective. They should get adequate vocational skills because these

children spend most of their time of childhood in this center; after this center, they need certain skills to earn money. If they do not have enough skills to get a job, they might return to criminal activities or end up back on the streets. Most of the students cannot get the education if they have no contact with the family. The health care system is also very poor and the children seem to be unhealthy. The children smelt badly when I went to this center and seemed to be very unclean. There are approximately 500 students in the detention center and the number of teachers was about 15; the teachers simply could not effectively help the 500 children.

In contrast, the street children center run by NGOs is cultivating the children in the right way. There are usually 40 children in the center and there are 13 teachers. Each teacher supervises a small group of children among the 40 children. By doing so, each child is under close and effective care. The children are taught a good curriculum such as general knowledge concerned with health, life, moral and social skills. The children can learn subjects according to their interest and ability so the children are happy to study at this center. There are also group sharing sessions every Tuesday. In this session, children have to do self-reflection and have to share individually on their improvements and weaknesses to the other students. It creates the space for the children to speak in front of others, learn self-reflection, and learning listening skills. They gradually learn how to listen to other people's feelings. The teachers visit to the parents of children and they chat with the parents to know more about the children's situation and give suggestion to the parents. At the beginning of the project, this center offered loans to parents to do small businesses. They provide vocational trainings to the children by cooperating with the other NGOs. After this training, the trainers find the jobs for the children. Children can work in various professions with these vocational skills. This kind of NGO center works for the children and this center can save children from a hazardous life on the street.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, street children need protection from the vulnerable situations and child rights abuses they face. The children's lack of attention from parents, their community, and the government creates these negative situations. Without a good environment and encouragement, children cannot become good people within society. The government needs to focus more on the street children issue. Although the government builds the center to improve its image as a member of CRC, the quality of the centers are still poor. Though Burma become a state party of the CRC and promulgated a Child Law, the situation of the street children has not progressed. Their rights are denied due to the lack of government commitment to child welfare. The poverty and lack of education of parents are also causing the children to be street more and more. Many children are dropouts from school because of family's financial situation and poverty; that is why the government should also promote the parents of the children and should provide an improved social welfare system. As children are the future generation, they should be cultivated and nurtured. Dealing with the problem of street children needs the cooperation of various governmental, non-governmental, and voluntary organizations. If building the centers is not effective, then alternative ways should be created to solve the problem.

## Recommendations to the Ministry of Social Welfare

- » Implement the CRC completely
- » Contribute more street children centers at least each center for One Township
- » Provide effective vocational trainings at the street children center if the formal education is not provided
- » Arrange for the enough teachers every center
- » Use more budget for the Education , and social welfare
- » Give trainings to the social workers

# The Social and Economic Impacts of an Inadequate Educational System on Kachin Youths in Mohnyin Township, Kachin State

by Seng Seng

## Introduction

Under the government of Burma, officially known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the education system is very poor and is responsible for the low quality of basic education throughout the country. The problems in the SPDC's education system are even worse for ethnic minorities. In Mohnyin Township in northern Kachin State, the poor quality of basic education and lack of educational opportunities beyond eighth grade are impacting poor ethnic minority youth in very negative ways.

Even though the SPDC's education policy and system looks good on paper, the reality is very different. The government's free education system is not free and it undermines the morale of teachers and students. The failure of the free system to provide good quality education to everyone, means that teachers must hold classes outside school hours both before and after regular classes to provide better instruction, but only for those who can afford to pay a "special fee" which the local people call "tuition fees". The tuition fees are high and many parents are unable to pay

The current education system is causing a decline in morale and hope among youths. The main reason for the poor quality of basic education and the lack of opportunities for youths is an inadequate education system which is underfunded and not supported locally. Impoverished families cannot afford their children's education under the current system. As a result many youth cannot continue their education beyond eighth grade. The problems in the education system force teachers to engage in charging special fees because their government salary is so low. Lack of education causes negative social impacts on the youth, including; illegal drug use, prostitution and trafficking, and a decline in youth attending school after eighth grade.

The lack of educational opportunities for Kachin youth has serious economic and social impacts on the community. Most of the youth are unemployed because they have not received any education beyond eighth grade. They are forced to leave their townships to make money doing whatever jobs they can to support their families. As a result, there are many psychological impacts

on youth, including loss of cultural identity, hopelessness, and lack of motivation for their future. In Mohnyin Township, family unity is breaking apart because the youth are migrating to other countries as well as to other areas within Burma, in search of work to support their families.

The SPDC should implement major changes to the current education system and provide effective free public education for Kachin youth beyond eighth grade. They should provide decent salaries for all teachers and eliminate the special fees that teachers charge students. My research focus in Mohnyin Township in Kachin State which is famous for good education; it has one of the top ten schools in Burma. There are around fifty private

boarding schools in Mohnyin and their curriculum is the same as the government schools. The private boarding schools in Mohnyin Town are very famous, with skillful teachers and annual test score results that are always higher than other schools in Burma. There are many students from the whole country who come and learn at private boarding schools. The boarding school fees are cheaper than the other private boarding schools in other cities in Burma; like Mandalay, Pin Oo Lwin and Yangon.

The most expensive study fees in Mohnyin for one year are equal to the lowest study costs in Mandalay and Pin Oo Lwin. The study fees for one year in Mohnyin are 1,200,000 kyat (\$1,200). It costs 1,300,000 – 1,500,000 kyat (\$1,300-\$1,500) in Mandalay and Pin Oo Lwin. The cost breakdown depends on a number of factors including; night time tutoring by teachers, snacks, and personal transportation. The parents have to pay the teacher at the beginning of the school year and students should have their pocket money to pay for their personal needs. The total cost is about 200,000 kyat (\$200). Besides the study fees, parents are responsible for school direct and indirect costs. Private boarding schools in Mohnyin are really famous for good quality teaching methods and inexpensive private boarding school fees. For these reasons, they attract students from far away areas such as Mandalay. Even though the fees are relatively cheaper than the other townships, this does not help the poor families and creates hardships for them. They can't afford to pay for their children to attend private boarding schools. Therefore, they have no other choice



than to attend a government school. When a child attends a government school, they don't receive a good foundation in basic education and teachers don't emphasize their teaching skills. In comparison to the private boarding schools, the students attending a government school are disadvantaged and many students drop out from the school. One student said:

*"My parents can't support my tuition fee (special outside class) in the most expensive class. So they let me attend at the cheapest tuition class (it means a normal class and the tuition cost is 90,000 kyt (\$90) in a year. We have to pay three times this amount, once per three months but my parents haven't paid any tuition cost for me till it already have half period of this academic year even they let me attend the cheapest tuition class. For that reason, if my parents can't support my tuition fee for first period within this month (in August), I have already decided to out off from tuition class."*<sup>1</sup>



Government Technological College in Mohnyin Town  
(Photo by Lovely Friend)

## Methodologies

My research examines the current education situation in Maw Han, Kadu village, Bahmaw Town, Yangon including the main research target area in Mohnyin Town in Kachin state. The information in this report comes from 42 interviews with people from different backgrounds and levels, some are migrants in Thailand, governmental teachers, retired teachers, boarding school teachers, students from GTC; College, State schools (Elementary, Secondary and Tertiary education), school drop-outs, churches leaders such as Pastors and Reverends, NGO staff, Township Jude and parents of students and victims of human trafficking. Other sources of information include; evidences from books, online research from websites and taking photos with partnerships during the research session.

1) Interview# 40 with student in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.



## Brief Report Outline

There are six parts in this research report which include; introduction, background, current education situation in Myanmar (Burma), main section, conclusion and recommendations. Part I is the introduction with basic background information about the target area; including its educational history and the impact of the current education system on the local community. Part II contains a detailed background history of the target area including political, local people's daily livelihood and geographic area. Part III briefly describes the current education system in Myanmar including the governments' thirty year, long-term plan. Part IV is divided into two sections; the main section discusses the root causes of the negative impacts on the local youth from the education system and is followed by the social and economic impacts within the ethnic community. Part V is the conclusion and the researcher's opinion on the SPDC's education system. Finally, part VI contains recommendations addressed to the SPDC, youth, parents, community, community based organization and non government and international non government organizations.

## Background

Kachin State is located in the northern most part of Myanmar and borders India on the northwest and China on the north-east by a mountainous region. The three districts which make up the Kachin State are Myitkyina, Bhamo and Putao. The population of Kachin state is 1.5 million and the capital city is Myitkyina. The majority of people are ethnic Kachin and include; Lachik, Lawwaw, Lisu, Rawang and Zai Wa. There are other ethnic groups such as Burman, Chinese, Indian, and Shan also living there.

Below are the number of districts, townships, cities/towns, wards, village groups and villages in states of Burma as of 31 December 2001:<sup>2</sup>

No.	State/Region	Districts	Townships	Cities/Towns	Wards	Village groups	Villages
1	Kachin State	3	18	20	116	606	2630

Kachin state is rich in natural resources including gold, jade and other minerals; there is also a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Mohnyin district is a part of Kachin state which includes Hpakant, Mogaung and Mohnyin Townships, which is particularly rich in precious gems and natural resources. The famous jade mine called Nam Hkyi is located in Mohnyin district. The Nam Hkyi mine is owned and operated by Chinese and Burmese business people with security jointly provided by the KIO and SPDC, ever since the cease-fire agreement. Local people (Kachin) work in the mine but are paid very low wages.

Most of the Kachin population depends on the natural forest and their main occupation is farming. They use two different types of farming systems; the first one is slash-and-burn or dry cultivation. In Burmese, it is known as 'Taung Ya'. The second type of farming system is more

2) "List of Districts, Townships, Cities/Towns, Wards, Village Groups and Villages in Union of Myanmar published by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Union of Myanmar on 31 December 2001, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma>



*Local people come back from the forest collecting seasonable foods.*

*(Photo by myushalat2008@gmail.com)*

fields include ground-nuts, corn, and watermelons by Shan people. They are growing vegetable gardens including many different seasonable foods such as; tomato, eggplant, chili, mustard, garlic, and radish and others. By these facts, most people's livelihoods depend on the natural forest, land and streams.

In the town of Mohnyin, there is only one actual store owned by local Kachin people and that store sells clothing, which is a profitable business. All of the other stores, which sell construction materials, electronics, and general consumer goods are owned by Chinese, Burmese and Indian merchants who are not local people. Many Shan people are making money by producing vegetables and paddy rice on land they own on the banks of streams. It seems that in most cases, everyone except the local people are profiting from living in Kachin state.

In 1994 the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), along with its political group the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC. This ceasefire agreement has continued and is still in effect, but is fragile due to the complex relationship between the two groups. The SPDC controls all of Kachin state and the political situation remains tense. Because of this, the research area for this study is highly restricted.

In 1976 a big political problem erupted when a Shan-Burman military group in Mohnyin Town attacked and killed all the Kachin people living there, because of conflicts between the militias and armies from KIA. A few Kachin people managed to escape and were saved by some monks in a monastery. The militias secretly plotted this event against the Kachin people who had no chance of defending themselves or protecting their property and lost all their possessions. The problems continue due to the discrimination and animosity between Burman and the other ethnic groups.

formal and is called irrigated farming. The local people in Mohnyin Township depend on nature for their daily livelihood, because most Kachin people survive by practicing "Taung Ya". For the Kachin people, living from nature means hunting, and collecting natural foods in season.

Nan Yin stream is situated in the center of Mohnyin and is vital to the farmers' survival. The natural forest and surrounding mountain range are very important for the Kachin people's survival as well. Most of the Kachin people make their living by selling seasonable forest products in the market, but earn very little money.

Other crops produced in the paddy



## The Current Education Situation in Burma

In Burma, there are many different governmental departments under the SPDC and the education department is extremely important for the development of the country. However, the SPDC spends only a very small percent of its resources supporting education. Most of the national budget goes to support the military infrastructure and the military families. So the quality of basic education has become very poor with a lot of corruption throughout it. These problems have lead to an increase in uneducated young people. The SPDC's education policies continue to change every decade since 1964 up until now. U Thaung Htut wrote in his book, *Education of Education*;

*"In the early era of the Socialist Republic of Union of Burma, the government used the curriculum which was written by the government of Revolutionary Council. However, some changes were made in education after Burma Socialist Program Party took over the power. Especially, the curriculum for Basic Education High School was changed twice in 1977 and 1985. The curriculum for Basic Education written in 1977-78 was replaced by a new curriculum written in 1985-86, due to the development of country's politic, economic, and social matters."*<sup>3</sup>

The government implemented a national curriculum program from 1988 to 1999. After that period, the government developed a new curriculum as part of the Thirty-Year Long-term Education Development Plan (2001-02FY\_\_\_2030-31FY). This plan aims to implement a new program in six, five-year phases, and is currently in the third phase of implementation. It is the most ambitious of the plans launched by the Ministry of Education and contains ten programs for the Basic Education and 36 programs for higher education.

The ten programs being implemented in the Basic Education under the Thirty-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan are:

1. Creating an education system for modernization and development of the country.
2. Basic Education for All.
3. Improving the quality of basic education.
4. Providing access to pre-vocational education and vocational education at different basic education levels.
5. Improving access to teaching, learning and communication technology; leading towards e-education.
6. Producing all round developed citizens.
7. Capacity building for educational management.
8. Carrying out basic education activities in collaboration with the community.

---

3) U Thaung Htut, Retired Rector, Education of Education. Myanmar Pyanyayee Shu Khin (Yangon: Daw Shwe Eing, November 2000), 56-57

9. Improving non-formal education activities.
10. Improving educational research.

The 36 programs for the higher education component of the long-term plan, focus on six areas that will generate qualitative development of higher education and contribute to national development endeavors and the preservation of national identity and culture.

The six core areas of focus are:

1. Development of human resources
2. Utilization of technology
3. Expansion of research
4. Development of a lifelong learning society
5. Promotion of the quality of education and
6. Preservation of national identity and national values

My research report will focus on the weakness of the current government education system in Mohnyin Townships in Kachin State. The city of Mohnyin contains three high schools, four middle schools and eight primary schools. There are also two colleges for students who pass high school and wish to continue their education; the Government Technological College and the Mohnyin Degree College.



*Degree College in Mohnyin Township views of the entrance archway and the administration building. (Photo by Lovely Friend)*

## Root Cause of the Weak Education System

### *An Inappropriate and Ineffective Education system*

The current Long-Term Basic Education Development Plan was divided into six, 5 year phases and began implementation in 2000 and is currently operating in the second phase as of 2010.

Continuous Assessment Teaching and Compulsory Education policies are part of the Experimental Education policy during the Thirty-Year Long-Term Education Development plan.

From my experience in 1999, when I was a student, we had to take the exam three times a year to pass every grade. The students have to pass three exams to complete one year and the students who do not pass the third exam can't get into the next grade. After you pass high school, at grade eleven, students also have to try hard to pass the "High School Final and Matriculation Examination" to continue to university. Grade eleven is very important for the student; the students who get the highest scores can join a Professional University such as Medical University or Government Technological University. At that time, the quality of education was better because the students received a good education from smart teachers. We did not need special classes outside of the regular class time and tuition special fees were not common like they are nowadays. The teachers were very good at supporting students and helping them understand the lessons and there was no discrimination among students. The teachers taught all students in the same class by taking overtime pay and there was a special class for grade eleven students, during regular school hours, to prepare them two months prior to the High School Final and Matriculation Examination.

The education system made the student independent and hardworking. There was no need to bribe the teacher to pass the exam and one could pass the exam from trying hard. Even if someone was from a poor family and did not have money to pay for the bribe, they could still pass the exam. According to a student's mother:

*"I like more the old education system that is when I was student because it made me to understand and recognize all lesson."*<sup>4</sup>

During the class promotion examination period, students who were interested in both formal education and non-formal education had to study hard, so there were many youth who became qualified and smart students. When those students became teachers, they were very committed and useful people for the community.



Youth are wasting their valuable time by playing game. (Photo by Brang Myutsaw).

The education system today does not require much from the students. They do not have to try hard or rely on self study to pass the exam to continue the new grade, because of the policy of Continuous Assessment Teaching. They only have mini tests during the lessons and do not have to take a final exam. In school, most of the students do not respect or listen to the teacher and do not obey the school rules. A lot of students feel hopeless and do not have a vision for their future. One teacher said:

4) Interview# 12 with students' parents in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

*"In my opinion, the current education system is not appropriate yet our peoples' nature. If the government wants to practice its system, all people should improve and change our morale in mind and human development at first."*<sup>5</sup>

There are many reasons for the decline in morale and increase in negative characteristics of the students in our community. In the early 1990s there was just one television in the community, if the children or students wanted to watch T.V they had to go to that family with the television and watch it there, but today:

*"There are so many situations in our surroundings that influence our children, students, and youths contributing to their declining interest in education such as T.V, movies, computer video game shops, snooker halls, and there are televisions in most homes now."*<sup>6</sup>

Most of the students are not interested in quality education and they do not even want to attend the next grade in the new academic year. Also, teachers are not skillful in using effective teaching methods and the teachers themselves emphasize copying during examinations in both the universities and schools. Because of this, there is a high quantity of educated people, but the quality of their education is low. A boarding school teacher said that,

*"When I was a student, I and all my friends wanted to study, try hard, and obey the teachers' reprove and teaching guide forever. We do have like and love our teachers also respect the teachers if we were not bright to made attention, recognize the text and exercises. So that, we passed with qualify examination n. For present students, there is no hopefulness about 75 percent for the future and they don't consider and care about they will be literacy or not. It is so serious and worst future for those 75% of students. There are 25 percent of students who are interested in their education and they really need their parents' encourage and strength by money and guideline."*<sup>7</sup>

### *Inadequate support for education*

In Burma, the military government does not give enough support for education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing human resources, but they always ignore their responsibility. If we have a lot of educated people in our country, it is very helpful for the development of the country. The military government got a lot of income taxes from the country, but only 1.4 percent was spent on education. If the amount was that low for the entire country, think of how little was spent on education in Kachin State. According to the education research from NHEC:

*"The quality of Burma's education has declined over the last three decades due to the SPDC's failed policies. The military regime uses 70 percent of the country's budget for itself. The military*

---

5) Interview# 5 with boarding school teacher in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author

6) Interview# 31 with boarding school teacher in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

7) Interview# 4 with government school teacher in Bahmaw, Kachin State, Myanmar. On file with author.

*does not focus on education and health care programs. They only provide 1.4 percent of the whole country's budget for education, crippling the system.”<sup>8</sup>*

The SPDC does not provide enough support for school teachers. In addition to paying teachers a low salary, there are shortages of; teaching materials, experiments materials, laboratories, and furniture. Most of the time, the school must collect a donation from the student's parent or rely on wealthy people to donate:



*Dirty Desks in the class room in the Degree College in Mohnyin: The research area for this report. (Photo by Partnership).*

*“The government only provides the school building and not the teaching supplies. So the schools do not have enough teaching supplies to support the student's learning well.”<sup>9</sup>*

The students had to donate the furniture, cleaning supplies and teaching supplies to the school. The students' parents have the responsibility of providing the school costs; both direct and indirect costs. Direct cost means the enrollment cost, text books and materials and indirect cost is means cleaning cost, and other social costs for the class rooms. This was true when I started to go to school almost twenty years ago, and contin-

ues even today in my focus area. The students' parents also have to take responsibility for paying the school compound cleaning fee and when there is a religious ceremony, in addition to paying for the school fees.

The SPDC's policy is to not charge school fees for primary schools but this is only on paper. In reality the students have to pay school fees. In other countries, like Thailand, the government supports the students by not charging tuition, school supplies and the food that provides the nourishment the children need to develop their bodies and brains. In Burma, there is no support for any teaching supplies or food expenses. The government supports very few students. For example, if there are five students in a family, only two students are free from paying admission fees. The parent said:

*“By the government's new policy, the school admission fees are decreasing since three year back, and I have a chance to send all my children to school. But the indirect cost is paid every month.*

8) <http://www.nhecburma.org/report.html>, School Education Research Journal (2005) Vol.1.P1.

9) Interview# 3, 4, 8 and 36 with government school teachers in Mohnyin, Bahmaw and Yangon Myanmar. On file with author.

*For example, 150,000 to 200,000 kyat (\$150-200) for direct and indirect cost per year. Before the current policy, I have to bring 50,000 kyat (\$50) for admission day.”<sup>10</sup>*

## *Teacher Corruption*

The SPDC has a policy which prevents teachers from collecting illegal taxes for the school. However, it is just on the paper and by announcement, because no action is taken to implement the policy and there are no checks and balances, so teachers do not follow it. Teachers do not have permission to teach for special fees that we call “tuition,” however they do it anyway for students from the pre class of grade one to grade eleven as well as college and university level.

There are many kinds of corruption committed by the teachers. All teachers including headmasters and headmistresses make income for their families from the students’ parents. Most teachers charge for classes and collect money for examination fee and other direct and indirect costs. For example, the actual fee for the examination is just 2,000 (\$2) kyat but they collect 5,000 kyat (\$5), keeping 3,000 kyat (\$3) for themselves.

If a student has to move to another school, their family has to pay the school over 5,000 kyat (\$5) per student. If a family has to enroll a new student in grade one, the parents have to go to the headmaster first and pay over 10,000 kyat (\$10). The parent must go to the headmaster’s home to do this, so their child can attend school. If the parent does not speak with the headmaster, they cannot enroll and attend school, but if they have already spoken to the headmaster, they have nothing to worry about regarding the child’s enrollment, because the headmaster will take note and record the student’s birth certificate to reserve enrollment. One parent reported that

*“Before the enrollment date, I went to the headmaster’s home to get and acknowledgement my daughter’s enrollment, gave 10,000 kyat (\$10) and other present for him. So I did not have any worries and serious for my daughter. Some parent can’t get their children’s enrollment because they did not approach to headmaster and they don’t have any experience about it is need to approach process with headmaster.”<sup>11</sup>*

The teachers ask for many things to be donated from students. The students’ parents said that the teachers ask for gifts from students:

*“You all must collect money and buy a good Longyi and shampoo for me. Hi Mercy, you are a quite good income family right, so that, after over the class, when you arrived in your house, you should ask your mother to give present me.”<sup>12</sup>*

The most popular method for collecting fees is through teaching a special class outside of class time and charging “tuition.” Every teacher has tuition class, but teachers in charge of a class want

---

10) Interview# 12 with students’ parents in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

11) Interview# 6 with students’ parents in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

12) Interview# 13 with students’ parents (Reverend) in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.



all their students to attend their tuition class. Tuition costs 5,000 kyat (5 USD) for grades one to six, kyat 6,000 kyat (6 USD) for grade seven, kyat 7,000 kyat (7 USD) for grade eight and nine, 9,000 kyat (9 USD) for grade ten and 150,000 kyat for grade eleven. Most grade ten and eleven students have night guidelines, so their parents have to provide 9,000 to 12,000 kyat (9 USD to 12 USD) per month. Teachers are so angry with those students who cannot pay tuition fees, even when the students' parents cannot afford the extra fees for their children. Teachers scold the students who can't pay tuition fee and can't attend tuition. If they cannot pay the tuition fee, teachers say?

*"Are you beggars? Why you are attending tuition without paying tuition fees? You must attend in my tuition class."*

There is so much discrimination between rich and poor families. Teachers give first priority and attention to the students from rich families. These students receive more favor, even if the students are foolish, as long as their parents can pay a bribe. Even when the students are very good in study, they do not receive the class prize, because his/her parent did not give any present to the teacher:

*"When my son was grade three he usually got second grade every chapter test all year round. His class teacher says me, your son have to get prize so you should prepare a new uniform to participate to prize giving ceremony and we also already done it all ready to attend ceremony. Actually, we can't participate to ceremony because we can't pay any extra charge to teacher. We already known that teacher says us about my son's qualify but we can't afford for it. Another student attend to ceremony instance of my son because her parent give bribe to their class teacher 30,000 kyat (30 \$). Student who got prize he is so foolish in class ever but she got it for her parents' extra charges as much as they can."*<sup>13</sup>

## *Poverty and Family Instability*

There are mixed populations in Mohnyin Town; among them, Kachin people in this Town are poor and simple. Their living standard is lower than other people and they are daily workers.

Kachin people in Mohnyin do not possess any properties, such as paddy farms, vegetable gardens or livestock. On the other hand, as a Kachin national, from their fore-father's time, every Kachin family served as KIA soldier. It shows that KIO/KIA and Kachin people cannot separate. At the present, at least one adult son or daughter must serve the KIO/KIA as a soldier. One parent said:

*"I served KIA soldiers as a nurse and teacher for 12 years and my son also a soldier right. After I retired I married with my husband and there are two daughters and one son form sibling eights. I have to serve for KIA even I retired and I was arrested often as the political prisoner. So I am*

---

13) Interview# 42 with former KIA soldier in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

*weak in taking family's responsibilities to develop my family and my children. And My son was recruited when he was just grade six during he collected canes in forest in summer holiday.”<sup>14</sup>*

In the people's viewpoint, Mohnyin Town is absolutely controlled by the SPDC. The Kachin people traditionally were recruited as soldiers from KIO/KIA secretly. This practice has continued for Kachin people since 1961, which was the beginning of the KIA revolution group that fights for the goal of attaining independence. It means Kachin people focus on their nationality as the common goal. The KIO/KIA represents all Kachin people in their struggle for independence and nationality, which began 49 years ago. Before the ceasefire agreement, between the KIA and SPDC, Kachin people from every where were brutalized by the SPDC. The Kachin people must serve in the KIO/KIA even after ceasefire agreement:

*“I was recruited when I was 15 years in 1963 as I served a soldier, and I was arrested by the SPDC's soldier from No. (56) Battalion, Shwe Gu on 15th July 1981, and beat up and brutal me again and again. Here you look my front teeth are broken up by beating their carbine, my left backbone was crack and both of up and down my lips was already pained like a hole.”<sup>15</sup>*

Consequently, the Kachin people are facing problems such as; uneducated generations, lack of property and opportunities to create economic marketing. Most families come to Mohnyin Town from other villages, including Shan State by SPDC's program. The reason for moving to Mohnyin Town is an unstable economy and political unrest. That is why all Kachin people have to survive depending on the natural forest and they can't concentrate on their children's education, health care or development of life security, because the stated problems hurt the wellbeing of Kachin people's current food security. As one interviewee said:

*“We can't contemplate for our children' education and give quite sufficient future plan for future because we have to go to forest to collect natural seasonable foods, sometime we have to stay in forest or Taung Ya for two weeks and leaves our children at home. We can't support to guide for their study and don't know how they are trying study or they are not.”*

The families hire themselves out to work in other people's rice paddy fields and receive a portion of rice as payment. They manage money for the family's food and basic needs, and sometimes it is necessary to share their children's school enrollment fees. Some people make their small income by hunting for their daily survival, but it is difficult to find prey because of large scale logging which is destroying the forest and wildlife is already disappearing. One villager said:

*“This year my adult son got fifty tins of rice (unit of measure for grain i.e a basket which holds sixteen pyay of grain) (approximately a bushel) as payment but we don't get it yet before harvesting rice. We have to use it already even we didn't get it yet because of we don't have any other extra*

14) Interview# 11 with students' parent and former KIA soldier in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

15) Interview# 7 with students' family in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.



*money to support my children's enrollment."*<sup>16</sup>

Another problem that the war creates is a high number of orphans in the Kachin community. For example two siblings and their spouses died in the war. Consequently, their family must take care of children who are remaining from two families. From that time, there is no other business for the family and in order to care of the children, they had to sell their heritage land. As one family member said:

*"After my brother and sister died, I have to take care of eight peoples*

*of my niece and nephews so I have chance to solve it that I sold our paddy farm (land) two acres it 40,000 kyat (40 \$) in 1993, and sold two acres again it 60,000 kyat (60 \$) in 1994 and remain four acres lastly but it also was sold. We have no more any heritage from our parent, every thing is already gone. At the present, I and my family are surviving depending on the forest."*<sup>17</sup>



*Degree Collage students are standing front of the classroom. (Photo by Partnership).*

## Social Impact

Education is the basic foundation for a nation's development and the next generation. Education is an essential tool for the country and youth. There is a Kachin saying "Today youth are tomorrow leaders". New Kachin generations are representative of the Kachin and they always have created the country's development through the best ideas. They are always the bright stars of the country and nationality. The old generations also have faith that they will be good leaders, but gradually this hopefulness is going to be lost. Because the new generation is taking the wrong road in various ways, it is like we are standing in the darkness.

According to the research, 20 percent of youth are graduated in Mohnyin Town, but that does not say whether those youth are qualified or not. In 1997, there was a small demonstration done by the University students, across the country. All Universities in the country were closed after this strike, except Myitkyina University. All the state schools did not enroll on time, which is usually in May. Instead, the government made a long summer holiday till August. All universities were closed from 1997 to 2000. All students from that time period are not interested in formal education, because they were denied access to higher education for three years. When the universities were open, all students did not value education, so they did not attend class regularly. Students did

16) Interview # 11 with students' family in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

17) Interview# 15 with students' parents in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

not practice self-study and before the exam they attend tuition as special class and then copy the in exam class.

There are so many used syringes in the university compound. They sell drugs to each other in the compound. For students, it is very easy to carry drugs from the border, because the government neglects the behavior of the students. Students have a chance to sell drugs, and go freely, except for participating in a political campaign. It is one of the government's policy to forbid youth's political participation and leadership.

The state school students can access education until grade ten without any worry or need to work hard, through the "continuous assessment teaching policy", but it is quite difficult to pass grade eleven. Thus the drop-out rate is high for students from grade ten and eleven because parents can't support the tuition fee. In this way many youth became unqualified, even degree holders.



*Drop out school children are making small income for their families. (Photo by Lovely Friend.)*

### *Increase in drug use and prostitution for the jobless*

Young drop-outs want to support their family's needs, but it is impossible to work for a government office because they have not graduated. They have a chance if they leave home and travel to other places to make money, doing whatever job they can get. All young people can find work as a jade/gold digger and work hard the whole day, but they use drugs to relieve the body's pain. Another reason to become a drug user is that it is very easy to sell and buy drugs in the mining area. Most young people who went to work in the mines become drug users and they are not able to support their family and lose their dignities. One interviewee said:

*"Hi, Hkri Shawng, all young peoples who went and work to make money wherever they work, if they come back to home or they are not, they all are already be drug users. In here, teenage people are practice stupid job such as making group and revolt around quarter of Town. Also they use drug."*<sup>18</sup>

Young females also want to support their family and don't remain long with family just collecting food from the forest and doing Taung Ya. They go to work as cooks, sales persons and so forth in jade and gold mines. As they stayed in mine many months and years, some become sex workers and serve as a "lesser wife". By this way, young females are making money through this method, in the mining areas and their native Towns. One example of this is:

*"Miss xxxx, she is 22 old and she went to Hpakant in 2006, and she returned home to her fam-*

18) Interview #32 and 33 with University students in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

ily pregnant. By the time she gave birth to her daughter, she has already been married three men. She also has sex with the other peoples before she not married to her husbands. The reason to do this kind of job to my sister is we are poor family and don't have opportunity to access to school.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Human Trafficking among Kachin community*

Human trafficking is a common practice in the research area and there are many reasons why people are trafficked. Poor uneducated families are the prime target of most trafficking activities. The victims are mostly young girls between the ages of 16 and 20. According to the youth leaders interviewed, only 20% of youth in the research area have graduated from college in the community, leaving 80% who did not pass the matriculation exam. In fact a large number of young females age 16 to 20, who make up a large number of the 80% have not completed a primary school education. With little education and no hope for a paid job they get married early and work in the forest with their husband, gathering food for their daily survival while struggling to help their families with basic needs. This group of females is particularly vulnerable to trafficking because of their desperate circumstances. The big problem is poverty and lack of education, which results in; poor decisions, little hope for a better future, worry and a low quality of life.

As the local communities continue to struggle to meet their basic needs for food and shelter, most wives have to arrange and think about the family needs to ensure the family's happiness. Women feel a big responsibility to help move their families out of poverty. For this reason, many single and married are mislead by the human traffickers. The human traffickers always focus on young females from poor families, one shared their experience:

*“In November 2005 our two youngest daughters went to work as day laborers on other people's farms in another village later my youngest daughter went to China with her friend to supposedly visit her friends' relatives. Later a woman from the village where my daughter worked told me that my daughter went to China with a woman trafficker then I went and asked for my daughter at the home of the trafficker and was told don't worry about it, they will come back after one week.”<sup>20</sup>*



*The girl was victim by human trafficker.  
(Photo by lovely friend.)*

19) Interview# 43 with drop out student in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

20) Interview# 14 with Mother who was victim human trafficking in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

The traffickers collect girls by misleading them and giving false hope about getting more income and daily wages. If the daily wage is 1,500 kyat (1.50 USD) per day in Burma, it is 30 to 120 Yuan in China (5,000 to 15,000 kyat or 3.75 to 15.00 USD) per day, as people can earn more money in China. So it is easy to mislead poor, unknowing families. The traffickers practice different strategies and try to persuade their victims, who, along with their families lack experience about related trafficking issues:

*"My daughter didn't come back till one week and trafficker's mother came and told me that your daughter already got married in China and she gives money four hundred thousand (400,000) kyat (400 \$) as the dowry. She will be come with her husband and parent in-law next month. We keep hoping our daughter will come back with her new family but these are nothing for us."*<sup>21</sup>

There are so many human trafficking cases in Mohnyin Town among families who have difficulty surviving and providing the families' basic needs. Another mother shared her feelings about her daughter who was a victim of human trafficking:

*"My daughter has a pregnancy when the trafficker took him but after she arrived in China they make her to take off her pregnancy by abortion then she was trafficked in China. We don't know in really she has married or not but the trafficker come to give me 400,000 kyat (\$400) and a couple of my daughter' photo as an evidence."*<sup>22</sup>

The traffickers have many strategies to persuade poor families first and after getting poor families' then they take their girls to China and don't follow through on anything they said. One victim said:

*"We never meet our daughter thought the traffickers ask us about my daughter will be come back and meet our family with her new family. Our family are felling so sad and left a felling in our mind except we have to pray for her in our victorious GOD."*<sup>23</sup>

As the SPDC ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the SPDC should not ignore these kinds of problems. Furthermore, they signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The SPDC must take accountability and respect their ratifications.

*Myanmar has ratified on Accession (a) on CEDAW on 22nd Jul 1997.*

*Reservation on CEDAW for Myanmar: Article 29: [The Government of Myanmar] does not consider itself bound by the provision set forth in the said article."*<sup>24</sup>

21) Interview#14 with Mother who was victim human trafficking in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

22) Interview# 44 with mother who was victim human trafficking in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

23) Interview #14 with and 44 Mothers who were victim human trafficking in Mohnyin, Kachin state, Myanmar. On file with author.

24) [http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en)

## Conclusion

The reason for the SPDC's failed education policies is clear, their strategy is to discourage education in Kachin state, because it is much easier for them to control uneducated people than educated people. The elaborate 30 year education plan is a mask over the true intentions of the SPDC, which is to undermine basic education, so that they can remain in power. People's lives are no longer peaceful since the KIO signed the ceasefire with the SPDC, because it has created instability. The cease fire has brought many conflicts in the State and among the Kachin ethnic groups. In the research area, most of the population is facing poverty. Because of the unstable politics, there is no right for the Kachin people to own natural. Kachin people lost their rights in their own land.

The SPDC tries to discriminate against the ethnic people, including Kachin people, in many ways. Even though the cease fire between the SPDC and KIO/KIA has lasted sixteen years, there is no improvement or development in social society, including education for the Kachin people. Most of the local people in Mohyin Township can't afford to pay for education and as a result, they don't know how to manage their life and how to develop their community.

Education is the hope and dream for the new generation to become good leaders for the community. If we don't have a good education system for the people, they will not be able to manage their communities effectively. Today good leaders are more important than ever before, because the new generation is facing major problems. In Kachin society, the young people learn from the older people in many different ways. If the current education is bad, the future of the young children and the community will also be bad and they will face many more problems in the future.

It is difficult to estimate the budget for the education department, because the national budget for education, under the SPDC, is only 1.2 percent of the total budget for the country. The natural resources of Kachin State are already gone and the people cannot depend on natural resources to support a good education system. Also the moral, attitude and character of the people are changing and standards of living are very low. The SPDC government's education plan and policy do not help and support the new generation to become educated.

One of the bad things is an ineffective education program. If the SPDC focused on having a real democratic system, the government would stop their failed policies and consider what is best for the new generations. If the government continues to practice the current system and policy of education, the future of the country and its citizens will be bleak. The government is responsible for its country and its people and should therefore educate its citizens. And also the government should create an appropriate program for the ethnic groups in the country. Then all the citizens can live in harmony and peace in the country.

## Recommendations

### *To the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)*

- » The SPDC should create a free basic education system and make access to University possible for local people



- » The SPDC should support the adequate salary of teachers and school facilities, including laboratory and library.
- » The SPDC should be the government that obeys the rule of law.
- » The SPDC should allow NGOs to do more education training and regional development openly in Kachin State
- » The SPDC should stop discrimination based on religion and culture (including literacy) and allow for self-determination and management within native groups
- » The SPDC should stop manipulating native groups

### *To the Youth*

- » The youth should be self-reliant.
- » The youth should attempt to educate themselves and not complain about family problems and political situation.
- » The youth should be aware of the SPDC's political situation and the Kachin people
- » The youth should avoid drugs
- » The youth should have good dreams for their future

### *To the Parents*

- » The parents should give more priority and respect to the children's futures
- » The parents should encourage their children to study and be interested in education
- » The parents should emphasize and give knowledge related to the Kachin tradition, culture and literacy.
- » The parents should have family goals that they then train their children in
- » The parents should unite to stop youth from becoming involved in drugs and cigarettes.

### *To the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Churches*

- » CBOs and churches should create opportunities to train youth
- » CBOs and churches should encourage and participate in youth capacity building activities
- » CBOs and churches should share and corporate with the young people about the Kachin tradition and culture



- » CBOs and churches should corporate and network with other NGOs to promote children's morale, attitude and education

*To Non Government and International Non Government Organizations (NGOs and INGOs)*

- » NGOs and INGOs should pressure the SPDC to invest more national revenues in the education department
- » NGOs and INGOs should support ideas and funding to implement informal education for the Kachin youth and children
- » NGOs and INGOs should give pressure to the SPDC to respect their signed agreements on Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child

*To Teachers*

- » The teachers should stop discrimination against poor students
- » The teachers should be equal and honest in teaching all students
- » The teachers should stop teaching tuition (special classes)
- » The teachers should be brave to request the SPDC for real rights and benefits for their services

# The High Cost of Education

## The Plight of Pa-O Children

by Khun Robert

Due to the lack of education facilities provided by the government, Pa-O children from Kauk Ta Lone Township, Southern Shan State are sent away from their home at a very young age to various areas in Myanmar/Burma<sup>1</sup> and consequently suffering from child rights abuses and exploitation in monasteries and houses.

### Introduction

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 26,

*"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."*<sup>2</sup>

It is clearly shown that the right to education is one of the fundamental rights of each and every one of us. It is especially crucial to children who need to learn the skills to support their lives. It is the best and most important stage of life to study and learn.

This report highlights the situation of Pa-O children who are struggling to get basic education in Pa-O areas of Southern Shan State. It is especially the economic and social conditions at home, as well as the insufficient educational facilities, that drive parents to send their children away from their birthplace. Due to the poor education facilities and the insufficient number of school teachers, children are being taken by monks to stay in monasteries and orphanage as well as in houses all over Myanmar.

This has become a long tradition practiced by local Pa-O people. Each year, a great number of children are being sent away from their homes by the monks and parents for several reasons

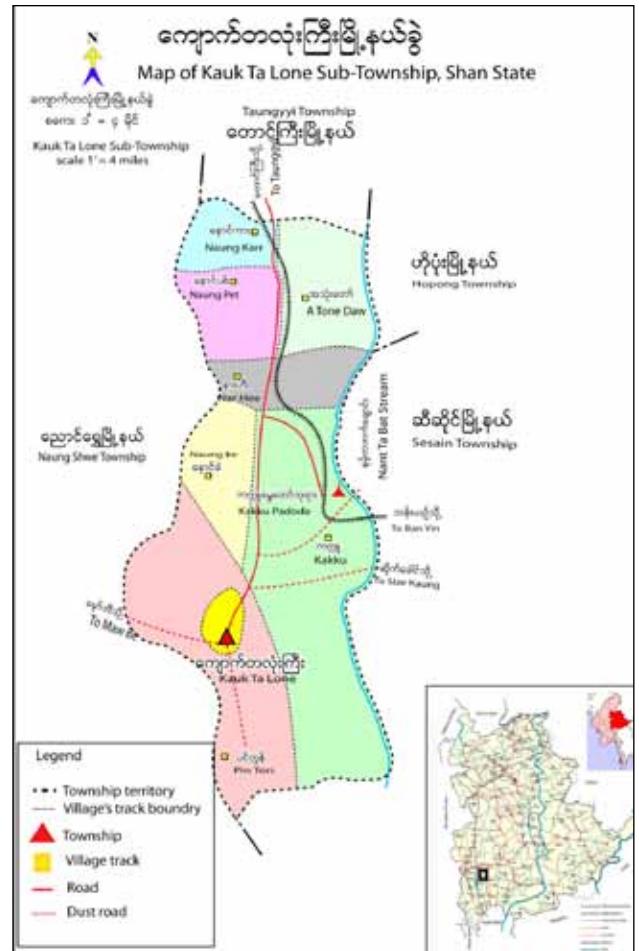
---

1) Burma is the former name of Myanmar.

2) UDHR(Universal Declaration of Human Right), <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr>

but most are related to education. In my research area alone, each year, over one thousand children, two thirds of the total population of children, are sent away from their homes to stay elsewhere in Myanmar. The children are usually between the ages of five and ten when they must leave home. Children are sent to various places such monasteries and orphanages but the majority is sent to individual families who like to have children in their home to do their daily chores.

Much research is done on human trafficking and cross-border migration but this issue with Pa-O children is an internal issue which is largely untold and hidden from the surface. What about the conditions at their new homes? What about the poor living conditions in the work places where these children end up – the factories, the farms and the domestic kitchens? Do they contribute to trafficking and child rights abuses according to international law? Why do these conditions exist and when children's rights are violated, why don't the authorities take action?



The primary objective of this one-month research study sets out to answer these questions mentioned above. It focuses on the condition of young children, the difficulties for them to access to basic education and the abuses and exploitation that they are suffering. It also examines the level of the exploitation happening to children and the places where this exploitation is happening. Lastly, it will suggest what can be done to alleviate this issue.

The first section sets out to examine the profile of children and attitudes and motivation of parents who are willing to send their children away and recruiters who engage in sending children to stay away from their home and to work for other families. Also, it will also reveal the fact that the poor education system remained unchanged although Burma is said to be on the road to democracy; the public schools are still too expensive and corrupted for parents to send their children.

Secondly, it will present about why children are sent away from their home at their very early age. In this section, the situation of their home town and villages and the causes of all this issue will be examined and analyzed. The local people in this research are called Pa-Os, also called hill tribe since they are dwelling on hills sides. Since their livelihood and way of living are very poor and simple, they are far left behind when it comes to education standard. They seem to have very

little care about their children's education for their unfavorable conditions.

The third section will explain how children are in a very vulnerable situation. Due to this poor living condition, many untold stories occur. For example, even disregarding the poor sanitation and lack of health care, some children are lost and many are abused and subjected to torture and exploitation by their adopted parents. Especially girls are far more vulnerable compared with boys since they are always sent to stay other families, never given the option of living in the monastery.

Finally, the last section will argue that children are suffering from the negative impacts not only while they are staying away from their parents but also for the rest of their lives. In this section, some case studies that happen to children staying in monasteries and families will be presented. Mostly, most children staying in monasteries are ordained as novices, young Buddhist monks, so that they can get a place to stay. They mostly have to study only Buddhist scripture.<sup>3</sup> This cannot help them practically and professionally when they leave the monasteries and become laymen again later in their life which is often the case for many children since they don't want spend the rest of their lives in the monkhood.

## Methodology

Primary research was conducted with sent children, children's parents, community leaders, and recruiters who are mostly monks from various geographical sites in and around Yangon. Altogether, 16 interviews with children, community leaders, parents and monks were done. Some of the data are from reports made by Khun Tun Tin, a member of PYO (Pa-O Youth Organization).

Children interviewed were those who are currently staying with individual families as well as those who have left the homes where they were sent to live. Among 16 interviews, 10 of them were conducted with children and 7 of them were the victims of different kinds of abuses and exploitation by house owners. The suffering and difficulties they face are more or less the same degree.

This research was conducted from 1, September, 2011 to 5, October, 2011. It was done mainly in two areas: monasteries where children live in and around Yangon and their hometown of Kauk Ta Lone Township, Southern Shan State, Myanmar.

## Background

Sending children to stay away from home in monasteries and in families as adopted children has been a long tradition in Pa-O society. It is estimated that it began since the 1962 civil war.

Until 1959, Pa-O people were under the rule of Monarchy whose rulers were mainly Shan people<sup>4</sup>. Under the oppression and torture of the monarchists, no one was allowed to study. Therefore, the large population of Pa-O people gained access to education very late, only after 1959 when the Monarchy system collapsed. From 1959-1962, there was an opportunity for education but then, in 1962, there was a military coup in Burma and the basic education was largely affected by the civil war between the Burmese army and Pa-O army which lasted until 1991. During the

---

3) Buddhist scripture is the teaching of Lord Buddha which is widely studied in many monasteries in Myanmar.

4) Shan is an ethnic group which has the largest population in Shan State.

conflict between SPDC (State Peace and Development) and PNO (Pa-O National Organization), young people were taken as porters and used as child soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

The civil war began in 1962. It was the time when there was a great tension and fighting between the Burmese military and Pa-O insurgents. During that time, U Khun La Phya, a former partner of independence hero General Aung San, was a prominent Pa-O leader. He was a highly educated and respected person with lots of friends in lower Burma.

During the great conflict, he went into the forest and became the Pa-O leader. During that time, a great number of Pa-O young people were tortured and taken for pottering by the Burmese military. Realizing this, he organized many monks to take the children to lower Burma to stay in monasteries and with his friends' families; this appeared to be the only option to help the children gain education and escape from the Burmese army. In this way, many Pa-O young people became educated, some of whom are working in leading roles in the Pa-O community nowadays.

## Background of Pa-O Culture

Pa-O people, the second largest population following the Shan in Shan State, are a hill tribe because they mostly live on the hill sides and earn their living by cultivation. They are simple but hardworking people. They have their own culture and literature.

As depicted in the map of the region, Shan State, the largest state in Myanmar, is situated in the northeastern part of Myanmar. Due to its size, Shan State is officially sub-divided into three areas, known as North, South and Eastern Shan States.

Pa-O people mostly live in rural areas away from the cities because they earn their living mostly by the cultivation of onion and cheroot leaf. Until 2010, all the Pa-O areas were controlled by SPDC<sup>6</sup> (State Peace and Development Council) regime. Pa-O people are living in various townships, mostly in Southern Shan State. Now, three townships of all Pa-O areas gain self-administration power which means the areas will be controlled by PNO (Pa-O National Organization) Party, an organization with strong ties to the Burmese government.

Buddhism is practiced by nearly 100 percent of the population.<sup>7</sup> Since they are strong believers in Buddhism, Pa-O people believe it is essential for a man to be ordained and stay in the monastery at least once in his lifetime. This is one of the reasons why children are being sent away to stay in monasteries.

## Current Situation

Nowadays, the number of children being sent away from their home town is increasing at the alarming rate. They are sent to stay in many places in Yangon. They are sent by monks and individuals to stay in orphanages and monastic schools but they are mostly sent to individual families.

According to my research, Pa-O children are proportionally the highest among all the ethnic

---

5) U BA Toht, a member of PNO. Personal interview. 10 September, 2011.

6) SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) is now a political party representing Burmese military government.

7) From "The culture of Pa-O" written by U Sandar Won Ta

groups living in Yangon monastic schools and orphanages; the number of Pa-O children is considerably higher than other ethnic groups such as Shan, Pa Laung, Wa, Da Nu and many other ethnic groups which come from different states and divisions in Myanmar.

Pa-O people have a fairly good education infrastructure such as schools from basic education to high school in their regions located near the city. It is because of the educational project organized by PNO (Pa-O national organization) in 1995 after taking ceasefire with government.<sup>8</sup> However, a large population of the people living in remote areas is still unable to access to the education due to their poor economy, the high expenses of education as well as poor and corrupted education system.



*Pa-O children on the bus to be sent away from their homes*

Corruption occurs usually among middle and high school teachers. The exam results and the grades of students' year round study are determined by the amount of money that the parents have to pay for their children tuition's fees. Most of the teachers' incomes are from their private tuition and classes. As a result, very little attention is given on the school lessons and children who cannot pay for the private tuition are greatly ignored.

Children are sent all over Burma except some states and divisions where Buddhism is not practiced. One Pa-O monk stated that per year, more than 10,000 children are sent from Pa-O regions to other places in Burma.<sup>9</sup> Children are sent in many forms: as novices, orphans, students. Boys are mainly sent to individual families, monasteries, monastic schools and orphanages; very few girls are sent to nunneries to live as nuns while the majority of them are sent to individual families. Girls are mainly sent to stay in families because there are very few places for them to stay. Therefore, they are more vulnerable to domestic abuses as well as human trafficking.

8) From a book called "Pa-O in Myanmar Union" 15 anniversary of peace in Pa-O regions.

9) Stated by U Ku Ta La, a monk who stays in Nage Wine monastery, Yangon



## Major Research Findings

### *Profile of Children*

Pa-O children are from various places of Burma but mostly come from Southern Shan State where the majority of Pa-O people live. According to the research, the majority of the children who are sent from their homes are below 10 years of age and 40% of the children are girls. Overall, nearly 80% of all children are sent to stay in families as adopted children or servants.

### *Low Income and Impact on Education*

Poor economy is the main drive of parents to send their children away. Most of the people in these regions are earning their living by cultivation of cheroot leaf and the estimated annual income for people is under 500,000 kyat, about \$500 USD. The majority of the population in this area lives hand to mouth. They usually work as daily workers. They have to live on their daily income which gives them no guarantee for tomorrow.

*"The incomes of our people are just unable to cover the expense of our children's education. Our farm is very far from here. We have to stay overnight, sometimes a week away from our house. So, we don't really have time for our children,"*<sup>10</sup>

- Villager from Kae Lunn village.

While the parents are struggling to survive and earning their living from hand to mouth, children are neglected and ignored. Parents know nothing but how to survive; they are illiterate and cannot even sign their names. In this situation, all they expect from their children is a helping hand in farming and household tasks. Therefore, children are expected to come home when they are old enough to help their parents on the farm from lower Burma.

*"Every parent has expectations and desires for their children's bright future, they have much hope for their children. I'm also a mother, so I can understand the parents' feeling but they also need to think about their day to day situation and look at the long term future of their children."*<sup>11</sup>

- Villager from Lon Hey village.

Like parents of the children, teachers are also facing many problems, especially with their salary. They earn only less than 50,000 kyat a month for young teachers who teacher basic education, about \$50 USD, and less than 100,000 kyat for senior teachers which is simply not enough to have a decent standard of living. Some teachers have to focus on their private businesses and

---

10) Kae Luu village is located in Southern part of Kauk Ta Lone Township

11) Lone Hey is a small village in Northern part of Kauk Ta Lone Township

teaching becomes a part time job for them.

Moreover, the number of teachers is very limited and each has to take care of over 50 children in one class. Therefore, it is very hard for them to teach and take care of children effectively. This is the main reason that makes the teaching profession an unattractive job for many young people and why it has lost the traditional respect from society.

Traditionally, pupils have the same respect for their teachers as they have for the Buddha and their parents. Teachers enter the classroom with goodwill, interest and self-sacrifice (seidana, wadhana, anina). Nowadays, the role of teachers has declined due to the fact that teachers' salaries are very low and they lack material support such as housing and transportation. They also lack academic support, such as teacher training programs and workshops. The lack of well-trained teachers also affects the quality of teaching.

### *Corruption and Poor Education System*

Most schools in this area lack basic classroom necessities such as books, pencils, tables and proper libraries. Teachers are paid an average of less than 100,000 kyat a month<sup>12</sup> - a wage unattractive to many young people who would otherwise be interested in a teaching career. Many schools are left with no choice but to recruit unqualified staff on a short term basis.

Parents usually have a negative attitude toward education. This is understandable since nearly all university students have no job employment opportunities and return home jobless after graduation. For most lower-class people, basic middle school education is thought to be enough for their children. This is the reason why many children are encouraged to come home after they complete their middle school from lower Burma.

*"We don't believe in education. It is just a piece of paper that gives us no guarantee for our future. We send our children away not because we don't love them but we just can't help it,"*

- Local farmer in Lone Hey village

The local school fees are so high that most of the local people are unable to send their children to school. The number of school teachers is also very limited. According to the policy of the Ministry of SPDC education, there must be 6 teachers in every middle school as well as a head master to monitor the school management. The schools must provide free basic education for all children. However, the reality is otherwise. U Mg Lay, from Ham See village<sup>13</sup> said:

*"We have to pay most at the beginning of the year, and then come annual fees. Not only that, we also have to send our children to tuition classes that cost the most and we also have to pay whenever there is a social occasion. Altogether, we have to spend at least 100,000 kyat a year"*

---

12) Stated by U Ba Lay, a school teacher in Lon Hey village during the interview on 23/Sep/2011

13) Ham See is a village in Northern part of Kauk Ta Lone Township

This amount of school fees is indeed high and it will take nearly 50% of the average annual income for ordinary people who can earn not more than 300,000 kyat a year.



*Pa-O novices doing construction work*

### *The Role of Monastic Education*

The monastic education tradition emerged from Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar in the 11th century and has been an integral part of Myanmar culture ever since. Thanks to the monks, monasteries played such a significant role in their culture and education.<sup>14</sup> Pa-O people are not an exception. Since nearly the whole population is Buddhist, monastic school is an essential part of their culture.

### *Difficulties for Children in Monasteries*

Sadly enough, nearly all the Pa-O children depend heavily on these institutions. It seems to be the only option for them to get basic education. Staying in monasteries and studying there is not always a good choice for many children. Children cannot be well controlled or guided since the living conditions are very poor and monks are not well trained to take care of children. Children are taught only by a limited number of monks and volunteer teachers. Since most of the monasteries are financially poor, the daily chores such as cooking, cleaning the compound, going out for food and even hard work like carrying blocks for buildings, are usually done by young novices and children. On average, children have only about 3 or 4 study hours a day. Some children are not usually properly guided and facilitated. So, many children are just running around during their study time. It leaves them little time for study, which their parents believe is how they spend most of their days.

14) <http://epress.anu.edu.au/myanmar02/pdf/ch07.pdf>

*"The most common problem that children are facing here is Hepatitis-B because of the living conditions"*

- Monk from Metta Wadi Monastic Education Centre.

*"I miss my mom, I want to go home,"*

- 6 year old boy.

In these kinds of monastic schools, parents are not allowed to phone to their children in the first three months because children will be crying to go home. Being away from home and having lack of parental control, children are greatly neglected and some are being bullied by their senior monks and laymen. As a result, the wellbeing of these children is greatly distorted. Many children are neglected and develop negative character such as stealing, lying and bullying others.

In theory, monastic schools are places that helped the country produce valuable citizens because students have to learn basic ethical values and morality. Unfortunately, most of the monastic schools are not well-functioning or well-organized. They are based mostly on volunteer teachers and untrained educators.

They also have very limited spaces for children. Most of the children from low and middle class people heavily depend on them; it is indeed difficult for monks to effectively and systematically run the school. The facilities are inadequate and poor hygiene and sanitation problems are so common. The classroom facilities and management are so poor that children have to sit on the floor to study with little teaching supplies such as note books, pencils etc.. Many children suffer from skin diseases and are skinny because of the poor health care and living condition.

### *Vulnerability of Children*

Economic crises, oppressive environments and low-intensity conflicts between local authorities and local people have left many children no options but to go and stay in other places. These children are often exposed to a wide-range of abuses in other families.<sup>15</sup>

Children are sent to leave home when they are very young. They have no language and literacy skills, reside and work in isolated areas with few or no services and are largely dependent on their new adoptive parents for their safety and shelter. Consequently, children often encounter exploitative and violent environments, health risks and the denial of a wide-range of basic rights.

Since the abuse and exploitation of children is so prevalent, many children are unhappy and run away from their new homes. Some get lost and find themselves on the street. When children are lost and run away, the families that take care of the children usually refuse to take responsibility. These are very sad and common stories that can often be heard in some Pa-O monasteries.

"The news of at least three or four cases about children comes to our organization every year,

---

15) From a report written by Khun Tun Tin (PYO)

especially at the beginning year of the school in June and July,” said by the manager of Pa-O religious shelter in Yangon. He added, “Nowadays, we can see many Pa-O children working everywhere, from maid services to big construction sites”<sup>16</sup>

Many people say the same thing about child workers. Employers have nothing to fear because of the loose enforcement of child labor laws by authorities.

## Domestic Abuses

While some of the children are sent to stay in monasteries, most of the children are now sent to do all the basic work in individual families as servants or so-called “adopted children.” Staying with families is now very common and there is a high risk for children to be abused and exploited.

Since more and more children are being sent to stay away from their parents at an early age, it is very common to hear many stories about children being abused and lost while they are away from their parents. The following case studies are some of the many stories happening to Pa-O children:

### *Case One*

#### **Nang San Yee, 14-year-old female from Kae Luu village, Southern Shan State**

San Yee, who had recently arrived at a nunnery in Yangon, was sent to lower Burma when she was 7. At that age, her parents were promised by the monks who brought her to Yangon that she would receive a chance to study. However, she was sent to stay in a family where she had to work as a servant doing daily chores as well as keeping the home grocery shop.

Unfortunately, she was forced to quit attending school after only one year due to the financial difficulties of the family she was living with. After that, she had to serve the family doing household tasks and keeping the home grocery shop.

*“I had to get up very early, at 4 o’clock in the morning, and prepare the shop. The shop opened from 7 am till 7 pm. And I could not sleep and eat well. I could eat only after they finished their meal with a different poor meal.”*

She also said that she liked to attend school and she was not happy staying with and working for the family.

Oftentimes, she was scolded and beaten by the house owners, especially whenever they had family problems. She had to be careful and scared at almost all time. She said:

*“I stayed there for 5 years but I was not happy at all. Now I am happy here because I have many friends and I can study,”*

She was forced to stay with the family for nearly 7 years but was eventually able to leave the

---

16) From the interview with U Tun Lwin, the manager of Pa-O National Shelter

home to become a nun. She is now staying at a nunnery and studying the Buddhist scriptures. She is unable to join state school since it is too late for her. She has very little time to go out and she is allowed to leave the nunnery only when her parents and relatives come.



## *Case Two*

### **Khun Khin Nyunt, 19-year-old boy from Te Koung village, Kaut Ta Lon Township**

Khun Khin Nyunt is now staying in Taunggyi Monastery. He was sent to stay in a Chinese family when he was 5. He went to school until he completed grade 6. After that, he had to stop attending school and starting working for the family in their business until he became a teenager. He was treated like a servant and was never given any payment. He finally could not stand the treatment any longer and left the home secretly.

*"I worked for five years, but never received any payment. I had to work all day. I couldn't go to bed until 2 am, but would then have to get up again at 5 am. I didn't have enough sleep. The employer was evil-minded, not only did he not pay me any money; he also slapped, hit and pinched me. His wife laughed while he slapped me [...] I was so lucky when I left the home in the very early morning. I didn't know where to go. I was lost. Luckily, I was saved by a traffic policeman who found me on the street. He gave me a meal for my breakfast. He also found a phone number on my bag and contacted the monk for me."*

Lost children are very common stories. Many children, especially boys, run away from homes when they are not happy and tortured by the houses.



### *Case Three*

#### **Nang Sein Kyi, 12-year-old girl from Par Mon village, Kaut Ta Lon Township**

Sein Kyi is now staying in the Mya Kae Sar Yee Nunnery in Thanlin Township and attending 8th standard in state school. She was sent to Yangon when she was 6 and stayed in a spinster's house. During her 3 year stay in that house, she could attend school but was miserably treated and abused by the spinster, who had a very short temper. When asked about her experiences, she said:

“When I stayed with her, she always said ‘I don’t want to see you doing nothing.’ I had to get up very early to do cleaning all over the house and cook for her every morning. She got angry easily and hit me at will. I had to be very careful when I talked to her.”

At one time, she was beaten badly and rescued by neighbors. Those neighbors took her to the Care for Mother and Child organization. She was then sent back to her nunnery. The torture and abuses she endured are shown by the scars still on her body.

“I got these scars because I dropped her cooking pot. She hit me with a hot cooking instrument. I think it will not disappear,” said Sein Kyi while showing me her scars on her back.

She then said, “When I cried and ask her to allow me to talk to my parents, she always said that she doesn’t know how to contact with them.”



### *Case Four*

#### **Ashin Su Ma Na, 13-year-old boy, a novice from Ka Lay Wa Monastery in Myaut Okka Lar Pa Township, Yangon**

Ashin Su Ma Na, a novice, layman name Khun Soe Lay, was sent to stay in Ka Lay Wa monastery when he was only 6 years old. He was ordained to be a novice since there was no place to stay if he is a layman student.

Ka Lay Wa monastery is said to be the monastery with the highest number of monks, novices and students in Yangon. Including monks and laymen, there are altogether 150 people staying in the same compound. Since there are many people, the monastery is disorganized and the living conditions are very poor.

When he was asked about his living condition, he said:

*"There are many novices and monks here. We have to sleep in a small room with many people. We all have to share the same bathroom, so we need to get up very early to wait for our turn. Another thing is going out to get alms for our food. We have to go to the downtown which is very far from here. And we cannot eat if we can't get our own food."*

Since the monastery is located outside the city, it is very hard for the novices to get food. So, many novices and monks have to go to the downtown, which takes them about 1 hour by bus. Also, there are many children guided by very few senior monks. So, the monks have to apply very strict rules in order to control all the novices. The novice said,

*"The monks are very scary. We dare not talk back because they can beat us very harshly. We need to obey and listen to them whatever they say."*

Children in this monastery are mentally troubled due to the strict rules and the insufficient care of the monks. One of the main problems is children receive a poor health care. There is a volunteer practitioner who comes to the monastery once a week, but it is indeed insufficient to take care of all the children. Therefore, most of the children are very thin and suffer from itchy skin diseases.

### *Case Study Conclusion*

These case studies are only four of thousands, many of which are far more tragic. Some of these children were fortunate enough to escape their abusive surroundings but four thousands of other children, they must remain in oppressive and abusive situations, never given a voice to express their pain.

## **Socio-Cultural Factors**

As result of the number of children sent away from their homes, there are many negative impacts on the Pa-O people and their regional development. Since children are sent away from their home at their very early age, they forget their mother tongue as well as their traditions and customs. There are very few young people who can maintain their Pa-O culture. Additionally, children cannot take care of their elderly parents as they are far from home.

"I am very unhappy to see my children when they are back. I cannot communicate with them easily. They are also not happy maybe because we cannot communicate and understand each other well and they are very used to living in the city," said a mother of two children who just came back after a long time staying away from home.



*"It is not a positive sign for our people. We cannot do anything to maintain our culture if children are not with us when they are young. So, children should not be sent away from their parents,"*

- U Khun Win Ko, a second chairman of PNO (Pa-O National Organization)

## Psychological Impacts

Children are being mentally and physically abused and exploited at the ages of 5 and 6 when they have the best potential of learning and childhood development. The learning capacity of these children is therefore damaged or ruined.

*"We are not only losing a great part of our generation but destroying their potential. We should not let our children grow up with a slave and servant mind-set,"*

- U Khun Win Ko, a second chairman of PNO (Pa-O National Organization)<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult for these children to grow up with a decent personality and sound character without proper care or attention given to them.

## Conclusion

The vulnerability of these Pa-O children is very great; the abuse they risk for the possibility of education is simply too high. Education has been and seems to continue to be a big struggle of their daily life. The difficulties faced by the Pa-O children described in this report are similar to those faced by many children in Burma who lack access to education in their hometown and must move elsewhere to receive it.

It is said that Burma is a country on the path to democracy. However, it is indeed doubtful that we will have a peaceful and successful transition in the long term since there is no any sign of change in our education system and the needs of children's education are largely ignored, especially in the rural areas. After all, Burma's long-term prospects for a successful transition to democracy will depend more on educational change which will take a great deal of consistent effort and time.

In reality, not only the Pa-O people but all the people of Burma are involved in a long and difficult struggle to create a democratic future. Burma is now evidently one of the most underdeveloped countries facing with many issues. Yet of all them, education will always be a big and vital part of our struggle.

---

<sup>17)</sup> PNO (Pa-O National Organization) is now an political party represents all Pa-O People.

## Recommendations

### *To the Ministry of Education*

- » The Ministry of Education should establish schools more accessible to children whose parents are poor and unable to take care of their children due to their work
- » The Ministry of Education should work with local authorities to ensure police are aware of children's legal right to attend school despite their financial difficulties.
- » Teachers should be provided academic and material support such as training, adequate salary and housing. The number of teachers should be increased to ensure that children are not neglected.

### *To the Local Government Authorities*

- » It is strongly recommended that the local authorities find a way to have nursery schools in these regions.
- » Local authorities and community leaders should invite many NGOs which can provide education facilities
- » PNO should take more measures to ensure that children are not abused and exploited by keeping their records or registration.

### *To Monks and Educators in Monastic Schools*

- » Empower volunteer monks and educators in monastic schools through capacity building programs
- » The number of monks looking after the children should be increased in order to take good care.
- » Monks who are in charge of sending children should be more careful and give more attention to the children.

### *To Parents*

- » Parents should be aware of the risk and danger that their children are facing in a place far away from them. They should be aware that sending their children away poses many risks for their future.

*To International Community*

- » Pressure the government to take steps in enforcing the child labor law to prevent abuse and exploitation.

# Challenges and Opportunities for the Future of the Monastic Education System in Rangoon, Burma

by An An Hti



## Introduction

Under the military regime in Burma, today's education is not free, despite what the government says. Schools collect fees from the students for many items such as repairs to the school roofs and rooms, buying cleaning materials, building toilets and paying honorarium fees for teachers. Moreover, text books are not provided by the schools. In addition, students have to pay mandatory after school fees. That is why the education cost for one student is 50,000 kyats per month (US\$ 50). A monthly income of an ordinary family is 28,000 kyats (US\$ 28) . This shows that poor families cannot pay for the government school fees. Therefore, children from rural areas and poor families have little chance to attend school because of economic deprivation, lack of schools and lack of governmental support.



According to the September 2004 disclaimer report by the government, the government said they formulated a Special Four-Year education plan which they implemented from 2000 to 2004 to promote the basic education sub-sector. This plan includes a redefinition of the completion of basic education, upgrading the quality of teacher education and support of all-around development activities. The government said they had some achievements from this plan including an increase in school enrollment rates and upgrading of teachers training institutions and teacher quality.

However, in reality, the United Nation Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2008 stated that the school enrolment rates are high at over 80% for both boys and girls, the drop-out rate is also high with less than 55% of those children actually completing the primary cycle. (UNICEF, Updated: 15 May 2008)

The Burma primary education system faces two main problems: there are not enough schools (the numbers range from one school for five villages to one school for 25 villages in the border regions); and a high drop-out rate, estimated to be about 34 percent. The Burmese government has publically committed to the Millennium Development Goals one of which is to achieve universal primary education. Moreover, the Burmese government, since 1991, has been a member of the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC), dedicated to protect the rights of the children to make primary education compulsory and freely available to all, and the reduction of drop-out rates. But their behaviors and lack of basic support to the country's education system is in stark opposition to this commitment.

The government expenses on education are estimated to be only about 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). This shows that education is lacking support by the government, especially in the rural areas. In many rural areas, even though there is a school building, there is no teacher working in the village. Teachers do not get adequate salaries to survive in the villages. If teachers are forcibly transferred to remote villages, they often do not stay there. As a consequence, the numbers of student to teacher ratio is very high. Moreover, the rural schools do not have enough basic materials such as benches, tables and text books. Furthermore, the government teachers do not get teacher trainings. Even the Ministry of Education (MOE 2006) itself admits that not all teachers have an academic qualification or have even 'attended certified course'. That is why the education of the rural and poor children is a hopeless situation under the military government.

For those rural children and poor children, religious leaders as well as other people run schools such as charity schools and monastic schools. However, under the military government, the charity schools run by people are not officially allowed. On the other hand, monastic schools are officially permitted. This is one of the strengths of the monastic schools. They can officially give educational support to poor children. Monastic schools are allowed to provide primary education by the government. Monastic Schools teach reading, writing, math, science and history as well as Buddhism lessons free of charge. Rural children and poor children rely on monastic schools for their education. In the 2007-2008 academic year, there were 196,458 monastic students in total across the country. That is why monastic schools fulfill a significant gap in today's education in Burma.

However, nowadays monastic schools face challenges in supporting the education of children.

These challenges are due in part to the policy of the government which controls and limits the monastic schools' activities. Furthermore, after the Saffron Revolution, the military government shut down some monasteries which were involved in the movement. One of the big monastic schools in Rangoon was involved in the movement. To stop their efforts, the military seized the school at night and arrested all the monks. Some monks fled. After their arrests, the government forced the monks to disrobe and become laymen, stopped all the school's activities and shut down the school. Consequently, those children cannot go to the school anymore.

Moreover, monastic schools have social challenges such as gender problems so that girls cannot get the equal opportunities to boys. Furthermore, some monastic schools do not have community participation. Some communities are not aware about monastic schools and they do not want to participate. Monastic schools need community participation in order to implement the school activities together. They lack teaching aids (training curriculum and materials). Children have to share their text books. Some schools do not have enough benches for children. Moreover they do not have enough teachers. In some monastic schools, a teacher teaches two different classes at the same time. Therefore they cannot give much attention to each student. And also, most of the teachers in monastic schools are lacking qualifications and do not get a salary at all. Therefore, monastic teachers need to be provided salaries and training. In addition, Monastic schools do not get much supporting from the government, although they are controlled by the government. Monastic schools have budget difficulties and monks and nuns have constraints in fund raising activities for school sustainability. According to Buddhist law, monks and nuns are banned in engaging in money-making activities.

Because of these challenges, monastic schools and the system in general are in decline and poor children cannot rely on the monastic schools. Education quality in monastic schools is also in decline compared to the government schools, which are also struggling.

To know the challenges of the monastic schools, research was conducted in three monastic schools in Rangoon. Therefore, this report is based on the survey of three monastic schools in Rangoon. In Rangoon, there are a total of 162 monastic schools in 38 townships. Monastic schools adopt the government curriculum of formal education. Most are primary schools. Some are post-primary schools (up to 7th standards/Grade 8) and some, but very few, teach at the middle level. In Rangoon, there are no officially recognized monastic schools which reported to teach at the high-school level.

This study comprises the following objectives; it explores the challenges of monastic schools in Rangoon and opportunities for future development. The aims of this report are to highlight that monastic schools are self-reliant and still play a vital role in Burmese education today and to express what kinds of supports are required so that they can perform effective programs for poor childrens' education.

To cover the report's aims, it will first describe the government policy on monastic schools and the difference between the written policy and the actual practices. The second part explains the social challenges and community perspectives which most of monastic schools are facing now. The third part shows how monastic schools have a lack of support in some areas. Real life examples from the survey data are described. The final part looks the positive factors of the monastic schools and then some programs are suggested for their future.

In order to support the development of monastic schools, the government, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society groups should implement a number of programs. They should set up subcommittees to engage in social activity and religion, give teacher trainings to teachers and form a monastic schools network. Moreover, the government must support the monastic schools by providing training to the monastic school teachers to be qualified teachers. NGOs and civil society groups should also promote and implement programs such as TOT training for the teachers, school administration training and develop the curriculum so that all poor children can access education.

## Methodology

This report is based on primary data and secondary data. The primary data comes from field research that took place in South Okkalapa Township, North Okkalapa Township and Hlaning Thar Yar Township, in Rangoon Division. Thirteen people were interviewed for this report. They included abbots of monastic schools, monastic school teachers, school subcommittee members and parents. The secondary data came from books, publications, internet websites and other information related to this issue. Some information described is also based on my own experience on this issue.

## Background of Monastic Schools

*“Monastic schools, or monastic education centres as they are often called, have been the most important civil-society institutions bridging the accessibility gap in the state-run education system in government-controlled areas. While public schooling is not available in many rural regions, there is a monastery in nearly every village”*

(UNESCO, 2002).



One of Monastic Middle School in Burma

Photo by Naing Zaw

The Burmese monastic education system is an old education system with a very long history. Since the kingdom era (about 11th century), monastic schools were the only center of learning for all people, from the king down to the common people. At that time, three main items were taught, which were; (1) Reading and Writing in Myanmar Language, (2) Calculations and (3) Buddhist moral lessons. They taught the children not only reading and writing but also how to be well-behaved. Monks have been both the spiritual teachers of the people and those responsible for the literacy of the people.

But in 1962, monastic education was abolished by Myanmar's socialist government. After the military coup all schools were nationalized. Christian and Buddhist schools could not continue under the new education system of the socialist government.

Then the monastery schools arose again in the early 1990s in response to Burma's deepening economic crisis. New schools are opening all the time to accommodate the demand for monastic education. Now the regime, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, officially allows monastic schools to provide primary education.

Today, the leaders of monastic schools see their schools' role as follows;

- » To educate the children in basic education (reading, writing and moral practice).
- » To produce disciplined patriotic, brave, courageous, and qualified leaders for the future.
- » To be financially accessible and convenient learning institutions for the country's poor.
- » To ensure that children have a good moral character and to prevent children from becoming street children and gypsies.
- » To strengthen the Buddhist community.
- » To serve the country and keep the nation strong.

With these aims, monastic education provides basic education with the same system of grades, curriculum and examinations as the government. The government recognized schools can hold final exams either at the government school or at their respective monastic schools. Some monastic schools deliver additional further trainings for the children's development such as health awareness, environmental awareness, music, handicraft, English language training and computer training.

Monastic schools especially target orphans and poor children who cannot afford to access formal education. They are free of charges such as school enrollment fees. Moreover, they usually give teaching materials such as books for free. Some well-funded monastic schools provide food and accommodation. But most schools can at least provide education support during the day time.

Monastic schools provide particularly to poor children, are free of charges such as enrolment fees and usually provide teaching materials such as books for free. Moreover, many monasteries serve as schools and orphanages at the same time.

There are two kinds of monastic schools, the first one is the school which is supervised by monks and the second one is run by nuns. The monks and nuns usually take principal responsibility in their monastic school to try to get donations, set the school rules, communicate with the ministers and monastic education committee and teach Buddhist moral lessons. Some monks and nuns teach other subjects such as Myanmar and History as well. Under the supervision of abbots and nuns, teachers and committees perform school activities. However, many schools do not have school committees and only the abbots, nuns and teachers organize the school activities.

Monastic schools operate like self-reliant private schools. But the difference is that they are under the guidance of the government. The government recognizes monastic schools as a co-

education system. The government sets out guidelines for monastic schools including strict rules about the school curriculum and limits on the monastic school level. The monastic schools are allowed up until the middle level. They have to act within the boundaries set by the government. They carry out activities for their school development and requirements; such as finding budget, school accessories requirements and teacher requirements, by themselves. They do not get support from the government.

The budget of monastic schools mostly depends on public donations. Some schools have fund raising activities run by the committee. The abbot of a middle school in Rangoon said his school was founded in 1993 and he is still facing funding problems. Although they have funding problems, they cannot stop the school because the numbers of students increases year by year.

The table below shows the total number of monastic schools and how the number of students is increasing year by year in Rangoon. It shows the importance of monastic education and that poor children and orphans rely on the monastic education for their lives more and more as time goes on. According to the monastic schools list published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs; the number of monastic schools and students from 2001 to 2008 in Rangoon division are as follows;

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
School	150	150	152	157	161	161	161	162
Student	23075	24200	25725	27558	30950	31857	32487	34678

*Table (1.1): Number of Monastic Schools and Students from 2001 to 2008, Rangoon Division Source: "State Monastic Schools Lists" by Ministry of Religious Affairs (2001-2008)*

The government promotes this data to illustrate their success in educating the poor but this data could also show that an increasing number of people need free education and cannot afford to attend the government schools.

The monastic school list in 2007-2008 academic year in Rangoon, demonstrates how many children need education and the small amount of post primary schools (up to 7th standard/ Grade-8) and middle schools. It further demonstrates the complete lack of monastic high schools in Rangoon.

District	Township	Primary	Post-Primary	Middle Schools	Total
Eastern District	13	39	7	4	50
Western District	9	19	2	1	22
Southern District	9	30	7	1	38

Northern District	8	38	11	3	52
Total	38	126	27	9	162

Table (1.2): Number of Monastic Schools and Students from 2007 to 2008, Rangoon Division

Source: "State Monastic Schools Lists" by Ministry of Religious Affairs (2007-2008)

## Challenges of Monastic Schools

The three monastic schools covered in this study represent many of the important issues being faced by other monastic schools in the country. The profiles of the three monastic schools are as follows:

Name	Township	District	Level	Year of Establishment	Principal	Students (2010-2011 AY)	Teachers	Administrators
School-A	North Okkalapa	Eastern	Primary	1965	Monk	156	6	Nil
School-B	Hlaing Thar Yar	Northern	Primary	2007	Monk	113	4	Nil
School-C	South Okkalapa	Eastern	Middle	1993	Monk	350 (250 stay at school)	13	8 Management Subcommittee Members

### *Monastic School (A)*

School-A is situated in North Okkalapa Township, Eastern District of Rangoon Division. It was established in 1959, nearly fifty years ago. It is a primary school and teaches formal education, which is the same system and curriculum as the government school. The aims of the school are; to give children, especially poor children, access to fundamental education, to rehabilitate the moral attitude of the street children and/or gypsy children and to preserve and perpetuate the religion. There are 153 students in the school. Most are ethnically Burmese and come from poor families. Some students are of Pa-O ethnicity. Some children do not have parents. They live with their relatives. In this area, most people earn their living by selling goods, opening small snack shops or driving trishaws. There is a government high school in this area, in the same ward as School A. Also, there is a charity training center for the youth's further education, outside of the formal government education system.

The abbot supervises the school's overall administration, such as recruiting teachers, giving salary of the teachers, finding donors, contacting with outsiders and teaching Buddhism. There is one headmaster and five teachers in the school. The headmaster takes the responsibility of com-



municating with the township education department, supervising teaching and administration of teacher and student administration. He is a former student of this school.

The school's needs are mainly dependent on local donations. One of the local donors donated the two storey school building. Shine Hope, a local Business Company, donated four toilets and support for teachers' salaries. Teachers now get 20000 kyats (US \$ 20) per month. Before this company started supporting the teachers' salaries, teachers did not get the permanent salary. The abbot pays a very small amount of honorarium fees to the teachers which comes from the donations he receives. Finally, there is a small library in the school. All school furniture and accessories were donated by a local donor.

### *Monastic School (B)*

School-B is situated in Hlaing Thar Yar Township, Northern District of Rangoon Division. It was established in 2007. It is a primary school and teaches the formal education system. There were 113 students for the 2010-2011 Academic Year. Most are Burmese and come from poor families. This area can be defined as a poor area. Most people earn their living by selling goods and driving trishaws, earning hand to mouth salaries. There is a monastic middle school in this ward. There is a government high school in this area as well.

The abbot supervises the school's overall administration such as recruiting teachers, giving teachers' salaries, supervising the school administration, teaching Buddhism, finding donors and dealing with the local authority and government. There are four female teachers in this school. One of the teachers acts as a headmistress. She is a retired government teacher. She monitors the teaching and conducts teacher and student administration.

The monastery building was donated by the Division Military Commander. Some international and local NGOs provide stationery and trainings for teachers.

### *Monastic School (C)*

School-C is situated in South Okkalapa Township, Eastern District of Rangoon Division. The school was formed in 1993. It has been allowed to teach up to the middle school level since 1996. Moreover, it was permitted to upgrade as to a Youth Development Charity Center in 2005 as a joint Monastic and Charity school. The school mainly targets orphans, poor children and minority children from border areas. There are 350 students in the school; among them 250 boys live and study at the school. The school provides food and accommodations for those 250 boys. Girls can only attend the school during the day time. Most of



"Hostel for boys" School-C

Photo by: An An Hti

students are Burmese and Pa-O. Students from school C have to join government high schools when they finish the middle level. The school supports high school and university entrance fees and all schools fees for the students who stay at the school.

This school teaches the same curriculum as the government schools. Furthermore, the school delivers additional trainings outside of class time such as health education, computer trainings, sports, music and English language trainings. In addition, there is a library to upgrade children's general knowledge. There are also two doctors, a traditional doctor and voluntary nurses to check the children's health. These activities are run by the school owned fund and international and local donations. For the school's overall administration, the abbot and school subcommittee supervise all activities.

The real situation of the monastic schools in Rangoon can be figured out by studying these three schools because they have many of the same challenges, although they have different background.



*Three storey building for students donated by the Japan NGO Southeast Asia Exchange Association Scheme, School-C*

*Photo by: An An Hti*

## Challenge I: Government Policy for Monastic Education System

The first challenge for monastic schools is that they are limited in their curriculum and the school's level of education by the government. Monastic schools are totally controlled by the government. They are under the guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education. There are Supervisory Committees in the Township Division and on National levels. Monastic schools are directly controlled by the Township Monastic School Supervisory Committee. According to the 1993 guidelines book, all members of the committee should be monks from different monastic schools. But in 2005, the Ministry of Religious Affairs reviewed the committee structure and added some guidelines for the 2005 guidelines book. Monks, nuns and religious officers, education leaders and headmasters from government schools are included in respective Township Monastic School Supervisory Committee.

There is a Central Executive Committee (CEC) to supervise the Township and Division Supervisory Committees. The committee members of CEC are national noble patron monks, Ministers from Religious Affairs, Director Generals from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education Training and Program Department and Directors from Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Progress of Border areas.

The structure of the committee can be set up by requirement. Duties of the CEC include conducting general meetings, setting up rules, guidelines and policy for monastic schools, audit-

ing the schools occasionally, planning and delivering for capacity building trainings for school teachers and making sure that text books are delivered on time. The aim of the CEC seems to be to promote the role of monastic schools. According to the guidelines book, the CEC has a duty to provide two types of support to monastic schools; training for monastic teachers and getting text books on time. However CEC cannot even provide these two types of support. CEC cannot organize capacity building trainings for teachers. Teachers may get trainings from other sources such as from NGOs or they may not get training at all. Teachers from the three monastic schools received trainings from international and local NGOs, not from CEC. These schools may have better access to NGOs since they are in Rangoon. For other, more rural schools, the CEC's inability to deliver trainings means many teachers go untrained and cannot deliver effective instruction.

Moreover, these three schools are not allowed to teach beyond middle school level. Even if the school has the capacity, they cannot continue to provide education for their students for high school. There are many students who cannot afford to pay government schools fees after they finish primary or middle level from the three monastic schools. In such cases, they need to be supported in their education. The headmaster of the School-A said he had requested the government high school to let a poor student attend the school free of charge. The government school allowed this student to attend free of charge for an academic year. The restraint of this government school is that it can allow no more than one or two students to attend free of charge for a year, because it also has budget difficulties. As a result, poor children from primary monastic schools drop out after fourth standard. Their education ends at the primary level. This is an example of how the government controls monastic schools and does not help to provide quality education for all its citizens.

There is no monastic school in Rangoon that is permitted to teach high school level. Government approved monastic schools cannot provide education beyond the fifth grade. In the guidelines book of CEC, their rules and support are described only for primary and middle level such as to try to get permission of sitting examination in the monastic schools for 4th standard and 8th standard. The CEC does not mention any description for high school education. Only two monastic schools in Mandalay are permitted to provide high school education. These two monastic schools got permission in 1993 and there are no other monastic schools that have got permission as of now. School-C wants to expand to the high school level, but School-C has been denied permission by the government. As to why the government does not give permission to expand monastic schools to high school, the abbot of the School-A explained one possible reason for this limitation;

*"The government worries that students will not join and enroll at their high schools. They don't want people to rely on the monastic schools. They cannot provide free education for all levels as we are. Moreover, the government doesn't want monastic schools to compete with them. Also, government doesn't like to assemble the people especially youths."*

In addition, schools must report student lists, time tables and exam lists to the Township Supervisory Committee. Furthermore, the school must report to the Township Supervisory Committee if they receive a donation. The headmaster of School-A said the school is asked to report if

the school gets donations but the school does not report their donation to the committee because the school thinks that this is not concern of the committee and the school has faced difficulties when reporting their funding sources in the past.

*"We tried to get donations by ourselves. That is why we believe that there is no need to report them. If we report to the committee, committee comes and checks how will the school use the donation? Who donated it? If the donation came from a foreign country, they will suspect the school and watch. The schools will be asked to submit the budget sheet to the committee. We have to pay some money as a donation to the committee. So the school decides that it is better not to report them."*

Although it is not mentioned that monastic schools must report the donations to the committee in the guidelines book, the schools are asked to report them. The headmaster of school-A said that if the school reports to the committee, the committee will then know the donation and they will ask for money. If the school does not report to the committee, nothing will happen as long as the committee does not know. But once the committee knows about the donation, they will ask for money from the school. That is why the school has to adapt to their circumstances. This is true in so many cases where unwritten laws are used by the committee to pressure monastic schools.

Moreover, monastic schools, including the three researched monastic schools, must follow the government education system which is the national curriculum. Monastic schools are instructed to request permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs if other subjects, such as Environmental knowledge, English language and computers, are to be taught in the schools. In Monastic Schools' guideline book 2005, the duty of the Township Supervisory Committee with regards to curriculum is as follow;

*"The duty of the Township Supervisory Committee is to ensure that all primary and middle standards' subjects except Buddhism course are delivered in accordance with the curriculum guidelines of the Ministry of Education."*

No subjects can be taught without permission. In addition, as they have to teach to meet the time schedule of the Ministry of Education, they do not have time to teach further subjects needed for children's development. Although they have difficulty to do so, some monks want to strengthen the knowledge of the children. The abbot of the School-C expressed his plan regarding the school curriculum;

*"Students need English language skills for high school level. Now we are trying to add English classes as an extra course within the limitation. Now we have set up a long term plan for school's education so that school children are educated and can stand on their feet. I will implement according to this plan, though we have obstacles."*

If the abbot has power that can influence the local authority and has a good relationship with the government, he does not need to request permission for all school's activities. He can protect

his school with his power. But if the abbot does not much power, he has to be aware of the government policy and try to keep these guide lines.

However, if any monastic schools get involved in political affairs, this school will be cracked down on by the government whether this school has the power or not. When the Saffron Revolution occurred in Rangoon, the military government cracked down on the monasteries which were involved in the movement, including monastic schools. One of the big monastic schools in Rangoon which was involved in the movement was stopped violently by the government. The military seized the school at night and arrested all the monks. Some monks fled. After their arrests, the government forced the monks to disrobe and become laymen, stopped all the school's activities and shut down the school. Consequently, those children cannot go to that school anymore.

Therefore, it can be said that Monastic Schools in Rangoon have significant challenges concern with the government.

## Challenge 2: Social Challenges

Monastic Schools also have social challenges that are not directly concerned with the government. This part shows the general social challenges being faced by the three surveyed monastic schools. These challenges are a result of gender issues, people's perspectives on the monastic schools and lack of support of monastic schools.

### *Gender issue*

The first challenge is that there are gender issues in monastic schools. For monks, it is difficult to arrange the accommodation for girls. The abbot of School-C explained that he only accepts boys to stay at the school, because if girls also stay and attend the school together with boys, there would be many problems concerning the girls. For example, he cannot ensure the security of girls. The effort to accommodate girls would burden him. He, as a monk, has difficulties handling problems with concern o girls. Therefore, he has decided, since the school's establishment, that it would be better if girls were not allowed to stay at the schools, even though he does not want to discriminate against the girls. He lets the girls attend the school during the day time. Girls can only attend the schools during the day time, thus creating an extra obstacle for girls to gain an education.

### *Community Perspective on Monastic Schools*

Communities' ideas about the role monks play and people's participation are challenges for monastic schools and monks. Some people think that monks should not participate in social activities. Such people believe that running schools are human being affairs and monks should only concern themselves with religious affairs. The abbot of School-C discussed about a case when he was criticized by some people when he started to implement the school's activities. People criticized him for conducting human being affairs instead of doing his own religion affairs and question how much he could know about human affairs. He thinks that this idea of the monks

is wrong. What he accepts is that monks have a responsibility to do good for people, even if the monks cannot know all human affairs. The monks should guide people not only on how to live peacefully and happily in life, but also should teach essential life skills for people. He accepts that the responsibility of a monk is to release the people's suffering. He said our Buddha also guides us like that. He expressed his commitment to his work in this way,

*"If we, the monks, do not look after the poor children and orphans who cannot access basic needs for their lives, who will take these responsibilities? Will we not care and let them be? For me, I cannot let them to live in a helpless situation and growing with hopelessness. Children are the future of the nation. I cannot let them to become ruined children. That is why I don't care about the criticisms of people of me and I carry out for the children as much as I can."*

### *Community participation*

Some people do not understand the stance of the monastic schools and they do not support or participate in school activities. The teachers of school-A, B and C said that the weakened community participation can significantly be seen when school festivals are held. Although the teachers invited parents or non-parents to join school activities, most of parents cannot join. The school has to do these activities by themselves, without the participation of parents or other people concerned for the school. Some parents have to work and they do not have time to participate. For some parents or non-parents, they are also uneducated and they are not interested in children's education. In their school, there are no celebrations like a fun fair, like government schools celebrate. The teachers of three schools said that private-public participation is necessary for schools' developments and children's progress.

## **Challenge 3: Administration and Management Challenges**

Monastic Schools are self-reliant. They do not get much support from the government, although they are controlled by the government. According to the 2005 Monastic Schools' Guidelines book, the Township Supervisory Committee or CEC has a duty to arrange trainings for monastic teachers and to provide text books on time. However, the Township Supervisory Committee or CEC does not provide these two kinds of support. The Township Supervisory Committee or CEC cannot organize capacity building training for teachers. Teachers must get trainings from other sources like from NGOs. The three monastic schools received trainings for teachers from NGOs not from CEC.

The three monastic schools run with little funding and they require support in order to be sustainable. Some UN agencies, NGOs and civil society groups support them. However, all their needs are not implemented by UN agencies, NGOs and civil society groups, because the small NGOs have funding constraints. So they cannot fulfill all the needs of monastic schools. As for the UN agencies and the big NGOs, they cannot focus on only one school. They have to share their support between the other monastic schools. As a result, the UN agencies and the big NGOs can only cover the general needs of the monastic schools. According to my research, the following



areas are generally needed to support for all three monastic schools. They are;

- a) Stationery and School Accessories Requirements
- b) Salary for Teachers
- c) Training Needs
- d) Qualification of Teachers
- e) Administration System
- f) Budget Requirement.

### *Stationery and School Accessories Requirements*

The first struggle for these three monastic schools is stationery and school accessory requirements. Although they get recognition from the government, they do not get support for teaching materials. All monastic schools including primary schools have to buy text books from government schools, although the government claims free primary education. For stationery and school accessory supplements, the researched three schools have difficulties every year. According to the interview with the Headmistress of School-B, the school is not a well funded school and does not have enough money to buy text books for this year. Therefore, students have to share their text books; two students per one book and sometimes three students per one text book. The school is still trying to get text books for all their students. It is shown that the Township Supervisory Committee, CEC and the government cannot take their responsibility and ignore their requirements towards monastic schools. The other two schools got donations and they can buy text books for this year, but they are not sure if they will get this support in the future and must operate year by year in this unstable way.

Stationery and accessories for students such as school bags, benches, slippers and umbrellas are needed as well. Out of the three schools, the students of school-B are poorer than the other two schools. Their families earn their living hand to mouth. They cannot afford to support school kits for their children. The school also does not have enough finances and cannot support these accessories for the children. The Headmistress of school-B said the difficulties of the children for this year are as follows;

*“Save the Children, an International NGO, supported stationery, bags and umbrellas for all students last year. But they cannot support this year. We don’t have enough money to buy these things because we have to buy text books. So the students do not have enough stationery this year. I bought pencils for them with my own money but I cannot afford for all students [...] Now the stationery they are using is from last year donation. When these stationery run out, I don’t know what to do.”*

Furthermore, the three schools need school classroom equipment such as furniture, black boards, and tables for the teachers. Currently, teachers have to share their tables. The school budget is shared to cover the costs of/pay for the teachers’ salaries, administrative costs and text books. Therefore, these schools cannot prioritize this equipment.

## *Salary for teachers*

Teachers from the three monastic schools are paid teachers. Their minimum pay roll is 20,000 kyats (US\$ 20) per month and maximum pay roll is 30,000 kyats (US\$ 30) per month. This amount is significantly lower than government teachers who can make double that salary or more. They have difficulties for their survival.

The Headmaster of School-A said that this is the first year he has been able to provide salary to his teachers. One of the big local companies supports a teacher 20,000 kyats (US\$ 20) per one month this year. The abbot paid a small amount of money as an honorarium fee from his donation up until last year, and he could not give every month. Some months, they were working without getting any money.

The other two abbots also have difficulty finding the teachers' salary every month. Some teachers quit the school because of low salary. Moreover, they do not get a pension, health insurance or rations; such as providing rice, cooking oil and clothes, as the government school teachers do. One of the teachers who has been working at School-A for 20 years expressed his feeling concerning the salary and allowances as follows;

*"One of big local companies provides 20,000 Kyats per a teacher monthly. I am very thankful to that donor. Frankly, I find it difficult more and more for my survival. I cannot support my family. Until last year, we did not get permanent salary. Moreover, we do not have pension or health insurance like government teachers. If possible, it is better we get equivalent salary rate with government school."*

Therefore, monthly salary is the only source of income for the monastic teachers and they do not get adequate amount of salary for their survival.

## *Training Needs*

To improve the quality of the teaching of monastic schools, the government delivers one teacher training for Mathematics, English, Social, Moral and Civics subjects every two years for monastic teachers. Teachers from the three monastic schools join these trainings in turn. Also, sometimes NGOs give trainings to the monastic teachers causally. But they cannot join all these trainings, because they do not have extra teachers to substitute while one teacher is attending the training. A teacher of the school-B said, in the school one teacher has to supervise all subjects and sometimes one teacher has to teach two classes at a time. Thus, they have difficulty attending trainings. The Headmistress of the school-B describes why they cannot join those trainings;

*"Sometimes the Ministry of Education used to give teacher trainings. We are invited to join these trainings. Moreover, UNICEF and some NGOs deliver teacher trainings too. If there is any training, we attend the training in turn. But we can't join all trainings. In school, there are no extra teachers to substitute if one teacher go and attend the training even only for two or three days. If a teacher attends the training, her class is closed until she comes back. So we are afraid that our students*

*won't have the class and they miss the lessons. The abbot also doesn't want this. That's why we rarely join the trainings during the school time."*

### *Qualification of Teachers*

Another need of the teachers from the three schools, is the need to upgrade their qualifications. The schools cannot pay well and so do not have much choice in selecting school teachers. For recruiting the teachers, the abbot of the school-B said,

*"We have to recruit people who have a volunteer spirit and can work with little salary. So in the school we have got only one teacher who has teaching experience from the four teachers. She is a retired teacher. The rest are young teachers without any teaching experience. We do not have much choice. The experienced teacher guides the other teachers."*

Because the teachers do not have much knowledge or experience, they cannot support the children well. For their qualifications, they can join the Institute of Education for Bachelor (B.Ed) degree. But the criterion for this degree is a high school degree. Some teachers from the monastic schools just passed middle school and are not able to attend this Institute. Also some teachers from these schools do not know about this opportunity. They do not get any official announcement from the Ministry of Education.

Concerning the school teachers qualifications, one parents from school-A expressed her opinion as follows;

*"In this school, some teachers just only passed eighth standard while government school teachers are graduated from the Institute of Education. So, the teaching method is different with government school. I don't want too many gaps between the government schools and monastic schools. In my opinion, monastic teachers need more qualification not only for them but also for children."*

Hence, one of the differences between government school and monastic school is the qualifications of the teachers.

### *Administration system*

The three monastic schools have different administration systems. The administration systems of the School-A and School-B are nearly the same. The abbot supervises recruiting teachers, giving salary of the teachers, finding donors, contact with the outsiders, contact with local authorities and teaching Buddhism. Under the supervision of the abbot, headmaster or headmistress and teachers carry out training activities. The abbot usually makes decides alone.

School-C governs with a different administration system. The abbot is an educated man and he is very enthusiastic about his work. The abbot set up a subcommittee with retired teachers and interested persons from the community to lead the school together with him. The abbot and subcommittee work together in seeking donations and overall school administration. They have

monthly meetings and if there is an issue, they discuss and decide together, considering all advice. The subcommittee performs some activities on behalf of the abbot such as fund raising, because the abbot has constraints in participating in such activities. As a religious leader, monks have prohibitions and limitations. The effect of having the subcommittee working together with the abbot means that this school is good at budgeting, school disciplines and sharing responsibilities between abbot, staff, teachers and the school committee. Besides the abbot, teachers and the committee clearly know what their tasks and goals are. This kind of school can manage their budget well and can develop itself. Their future does not seem to have much stress. Moreover, because of their good administration system, children get effective support from them, for their education and for their health. It is their achievement from having a good governing system.

Although it is good that the monastic schools set up their administration structure individually, the two schools which do not have the subcommittee structure and share the responsibilities as such, cannot set up school goals well. The abbots have a lot of stress over the school. Their situation is different with the school-C. School-A and B have more obstacles in their school budget and sustainability than School-C. Community participation is important in school's administration. That is why for those kind of schools who do not have a firm school structures, management trainings, workshop and seminar about school administration are needed.

### *Budget Requirement*

For all schools, budgeting and fund raising are major difficulties. When I asked the abbots, teachers and subcommittee members what was the main difficulty for their schools, almost all interviewed people replied with the same answer; "Budget." They cannot rely on donations, because donations are not permanent. They have to stand by themselves. The abbot of the school-C explained the school budget as follows;

*"The school's monthly expense is approximately two million kyats (US\$ 2000). Accommodation costs, food costs, supplement for children, health care expenses, stationeries, salary and administration costs are expensed. It is not easy to seek money to cover these amounts monthly. We got donations from internal and external donors. But donations are not permanent and we cannot rely on it. So we run making iron business as a fund raising program. We earn approximately 200,000 or 300,000 kyats (US\$ 200 or 300) from this business but it is not cover all expenses. That is why we have to think another plan for fund."*

Hence, for consideration to not have a budget shortage, the school set up an endowment fund two years ago. Now School-C has 4 million kyats as an endowment fund and they pay the salary from the monthly interests from the endowment fund.

The other two schools cannot build an endowment fund because they do not have the capital. One of the monastic teachers from School-A said,

*"If someone asks me what will they donate for school, then I encourage them to participate in building an endowment fund. It is a kind of donation that never disappears and I recommend*



*that it is fulfilling the requirement of monastic school effectively though I don't mean donations for building, stationery and other things are not necessary."*

The above difficulties are struggles for not only the researched three schools but also for other monastic schools. The monastic schools face these challenges and have to solve them by themselves.

## Positive factors

Although monastic schools have challenges, they also have many positive factors or strengths. These positive factors are stated based on the common facts from the survey of the three different monastic schools in Rangoon. Some positive factors are already implemented in the surveyed three monastic schools. The first and most important positive factor is monastic schools are recognized by the government and they are part of the education system. The government gives recognized certificates to the monastic school students after they finish the primary level or middle level.

The second positive factor is that extra curriculum such as music, computer use, applied English and health awareness can be conducted at the monastic schools by the assurance/recommendation of the school abbot.

The third factor is the opportunity to use alternative teaching methods, which can upgrade the children's critical thinking instead of having them purely memorizing facts. School-C is currently trying to start to use a teaching style that is different from the government schools' teaching method of rote learning, but this is rare among monastic schools.

The last positive factor is social programs such as HIV/AIDS awareness programs, life skill trainings for the children and gender awareness trainings can sometimes be implemented under the monastery. Phaung Daw Oo, a popular monastic school in Yangon and Mandalay, carries out the HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Support project in the monastery. Moreover, Phaung Daw Oo delivers Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking (RWCT) training courses to the monastic school teachers across the country. There is also a library, a clinic, computer classes and a furniture factory in the Phaung Daw Oo school which is accessible by the children. It is shown that, some social activities can sometimes be performed at the monastic schools. As the monastic schools have these strengths or positive factors, making the monastic schools and education stronger is fulfilling the gap of the helpless children's education.

## Suggestions for Improvement

For supporting and strengthening the monastic schools, I would like to suggest some possible programs. Some programs are needed to be conducted by the government. Some programs should be performed by UN and others should be carried by NGOs and civil society groups, because these organizations have the capacity to reach out to the whole country, including rural areas. Finally, some activities should be conducted by the monastic schools themselves. These opinions are based on my research on the three different monasteries in Rangoon and interviews with the respective monks and people. Program suggestions are for budget sustainability, qualification of

teachers, trainings for teachers, school administration, upgrading girls' education and making a monastic schools network for cooperation with each other.

### *Budget requirement*

The first program I suggest is providing financial support to monastic schools. For the monastic schools' budget sustainability, private sectors and individual donors should support capital for endowment funds and NGOs and civil society groups should facilitate the monastic schools in setting up fund raising activities.

One problem is that monks are constrained from running fund raising programs. To alleviate this, monastic schools should set up an education subcommittee with interested parents or teachers or outsiders. This committee could lead fundraising activities instead of the monks. They could supervise teaching, participate in recruiting teachers, selecting children, finding funds for school, doing fund raising activities, setting goals for the school and revising courses together with the abbot. As some abbots cannot set up a subcommittee if they do not have enough people, NGOs and civil society groups should perform as a subcommittee for those kinds of schools. By this method, the difficulties in relations between parents and abbot can be improved.

### *Teachers' Salaries*

Another issue is that there are difficulties in paying teachers' salaries when the monastic school's budgets run out and they cannot find any donors to support the school. If the school cannot pay the salary, then the teachers find it difficulty in their survival and they will quit the school. To prevent this from occurring, UNICEF or NGOs or civil society groups should support a fund for teachers who do not get adequate salary or any salary at all.

### *Trainings Needs*

For upgrading monastic teachers' teaching methods, teacher trainings such as teaching approaches for national curriculum and Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking (RWCT) training courses need to be delivered more often. UN agencies (eg. UNICEF) can deliver the teaching approaches for national curriculum in coordination with the Ministry of Education Department, if the government cannot deliver these trainings to the monastic schools at least one time a year. Then for the RWCT trainings, not only the Phaung Daw Oo, but UN and NGOs can deliver these kinds of trainings as well. Any training which can support the quality of teaching methods should be conducted by the UN, NGOs and civil society groups. These trainings should prioritize new teachers. These trainings should be conducted not only outside of schools but also in-house so that every monastic teacher can join the trainings.

### *Qualification of Teachers*

For the qualification of the monastic teachers, government short term intensive certificate programs, which confer the Bachelor of Education degree, should be designed. This program



should last between three and six months and mainly target the monastic teachers who have only completed middle and high school. Although the course would give an Education degree, it should include courses in facilitation skills, applied English, critical thinking, and understanding the nature of children, so that the monastic teachers can be skillful in their teaching and supporting the children's education. In the meantime, when the government cannot provide the alternative certificate programs for the teachers, these certificate programs could also be implemented by UN agencies and NGOs. They have the capacity to design these kinds of trainings and can reach out to the rural areas. They could support more scholarships for Burma's teachers who want to pursue further study abroad, so that they can learn about others countries' education systems and can adopt and upgrade the children's education according to their nation context.

### *School Administration System*

For school administration system, school management and administration knowledge trainings should be facilitated, not only to teachers and committees but also to the abbots. This can be done as a School Capacity Assessment Workshop which all members can participate in and find out their vision, needs and opportunities for school development. These kinds of workshops can be implemented by the NGOs and civil society groups and they can also set up a good administration system together with the abbot and school administrators.

### *Community Participation*

As community participation is also required for school sustainability, campaign programs and awareness programs should be developed among the community. To get community participation, NGOs and civil society groups should organize social activities such as fun fair programs together with the school administrators.

### *Increasing Girls' Education*

In order to allow girls to get equivalent opportunities to boys, the government, UN, religious leaders, NGOs and civil society groups should encourage more schools run by nuns. They also should support with funding and assistance to the schools which are currently led by nuns.

### *Network of Monastic Schools*

The next important thing is that monastic schools need to set up a national network of monastic schools. This network should include all monastic schools including town and village schools, donors, NGOs and UN agencies. This network could meet once a month to discuss the issues of monastic schools. They can invite the new monastic schools to join as members. From this network, monastic schools can share information, help each other and advocate to the Township Supervisory Committee. But there might be some obstacles to forming a monastic schools' network. The first obstacle is that under the military government rule, no one is allowed to form a group, including monks. Another constraint is that monks would have difficulties in organizing people and forming the network. One possible way to form the monastic school

network in Rangoon is that monks could join the meetings of LNGOs which are held biweekly in Rangoon. Sometimes UN agencies, donor agencies and international NGOs also join that meeting. One Myanmar NGO could organize these meetings and this organization or NGO or civil society group could invite monastic schools in Rangoon. One or two monastic schools joined that meeting before. Other monastic schools might not know about this meeting, so they have not joined yet. If monastic schools join these meetings, it will easy to organize a Monastic Schools Working Group or Network easily. Then later they can organize it by themselves.

By implementing these programs, monastic schools will empower and support the poor children more in the future. These schools have played an important role in the culture and education of youth in Burma. Supporting this monastic education system will continue to be necessary in the future, since they offer unique benefits to the community that government schools cannot provide.

## Conclusion

Monastic schools have existed since ancient times. They are not a new system. They have been working for the poor children's education. They emerged according to the demand of the era. According to the current economic, social, and education situation in Burma, monastic schools are even more needed now. If there were no monastic schools, how could poor children receive an education? Who would care for them? The monastic schools fulfill a significant gap in today's education system in Burma. They not only teach basic education, but also they teach ethnical values and morality. They ensure the welfare of helpless children.

The circumstances of monastic schools are that they are self-reliant schools and many struggle under the government policies, social constraints and economic troubles for the school's existence. The quality of the school's education is different based on their relationship with the government, school administration, community participation and support of public and private sector. Now the education of the poor and helpless children needs to be encouraged more. The monastic schools continue to find ways to perform educational support programs for children who cannot access education because they believe that education is the most important factor for children's development and that children are the future of the nation.

Therefore, all of the community should be aware of the importance of monastic schools and participate in the development of monastic education. Government and respective ministries should encourage the monastic schools, because they also serve the national development. Now it is time to create better lives for hopeless children. Support is needed for all monastic schools who are working to develop a better educated generation in Burma. Monastic schools have been, and always will be, a trusted source of education for vulnerable communities. Supporting the monastic school system means supporting the citizens of Burma in their quest for a better life.

## Recommendations

### *To the Government*

- » Consider the monastic schools and encourage them by supporting their needs.



- » Permit monastic schools to open a high school, if they are qualified.
- » Allow the monastic schools to teach additional courses if they want.
- » Design alternative education programs to promote the quality of the monastic teachers.
- » Encourage schools run by nuns so that girls can get equivalent opportunities to boys.
- » Maintain free primary education, including monastic schools.
- » Keep the commitment to the Millennium Development Goals especially to achieve universal primary education.
- » Respect and follow the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

### *To the Local Authorities and the Local Department of Education*

- » Help the monastic schools instead of making complicated rules and regulations.
- » Give more teacher trainings to the monastic school teachers.

### *To Township Monastic School Executive Committee and the Central Executive Committee*

- » Carry out the duties that are described by the guidelines book.
- » Support the monastic schools as described in the guidelines book.

### *To Monastic Schools*

- » Make sure the schools' administration and management are well disciplined so that the schools are sustainable.
- » Try to set up a subcommittee with interested parents, teachers or outsiders to implement school activities together.
- » Create a national monastic schools network to enhance the monastic schools activities and enable more support of the children's education.
- » Try to increase the schools run by nuns, so that girls can stay at and attend the schools.

### *To Principals and Teachers*

- » Teachers should have the social spirit to help poor children.
- » Try to get community participation through school activities and giving awareness about

the monastic schools.

- » Try to improve teaching methods such as developing the critical thinking of the children and their life skills.

### *To Community and Parents*

- » Encourage the children's education by enrolling students every year and helping them in their studies.
- » The Community should know that monastic schools are for the poor children and they fill the necessary gap of today education's requirement in Myanmar. They should also encourage the monastic schools by participating in the monastic school's activities such as fund raising or fun activities for the children and the schools.

### *To UN Agencies, NGOs and Civil society Groups*

- » Give more support in funding and assistance to schools which are lead by nuns.
- » Support not only training for teachers but also stationery, classroom equipment and teachers' salaries
- » Do effective programming for monastic schools' sustainability; such as fundraising, teacher qualifications and making education accessible to poor children free of charge.
- » Support the monastic schools in forming a national monastic schools network.

## References

- States Monastic schools list (2007-2008), the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2008.
- Rules and Regulations of the Monastic Schools Supervisory Committee, Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1993.
- Rules and Regulations of the Monastic Schools Supervisory Committee, Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2005.
- Moe Moe San, Master of Public Administration (MPA) Programme, A Study on Monastic Education Centers in Yangon, June 2009
- Union of Myanmar (2004). Development of Education in Myanmar. The Ministry of Education, the Government of the Union of Myanmar, September 2004
- Dictatorship, disorder and decline in Myanmar (December 2008).
- "Department for International Development (DFID) 2008", Burma/Myanmar: UK assistance, Unpublished document, 17 April 2008, London

- “States Monastic schools list (2007-2008)”, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2008.
- Union of Myanmar (2006). Myanmar Millennium Development Goals Report 2006. The Government of the Union of Myanmar, November 2006

## Abbreviations

NGO	Non Governmental Organization
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	the United Nation Children’s Emergency Fund
CEC	Central Executive Committee



## Poverty & Health

Burma's health situation is one of the worst in the world. The majority of the population has no access to any health services, nor do they have access to information about disease prevention and treatment. Health spending in Burma accounts for just 4% of the national budget, while roughly ten times that amount is spent on the military.

More than 70% of the country's population resides in high-risk malarial areas and 97,000 new cases of tuberculosis are reported each year. A lack of education about sex and sexually transmitted diseases, combined with high rates of intravenous drug use, has led to a soaring rate of HIV infection. This situation is further exacerbated by the government's policies on humanitarian aid, which is greatly restricted throughout the country.



# The Impact of Poverty Among Mon IDPs at the Bee Ree Resettlement Site in Northern Ye Township

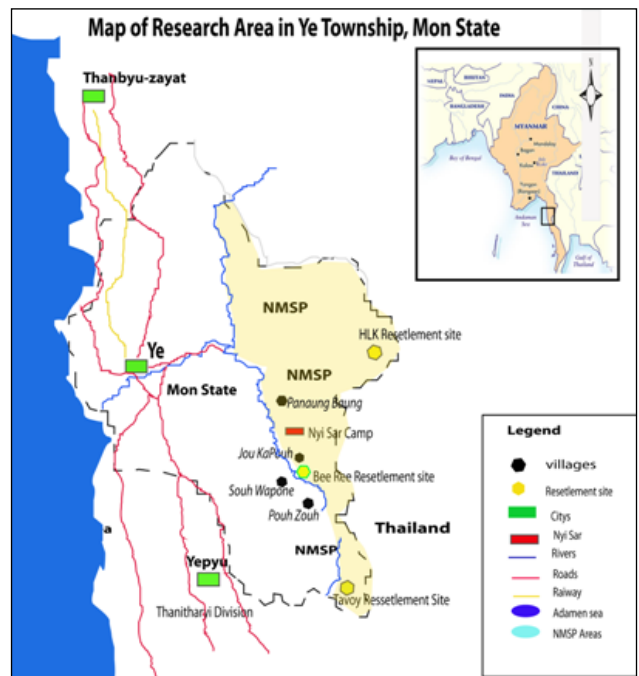
by Mi Thuzar

## Introduction

The Mon Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Bee Ree resettlement site in northern Ye Township, Mon State, are facing severe poverty, which results in many negative impacts such as food insecurity, lack of health care, and lack of education for children. As a result of civil war between New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Burmese government troops known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), 3,716 people live in the Bee Ree Resettlement site in Mon State. They not only face severe poverty but also an uncertain future as there is still no peace in the area.

The Bee Ree Resettlement site is not provided with enough support by NMSPs or by aid groups, which results in a multitude of problems in the resettlement site; there are no jobs in the resettlement site, leading to high unemployment and food insecurity. Proper health care is out of their reach. Children also face an uncertain future as they do not have access to formal education.

NMSP is only able to provide security for in the Bee Ree resettlement site. The people in the Bee Ree resettlement site have to work on their own for their survival. Their main livelihood in



the resettlement site is logging. However, they are not the ones who own the logging business. They are hired to do hard labour with very low wages. According to research, the maximum wage for a hard working man is 60000 kyats (83.USD) for 10 to 15 days of work, all the work available for a one month time period. Jobs for women in the resettlement site are scarce. They only take care of the children while their husbands are away searching for other sources of income.

The people in this resettlement area depend on the forest and river for their income and food security. The main job is logging in nearby forests and then transporting the logs on the river. This work is only available for 4-5 months during the rainy season. Because the local people do not have the money to buy the tools necessary for logging, they must work for wealthy people from Yee. This work is only done by men and is dangerous, but they must do this work because there are no other jobs. Some families travel with the men for 1-2 months because if they stay in the village, they do not have enough money for food.

Fortunately, the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has been trying to help the resettlement site since 1995. Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC) collaborates with TBBC and provides a small amount of rice, but they can provide only enough for three months in a year. The MRDC, with help from TBBC, also distributes vegetable seeds two times per year, during the rainy season and summer season. Even with this help, the people in this community still suffer many difficulties.

The Bee Ree resettlement site is not the only one facing such a harsh situation; there are other minority groups throughout Burma who are suffering from the same patterns. They are futureless people with little hope of returning to their land as the SPDC troops are still waging war against the ethnic resistance groups. As long as there is no peace in Burma, Mon resettlement communities, and other ethnic groups, will have to live in small huts with not enough food and medicine, and their children will continuously suffer from a lack of education.

## Methodology

Interviews were conducted in four villages in Northern Ye Township from September 13th to 24th 2011. Fifteen people were interviewed in each of the four villages, which included women, children, men, primary school teachers, medics, two leaders from NMSP, and community leaders. The interviews revealed the various issues the Mon Bee Ree resettlement site is facing, including, unstable jobs, food insecurity and lack of access to formal education for children in the resettlement site areas. The interviews highlighted the dire situation in the resettlement site area. This research is based on obtaining qualitative information from people in the community, NMSP, MRDC and includes some personal observation and analysis.

## *Political Background and the Current Situation of the Research Area*

In 1948, Burma gained independence from the British. Shortly after independence, the Mon Army separated from the Burma military and a civil war began between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and SLORC (Burmese army, later called the SPDC), with the NMSP demanding self-determination and a Mon State (Môn land).

Before thousands of Mon people moved into the NMSP's ceasefire zone, they fled to the



Thai-Burma border area called Pop Juee. Later, they moved to the Bee Ree Resettlement Site. The situation for the Mon people has remained poor even during the sixteen-year-long ceasefire which the NMSP signed with the SPDC in 1995. The Mon people living under Burmese control have had their lives destroyed by the SPDC through human rights abuses such as forced displacement, forced labour, travel restrictions, illegal taxation, and land confiscation. After the NMSP ceasefire, SPDC troops took the opportunity to increase military deployments in Mon areas. Since 1998, the Burmese Army has deployed over ten Light Infantry Battalions and an additional ten Artillery Regiments into the southern part of Mon State, Yee Township.<sup>1</sup> This enabled the Burmese Army to move closer to NMSP-controlled areas, which were agreed upon by both parties as permanent ceasefire zones.

In 2010, the Burmese ruling party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDC), ordered all of the ethnic armed groups in Burma to act as a Border Guard Force under the command of Burmese Army but NMSP refused their request. This led to increased tensions between the NMSP and the USDC. The government has responded by increasing restrictions on the movement of local people, preventing trade. Since the threats have been increasing everyday within the communities, people in both ceasefire areas and surrounding areas are unable to conduct their daily work because of fears that fighting between the SPDC army and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) would break out.

## The Situation in Bee Ree Resettlement Site (NMSP's Ceasefire Zones)

### *Demographic Information*

The research area of Bee Ree refers to four sections: Johaprao, Panan Baung, Suwana Phom and Burk-Surk. The area has a total population of 3,716. Panan Baung is the most populated section in the whole area. These villages are spaced far from each other. In these four villages, there are different ethnic groups such as Mon, Tavoyan and Karen. The majority of people are Mon with a few Karen and Tavoyans who have relocated there because of government expulsion from other parts of Mon State.

#### **Number of Families**

673

#### **Population over 5 years**

M - 1631

F - 1626

#### **Population under 5 years**

M - 241

F - 218

#### **Total**

3716

1) Information taken from Mon Relief and Development Committee monthly report September 2011.

## *Geographical Information*

My research area is in one of the Resettlement Sites under the NMSP-controlled area (Ceasefire Zone), Northern Yee Township, Mon State, Burma. In these areas, there are many forests and the Yee River. Local people depend on the environment for their livelihoods such as cultivation, hunting, foraging from the forest, and logging. The Resettlement Sites are one full day travel from Yee City and a half-day travel to the Thai-Burma border. There is one Mon education department centre in this area called Nyi Sar, which is located near Johaprao and Panan Baung village. Suwana Phom and Burk-Surk are situated north of the other villages. These four villages are connected by one road used during the summer and winter seasons. During the rainy season, the villagers must travel by the river to go to the other villages.

## *Situation Before Moving to Bee Ree Resettlement Site*

People who live in this NMSP ceasefire zone came from different parts of Mon State and Karen State. When they lived in their homeland, they owned property, including farms, gardens and rubber plantations. They had a relatively secure and sustainable livelihood before they were forced to flee and move to the Bee Ree resettlement site. Some of the people were daily labourers but they received a stable salary and did not worry about income or food security. They lived so comfortably that they were able to donate money to the monks and temples.

Most Mon people are in contact with the NMSP and also help supply the NMSP with materials they need; in return, the NMSP provides security for the Mon people. They depend upon each other; when the NMSP goes on a trip between the Mon State - Karen State Border, the soldiers take rest in the villagers' home and sleep there for one or two days.

*"Mon soldiers visited in my house and I cook food for them [and] discuss about health care for the children and about our job. They are relatives with us and just come to visit my home – not to get information. But the Burmese soldiers don't believe what I say, so they arrest me and put me in the jail for one month."*

- Female, age 49, from Burk Surk village.<sup>2</sup>

The security situation remains extremely dangerous for villagers. The SPDC set up camps near the villages. Sometimes, they even order the police to close the gates to the village day and night, sometimes for as long as one month. This prevents villagers from taking care of their rubber plantations, farms and flower gardens. When the SPDC are in the village, they often steal the villagers' livestock such as chickens, ducks, cows and goats. The SPDC also steals fruits such as durian, mangosteens and bananas from the villager's gardens without permission. There is also forced labour, travel restrictions, and illegal taxation. This creates many problems for the villagers such as a lack of food and income and they are forced to sell their property in order to support their families. The sale of the property only provides a short-term solution, as families are in need

---

2) Interview 35, September 21, 2011.

of stable incomes to support their children's education and other needs. Daily workers in particular find it very difficult to get food because they are poor and suffer from malnutrition. They also cannot afford to provide education for their children and it is a large problem for them.

*"We never travel outside of our village because we never have security for us. If we go anywhere the police know and they see us, they will put us in jail."*

– Male, age 49, from Johaprao village<sup>3</sup>

*"Before my family fled from our homeland, we were always interrogated by the SPDC because my father has relatives in the NMSP. He is also a Mon language and literature teacher."*

– Female, age 21, from Johaprao village<sup>4</sup>

At that time, the SPDC did not allow the teaching of Mon literature in the Mon villages, Ye and Kyar Inn Seik Gyi and other Townships. Now, some Mon villages in the area can teach the Mon literature in the Mon temples but only for a summer course lasting about 2 months.

Because of their fear of the SPDC, the people cannot go to their farm and make money. The worst thing is that their children cannot go to school and they are always worried about the possibility of fighting between the NMSP and the SPDC.

Some villagers go secretly to their rubber plantation and farms to monitor and do work, but if they are caught, they are arrested, given punishment and possibly put in jail; if the family members want the prisoner to be released from jail, they must come to pay money as a guarantee. If villagers manage to escape from the SPDC, they can run to the NMSP-controlled areas but if the SPDC obtains information about who ran to the NMSP, they will be arrested by the SPDC. Therefore, the villagers live in fear and do not want to leave their homes and cannot do anything in their villages. In 1995, the conflict was started in areas such as Ya Pu village, Khu Zar village in Ye Township, the Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, Mu Don Township and some areas of Thanbyu-zayat Township. For these reasons, sixteen years ago, people fled from their homelands to escape the violence and moved to the Bee Ree Resettlement Site.

### *Travel Restrictions*

The majority of people who live in the NMSP-controlled areas do not have ID cards or documents for travelling around Mon State. Many of these people fled from their homeland over 16 years ago. When they fled their at home villages, some of villagers didn't bring their ID cards, some lost them on the street, some ID cards expired, and some villagers didn't have any ID cards because they didn't have family registration. Therefore, whenever they to travel, they face the

---

3) Interview 5, September 13, 2011.

4) Interview 3, September 13, 2011.

problems because of not having the ID cards. When the villagers are going to Ye Town and other towns, they travel with a document given by the NMSP. The SPDC soldiers often do not accept this document.



SPDC checkpoint bridge

*"If we go to Ye City, we request the travelling document from the NMSP or community leader, but at the check-point, the police ask why we do not have ID cards. When we show our travelling documents, they do not like it. The soldiers ask for money and threaten us with guns."*

- Female, age 35, from Panan Baung village<sup>5</sup>

*"When I went to the Ye Town, the police asked me questions at the checkpoint and they look down and showed no respect because I could not speak in Burmese."*

- Female, 32 years old, from Panan Baung village<sup>6</sup>

*"I cannot speak or read Burmese but when I went to the Ye Town to buy some medicine for my children, at the check-point the police asked me questions in Burmese. I could not reply immediately, so the police hit me with his gun and shouted loudly, before allowing me to pass."*

- Female, age 40, from Panan Baung village<sup>7</sup>

---

5) Interview 24, September 18, 2011.

6) Interview 25, September 18, 2011

7) Interview 27, September 18, 2011.



These problems happen in the local communities far from the big towns. From my interviews, I learned that many ethnic people in Burma are suffering and facing problem like these because the Burmese Army moves and camps in the local ethnic communities. The army is very harsh and barbaric to the local people, especially if the ethnic people confront the army after being degraded by them. Then, people in the resettlement site cannot speak Burmese well and some do not understand any. So, when they travel, they face many problems at the check points.



*Conflict area near IDPs*

After ceasefire between the NMSP and the SPDC, some people travelled with NMSP soldiers because they could travel and sell their goods easily on the trip. It is one way of protection for people in the NMSP controlled area. These people are depending on their relationship each other. However, if the people are not with the NMSP, they face many problems when alone at the Burmese army check-points.

### *Conflict Between NMSP and SPDC*

The people who live in the Bee Ree Resettlement site rely heavily on the NMSP. When the NMSP and the SPDC are not fighting each other, the people do not worry and can live comfortably in their own communities. In 1995, the NMSP accepted the ceasefire with the SPDC. After the ceasefire, the people could live comfortably in relative peace because the NMSP did not allow the SPDC to pass or travel around this Resettlement Site.

The Resettlement Site area provides protection and security for IDPs after being forced to flee by the SPDC. The Bee Ree Resettlement Site community cannot travel within the SPDC-controlled areas. They have no ID cards, and cannot speak or write in Burmese. After the NMSP accepted the ceasefire with the SPDC, these people had a chance to travel and go back to their hometowns. When they travelled back to their villages, they had to go through police check-points and they were asked many questions. Most of the time, villagers faced language problems and could not answer the police's questions.

Therefore, villagers live in fear and are always worried about going through police checkpoints. In April 2010, people who lived under the NMSP were afraid and moved to the Haloudkani (HLK) Resettlement Site because NMSP refused to accept the SPDC demands to act as Border Guards. The SPDC declared that they would fight with the NMSP. At that time, the villagers moved and fled to other areas. Most villagers moved to the NMSP-controlled area near the Thai-Burma border called the HLK Resettlement Site for six to seven months to avoid the civil war. During this time, the villagers lost their rice crops, animals and property while they were away.



Villagers in the research area

*"I have moved because of the civil war [between the NMSP and SPDC] four times. We do not have a stable job or land because we are always worried about the fighting."*

- Male age 45, from Suwana Phom village<sup>8</sup>

Now, in the Bee Ree Resettlement Site, the villagers are preparing to move again, waiting on orders from the NMSP. After the election on November 7, 2010, the SPDC were unhappy because the NMSP had boycotted the election. The SPDC smashed all the NMSP signs and stopped all cooperation and banned all NMSP activities inside Burma. After that, people who were linked to the NMSP could not travel inside Burma. People living in the Resettlement Site are especially at risk; they are preparing to move to another place and are afraid of what will happen in the future. These people are always worried and have no peace in their life. Therefore, women and children have little or no access to education or a chance to develop vocational skills. The people who live under the NMSP control are facing many problems.

## Causes and Effects of Poverty in the Resettlement Site areas

People who are living in the Bee Ree Resettlement Site area are facing extreme poverty, lack of stable jobs, lack of income, food insecurity, lack of education, lack of health care and loss of land and property.

When they left their homeland, they fled secretly because if the SPDC caught them, the SPDC would arrest and torture them. Those who fled could not carry much and left with few

8) Interview 18, September 15, 2011.

possessions. In particular, they lost their land, farms and animals; all of their property was then taken by the SPDC. When they got to the resettlement site, they were faced with a shortage of food and jobs. In this area, there are no stable jobs and a lack of income, which also means they do not have enough food and suffer from malnutrition, especially the children. Gradually the children's health deteriorates because of malnutrition but they also lack health care and the clinics have no more medicine. Some of the women do not know how to protect their health and lack family planning.

Another consequence of the poverty is that the villagers cannot support their children's education because their priority is to earn enough income for survival. They do not consider issues such as education beside of their daily struggle. The children know about their parents' difficulties and do not dare request for the opportunity of education. So the children are not interested in education.

*"I have four children and I depended on my husband before [but] now he is married with another women and I face more problems getting food and job, because all of my children are so young, so I face more problem on the job to get income."*

- Female age 27, Panan Baung village<sup>9</sup>

*"I am a hunter and I find income for my family but sometimes I spend a lot of time trying to hunt but am unable to kill anything. I tried hard to get and I want to get more and want to get enough food for my families".*

- Male age 44, from Panan Baung village<sup>10</sup>

In the Bee Ree Resettlement Site, most families are very poor as there are no stable jobs for them.

The livelihoods in this area are not developed because it is very difficult to travel to Ye City or other places where they can earn an income. They are not able to support their families as food and jobs are scarce and there are no jobs for women. If women could work and help earn money for the family, then they would probably not face such extreme poverty. There are only jobs that men can do so it is hard for families to earn enough money to survive. However, in the current situation there is a lack of vocational skills and no opportunity to get knowledge and learn skills for working.

Most women have no jobs and no incomes; they depend on their husbands. They cannot support their families and just look after their children at home. Most women never attend school and those who do usually only attend for very short time. They have no vocational skills that would help them to gain an income.

---

9) Interview 22, September 19, 2011.

10) Interview 29, September 20, 2011.



*(Top left) Men preparing an elephant to transport timber.*

*(Top right) Men transporting logs down the river.*

*(Lower left) The river is used as transportation for local people.*

*(Lower right) Making a boat from wood.*

## Livelihood

Before the villagers lived in these IDPs area, their livelihood was the cultivation of rubber and betal nut. Now, their main livelihood is logging. When they start the logging, they do not have money to invest to log the wood. They take money advances from merchants and wealthy people to buy tools, food, medicine and other things they need for their work. After that, they go to the forest and start to cut down the wood; sometimes they stay for one month and two weeks in the forest.

After the logging, they use elephants and drag the logs from the forest to the village. After that, they transport the logs on the river to the Yee Town. It takes one or two weeks to transport the logs; they carry two to four tons with such a raft. They get 30,000 kyats per ton and sometimes they make two trips per month, transporting eight tons. If they lose any logs in the river during their transportation, they must compensate for the loss to the employers. They must also pay back the money to the merchants and wealthy people who gave them money advancements. They have no other choice. They depend on the logging as their main livelihood but this work is only available for 4-5 months during the rainy season.



Some of the IDPs work as carpenters to make boats for wealthy people. It usually takes 15 days to make a boat and the workers receive 7000 kyats per day. However, this work is also not consistent and is only available six months in a year. Some of men work as hunters to find income for their families. When they kill the animals, they sell the dead animals and eat what they cannot sell. The hunters can go the hunting in the summer and winter. In the winter, the crops ripen so the animals come to eat the crops and play in the farm. At this time, it is easier to hunt but when they sell the animals, they receive a lower price because meat is more available. People who live in resettlement camp cannot afford to buy the animals so the hunters must sell them in the town. It is very difficult to sell the animals for the hunters because the hunting is illegal and if the police apprehend them at the checkpoint, they seize the animals and arrest the hunters.



*The children make tiger grass to dry*

Another source of livelihood for villagers is plucking tiger grass to make brooms that are then sold. They receive 4000–5000 kyats per day for this work. This work is only available 2–3 months, from December to February. Another kind of job is clearing the weeds and undergrowth in rubber gardens. For women, they receive 2500 kyats per day and for men 3000 kyats per day. This work is mostly only available for three months of the year during rainy season and is usually only four or five days a month.

All of these jobs are only available less than half of the year. Because the IDPs can only work a few months in a year, their income is very low and they cannot support their families. Furthermore, the logging and transportation of logs is very dangerous work. When they cut down the trees, some people are injured because trees and branches can fall on their hands, legs and heads. When this happens, they usually don't have the money to treat their injuries. If they are able, they borrow money from wealthy persons and receive limited treatment at the Ye clinic. Then, however, they are in debt, which causes further economic problems.

## Lack of Education

Because of poverty, most families in the Bee Ree Resettlement Site cannot support their children's education. Oftentimes, parents do not send their children to school because parents need the children's help to either take care of younger siblings or to help out with farming.

To send their children to the local school run by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), parents must pay 2000 kyats every month for each student. This is the policy of the MNEC because they not have the money to support the teachers' salary, only enough for materials to help the school. Some parents also cannot afford to buy the uniforms children must wear to go to school. Even though parents want to send their children to school, because of their lack of

job and food security, they oftentimes cannot afford to send the children.

*"When I was a child, I didn't study at school because my parents had no money and couldn't afford for us to attend to school. So I do not have confidence to speak and am always scared of people."*

- Female age 25, Suwana Phom village<sup>11</sup>

*"I do not want to go to school because my mother does not have money and we do not have enough food to eat, so we want to get money to buy some food. I want to eat food a lot."*

- Female age 12, Panan Baung village<sup>12</sup>

*"I want my children go to school and I want to learn vocational training because if I can gain vocational skills, [I can] get a chance to create a job [and have] happiness in my life. Now, I can't support my children's education and [have] no job and not enough food."*

- Female age 31, Johaprao village.<sup>13</sup>

## Lack of Health Care

Most of the children in the research area suffer from malaria and pneumonia during the rainy season. Some families do not have mosquito nets or warm clothes for the children. If the children feel sick, parents only give them a 500 mg paracetamol tablet. They do not go to the clinic to visit the doctors because the doctors only provide the same 500 mg paracetamol tablets; they do not have other medicines. Many families do not have knowledge of health care and they do not know how to protect their children.



Community clinic in Panan Baung Village

11) Interview 20, September 15, 2011.

12) Interview 31, September 22, 2011.

13) Interview 10, September 14, 2011.



Also, they do not know about family planning so they have many children and sometimes cannot take care of them. Children face malnutrition and a lack of health care because parents cannot afford to support them.

The Mon National Health Committee (MNHC) cannot afford to buy medicine and it is difficult to transport the medicine because the medicine must go across mountains, forest roads, streams and the Thai-Burma borderlines. The medicine can only be transported by cars and trucks during the summer season; in the rainy season, medicine must be transported by foot. The medicine must cross long distances before it can reach the resettlement camp. The MNHC's donors are from foreign countries and the donations they provide are illegal. If the SPDC learns of how the foreigners donate this care, they will damage the MNHC ability to provide care. This means the clinic has many problems and cannot help the villagers who suffer from diseases.

The clinic cannot provide medicine for the children and some children get malaria. The clinic also does not provide birth control or family planning lessons so women often become pregnant and cannot support the children. In the clinic, medicine is never free; patients must provide half the cost of the medicine and so some patients cannot pay for medicine.

## Conclusion

The people who live in the Bee Ree Resettlement Site have depended on the NMSP for more than 16 years. They also depend on the forest and river for their livelihood. Transportation around these areas is very difficult because the area is a ceasefire zone and the villagers cannot move freely outside the zone to go to local towns like Ye Town without much difficulty. People who live in this area are poorly educated and lack skills, knowledge and stable employment.

In sixteen years, the resettlement site has not been able to develop business or steady employment. The villagers fled from difficult parts of Mon State and Karen State. They have suffered from human rights abuses; they also have no opportunity to create jobs. They have low levels of education, lack vocational skills and have trouble gaining an income.

Since this area is a conflict area and a resettlement site, already these villagers had moved away from their homeland. In 1995, before ceasefire between the NMSP and the SPDC, they faced many human rights abuses by the SPDC so they remain afraid of the fighting. After the ceasefire, there was still no stable situation for them because they could not go back to their hometowns or travel around because they had no ID cards or documents for travelling in Burma. A further language problem is that the majority of people who live under the NMSP cannot speak, read or write in Burmese. This causes the people to suffer abuses at SPDC police check points and become discriminated against.

Poverty is the greatest problem in the resettlement site. People who live there have no stable jobs and a low income because all jobs are only part time. Therefore, the people are facing the income and food security problems. Furthermore, the parents are not able to support their children's education so children do not receive an education. Parents are forced only to think about how to get income to provide food security for their families. The children are not interested in education because their parents cannot support them to go to school. If the Burmese Government and NMSP continuously have conflict and civil war, all people in the resettlement site will

continue to face the problems of poverty.

From my fieldwork and interviews, I learned that the people suffer greatly from the problem of poverty in the resettlement site. I am deeply concerned for the future of the people in the resettlement site; the people have no opportunity to develop because of their poverty. Even after the elections, the Burmese government's policy has not changed in this part of the country; fighting between the SPDC and NMSP continues. As long as this fighting continues, the people living in the resettlement site will face the problem of poverty in the long term.

## Recommendations

### *To the Burmese Government*

- » Provide livelihood opportunities to the ethnic people in the local communities
- » Create livelihood-training activities every month.
- » Provide education for children in the local communities.
- » Provide the health care in the local communities
- » Stop the civil war between ethnic armed groups and Burmese Government.

### *To NGOs and International Community*

- » Pressure the Burmese Government to respect Burma's ethnic minorities.
- » Research and truthfully document the problems of poverty and the lack of education.
- » Pressure the Burmese Government change new policy in the country
- » Pressure the Burmese Government to discuss with ethnic armed group about transitioning to Democracy.

### *To The New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs)*

- » Encourage and provide support to the people who want to create businesses.
- » Advise people about how they can create employment opportunities for themselves

# Economic Hardship in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, New Mon State Party Region, Burma

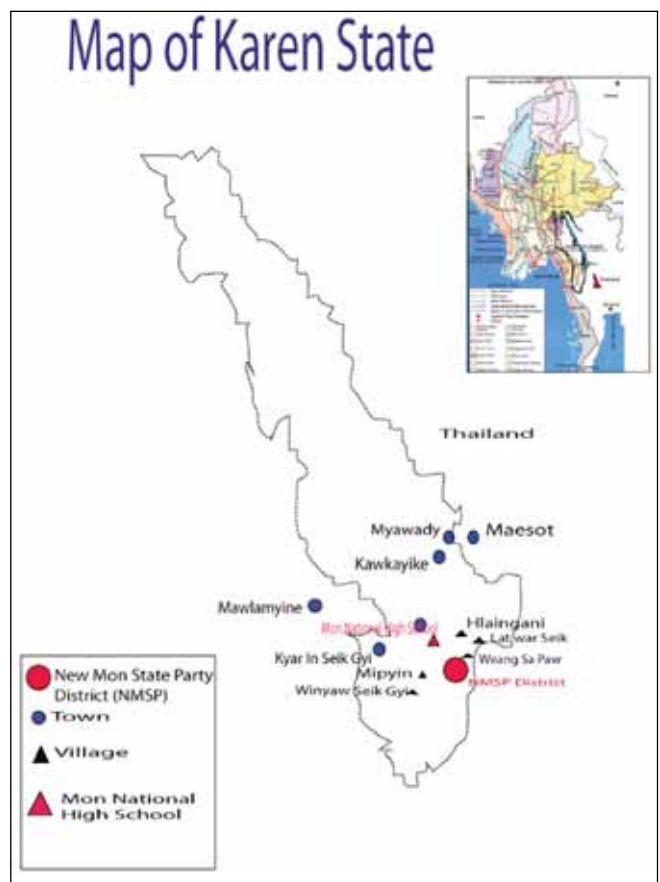
by Mi Goe Chai

## Introduction

The aim of the report is to look at five villages in New Mon State Party (NMSP) region, Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, Karen State, Southern part of Burma and the economic hardships facing the people who live in these areas. There are only rubber plantations for livelihood of these people and they have no more jobs except rubber plantations.

They are struggling to create enough income to support their life. They also have difficulties travelling, another problem for their livelihood.

This report intends to examine how family economic hardship is depriving the children of a formal education and creating other problems in the community. Most children cannot go to the school and have to work with their parents from a very early age. Some young people are even going to Thailand to find work. Most people who are living in Southern Burma are working





*Children from the research region who cannot join the school.*

as daily workers because they do not own their own rubber plantations. They have to support their family by working odd jobs and their income is insufficient for the family and they are unable to meet the costs of their children's education.

The schools in this region are only primary level education. There are no schools in some villages and there is only one national high school in Weang Sa Paw village. It is a boarding school and is over 15 miles from their village and the students live at the school. Even though the cost of the national high school is far cheaper than government schools, most children still cannot afford to go to the national school. If their children go to the high school they will have to pay a lot more than they did for primary level education and therefore most people cannot afford to send their children. One parent explained,

*"I am interested in my children's education but I don't have enough money to support for middle and higher education levels. My eldest son and daughter are working in Thailand and support us."*

(Interview - 6 - 11, Sep, 2011)

According to my research, both parents and teachers believe that the main problem preventing children from accessing education is economic hardship. As for the New Mon State Party (NMSP), the ethnic armed group and local governing body, they cannot support for all education of their new generations because they do not have a big enough budget.

Members of the community would like to discuss their concerns and opinions for addressing this issue and hope to find a solution to the problems of their children education. At the time, we hope to inform the education communities about the impact on this region. They have a plan to discuss with School Education Committee for increase wages to the workers because most rubber



plantation owners are included in the committee.

## Methodology

The research took place in the NMSP region of Karen State and was carried out between the 8th September and 2nd October 2011. I interviewed 60 people from five villages. The interviewees were villagers, teachers, students and NMSP members.

The information I obtained came from both personal interviewing and group interviewing. The interviews with the villagers were one to one and the interviews with the students were carried out in a group format. Before I went to the village I had to phone and confirm with the village leader that I could carry out interviews. When I arrived in the village, the group leader of the village sent me to his house for interviews. When interviewing the villagers, I did not need to go to each house because the leaders had already organized people for me to interview. Interviews were focused on livelihoods, education, the political situation and difficulties relevant with the issue of this region.



*A house of people working in the rubber garden*



*Mon National High School, Weang Sa Paw Village, Karen State, NMSP Region*

## Background of People from the Research Area

The Mon people have been living in this area for 100 years very happily and peacefully. At that time, there was no school for learning but the boys and men had a chance to learn literature at the monastery. They studied in the early morning and at night time. All girls and women stayed in

the house and did all of the housework and took care of the children so they had no opportunity to study the literature in the monastery. Some men taught their wives and daughters the literature they got from the monastery when they had free time. By doing this they increased the numbers of educated people in their nation. They had a good relationship with neighbouring ethnic groups such as Sagaw Karen and Poe Karen. They were unified and helped each other whenever they needed help.

Burma gained its independence from British rule in 1948. At that time, Mon leaders called for ethnic rights including the rights to maintain Mon literature and culture and to form a Mon Council for the Mon people. All of these demands were rejected and the new democratic government of Burma cracked down on Mon political activities, assassinated, arrested, and detained Mon leaders, and burned down villages. As a result, the Mon began an armed struggle like other ethnic group in Burma, initially under the leadership of the Mon People's Front (MPF), and later under the New Mon State Party (NMSP). The NMSP reached a ceasefire with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the Burmese army, in 1995. Despite this agreement, the political activities of NMSP have continued to cause conflict and disturbances. Human rights violations including forced labour, portering, confiscation of farms without compensation and arbitrary arrests continue to happen in the region.

## Livelihood Problems

The former primary livelihood of this region was farming and they have been working the land for a long time. However, between 1998 and 2002, local merchants purchased 100 acres of farmlands at a low price. The owners received only a very small amount of compensation for their lost land. Nowadays, these lands have been turned into rubber plantations. As a result, many people in this area are now landless and have no livelihood. Therefore, they are forced to work on the rubber plantations as daily workers.

One 60-year-old villager said,

*"When I was young, in our village we had no worry for livelihood because we could grow vegetables such as long beans and okra and we could survive our live. It made us happy and peaceful even though we were not wealthy with luxury. We had no need to buy more things for our house. We could stay without many things and [there was] no competition for luxury among us. At that time, we were really happy and satisfied in our life. We could learn education for free at the monastery. Nowadays, it is very different our time before. We have to buy everything. The goods prices are also more and more expensive. So how can most people who live in this area hope the situation will be change to be better for them and their generation's future?"*

(Interview – 10 – 15, Sep, 2011)

Their cost of living is between 2,000 and 3,000 kyats each family per day but they only receive wages between 500 and 700 kyats per day working on the rubber plantations. The income is not adequate for them and most of their daughters and sons end up going to find work in Thailand to



try and help solve their families' economic hardship.

Twenty years ago, there were no rubber plantations in this area and people were working on their farms for their livelihood. In 1996 a group of merchants came and bought the land in this region and changed farming to rubbers plantations. At that time, the NMSP and SPDC had a ceasefire but the economy was very poor. The merchants came and bought the farmlands at a very low price and they created rubber plantations. The villagers were naive and sold their land to them. Now they are facing a big problem of not enough income and family economic hardship.

One villager said,

*"Now I have nothing to do except be a daily worker in rubber plantation, and my wage is not enough to support my family or cover the cost of school. We have to work, the whole family, in the rubber garden. We parents are cutting the rubber and our children will pick up the rubber cup during working time."*

(Interview – 16- 14, Sep, 2011)

Another villager explained,

*"If we had known we would face problems like this when we sold our farm to the rubber plantation owner, we never would have sold our farms. We did not think we would have a problem like the present situation. Now we really regret selling our farms to the rubber plantation owner."*

(Interview – 26- 24, Sep, 2011)

They are very concerned for their own and their children's future. They cannot survive only working on the rubber plantation. They have no labour rights and do not know that they are entitled to labour rights. There are many people from this area who have not passed a high level in education and the villagers lack education and knowledge.

## Lack of Education and Child Rights

In 1991, the Burmese government signed up to the Convention of Rights for the Child. (CRC) Although they signed up to this convention, they do not implement any of the recommendations. Wherever you go in Burma, there are many children who cannot go to school. Some children are leaving home and living as street children and can be seen on every corner in the big towns in Burma. According to the CRC:

1. In all actions concerning children, whether



*Children collecting water bottles*

undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. (CRC- Article 3)

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures. (CRC- Article 3)

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision. (CRC- Article 3)

The US State Department, however, has commented on the real state of child rights in Burma. Their report explains:

- » Children under the age of 18 make up approximately 40% of the population
- » Unskilled and without legal protection, children work in the informal economy and in the streets.
- » SPDC policies and practices increase children's vulnerability to drug and sexual abuse
- » Current junta policy claims that schooling is free up to age 16; however corruption and available facilities make "free" schooling an illusion.
- » While the law prohibits child abuse, there is no available data on the extent of abuse, and there are no reports of prosecution for child abuse.
- » Burma has the largest number of child soldiers in the world at 70,000.
- » While the regime has signed up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), children are getting hungrier and sicker.<sup>1</sup>

The education system Burma is deteriorating and school fees are too high for citizens to afford. If one high school student studies in a boarding school, it costs at least 1,000,000 Kyat per year. This is very high amount for ordinary people. Most families are not able to earn such an amount even after they combine the entire year's income. At the Mon National High School, the students study in a boarding school and pay at most 150,000 kyat per year. Even having to pay this reduced amount, most children still cannot afford to join the national school. Therefore, almost all children are losing their right to an education under the Convention of Rights for Child.

## Family Economic Hardship

In my research area, working as day labourers on the rubber plantations is the only available

---

1) US State Department (08 Mar 06) Country Reports 2005: Burma

work. The rubber producing seasons are in the winter and summer. During the rainy season, there are no jobs available for villagers. During this time, they can barely survive and life is very difficult for them. They want to do more jobs but they cannot create a new job because they no longer have their own land for growing paddy or vegetables. Those who did not lose all their land were left with land that was not suitable for growing. The soil cannot make a good fertilizer like the virgin land that was confiscated. Furthermore, most people cannot buy their own rubber plantation. They are working as daily workers and they have to work from 1am to 3pm every day. Their wage amount is between 150,000ks and 200,000ks per year.

## Risk of Human Trafficking

One villager explained,

*"We have no other choice of jobs and there is nothing to do except work on the rubber plantation, and I cannot send my two young children to the school. Their elder sister had gone to Thailand and working there. But we get no news about her; she went Thailand two months ago."*

(Interview – 9 – 15, Sep, 2011)

He was very concerned about his daughter because when I arrived in the village, one young woman came back from Thailand four months pregnant and could not tell who the father was. She was 20 years old and she had left her village three years earlier. She went with a trafficker, who told her she would get good work in a shop as a shopkeeper. When she arrived in Thailand, however, the man had deceived her. These stories are very common of young women who are trafficked.

Even though she was a young girl, she is so silent and afraid of people. She does not say many words and looks so pitiful and is very concerned about her pregnancy. There is not only no clinic but also no doctors or nurses in the village. Most people who are from this area do not have these rights and they do not know about their human rights. They really lack knowledge and everyone can trick to them because they are very naive people.

This is similar to rural areas all over Burma that have no clinics or schools, causing most people to face difficulties accessing health and education. The Burmese government has not been able to solve these problems until now. Although the Burmese government has signed up to the UDHR, they do not care about the difficulties facing people from rural areas.

## Conclusion

Economic hardship in the five villages in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township is the cause of many problems for local villagers, including a lack of education, the risk of human trafficking, and a lack of medical access. These problems present serious difficulties for villagers living in this area. Without economic development, it's likely that these problems will continue.

## Recommendations

### *To the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)*

- » Build social and economic development based on the local community's perspective and concept of development.
- » Provide free education for primary level in Karen and Mon State.
- » Completely implement the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC).
- » Completely implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- » Build good infrastructure for transportation in Karen and Mon State.

### *To New Mon State Party (NMSP)*

- » Discuss about the worker's wages with the local rubber garden owner.
- » Create livelihood opportunities for the Mon people from Karen and Mon State.
- » Build more primary schools in the region.

### *To the Villagers*

- » Learn about Human Rights and Labor Rights.
- » Request better economic opportunities from plantation owners.
- » Stand strongly for adequate income in their life.
- » The Rubber Garden Owner
- » Respect the value of workers.
- » Provide adequate wages for workers' time and labor.

### *The Local NGOs*

- » Advocate to the SPDC to implement UDHR and CRC.
- » Give Human Rights knowledge to the community.
- » Send more Human Rights watch groups into the Mon and Karen areas.
- » Send more education groups into the Mon and Karen State.
- » Stop the businessmen who profit from and traffic to poor people.

# Social Impacts of the Government's Insufficient Health Care System and Lack of Awareness about HIV/AIDS for People Living in Hpa-an Township, Karen State

by TT

## Introduction

Karen people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Burma. They are very friendly and love their native place. They are very proud of their hospitable culture. They want to live in their own community and practice their culture and lifestyle. They are not greedy and want to live a peaceful life in harmony. They are able to survive by living on their native land and forest close to nature. Their land and forests can support them and their livelihoods and gives them pleasure. However, those this life is becoming difficult as the life of Karen people is suffering from civil war.

Around the 1990s, people from Burma were faced with an economic crisis, which also affected the people from Karen State.<sup>1</sup> The government of Burma (SPDC) could not support the basic needs of the people, especially the ethnic groups. Although Karen state does very good trading with Thailand, most of the people cannot participate in



1) "The military era 1," Asian venture, [http://www.asianventure.com/myanmar/history/military\\_era\\_i.html](http://www.asianventure.com/myanmar/history/military_era_i.html)

trading. Since that time, the Karen cease-fire group called the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which broke away from the Karen National Union (KNU), are the only group who get the opportunity to trade freely with Thailand. This group conducts export and import trading between Karen state and Thailand. But, only this group of people can benefit economically from this trading, while the other people become poorer by the day. So, for many people their only chance of survival is to migrate to another country to solve their problems. Most of the people, especially youth, from Karen State go to Thailand while others go to Malaysia or Singapore.

When they arrive to another country, they experience culture shock because of the new environment; everything is totally different. Living abroad, there is no one to supervise them, like in their home community. As young people, they are curious and want to try new things with their new freedom of living in another country. So, most of the youth like to go to Karaoke bars or night clubs to release their stress from work. The married people living abroad behave like they are single again, as no one knows about what they do while they are away, some of them some visit sex workers. Most of the ethnic people don't know to use condoms when they have sex with sex workers. That is why some unlucky people contact HIV in other countries.

In this case, the role of government is very important. However, the government in Burma, the SPDC, does not care about HIV cases. Compared with the great needs, we can see that SPDC does only small actions for people living with HIV (PLHIV). Thus, we can see the stigma and discrimination against HIV positive people. This report will reveal the hardships that PLHIV from Hpa-an in Karen State face, because of the lack of concern for health care for PLHIV and HIVAIDS and awareness and prevention programs by the SPDC.

The government's healthcare system and awareness programs are not adequate for the needs of the people infected with HIV in Hpa-an township in Karen State. PLHIV face problems of discrimination, lack of medicine, unemployment and other social problems associated with the stigma of HIV/AIDS. As a result, they endure lives of desperation including; weak health, migration to Thailand to access medicine, poverty, chronic illness and death. The government of Burma should stop ignoring the problem of HIV and provide adequate healthcare, including access to anti retrovirus treatment (ART), and begin HIV/AIDS educational programs to build awareness and reduce the stigma and fear afflicting its people.

This report will precede as follows, part one provides the general background of the research area and key issues. Part two will describe the limited healthcare support from military government for PL HIV. Part three will describe the SPDC's weak HIV awareness program for the people. Part four will outline the social impacts that PLHIV are facing. Part five will explore some recommendations for military government, local NGOs International NGO and the community to transform these situations into an equal and fair community.

## Methodology

This report aims to show the reality of PLHIVs in Hpa-an Township of Karen State and the social impacts resulting from the stigma and discrimination that they have to face in their community. This report is based on field research in Hpa-an township in Karen State. PLHIV, family members of PHIV, NGO and CBO workers and community leaders were interviewed for this



report. Moreover, secondary data from applicable books and the internet was used for this report.

## General Background Information

### *Background of Research Area*

Karen state is situated in south-eastern Burma and borders Thailand to the east. Hpa-an township is the capital of Karen State and borders Hlaing-Bwe Township to the east, Tha-Hton and Paung townships to the west, Malamyine and Kyike-Ma-Yaw to the south and Bee Lin and Hpa-Pon to the north. The population of Hpa-an township is estimated at 461,000.<sup>2</sup> In Hpa-an township, there are 475 villages within 91 village tracts. The majority of the people are Sagaw Karen and Pwo Karen. There are also other ethnic groups such as Myanmar, Pao and Mon. Most of the people are Buddhist but there are also Christians, Lekes, Hindus and Moslems. The main income of the people in Hpa-an comes from paddy rice, logging and trading with Thailand.

### *Political and Economic Situation of Karen State*

After the war ended, Burma was granted independence in 1948 by the British Government. Since then, Karen people have been seeking to have an independent subdivision or state within Burma, similar to what Shan, Kachin, and Arakan people had been given. Afterward, Burma was ruled by a nationalist military government under Ne Win. Karen people were never able to get what they had been seeking for. Instead, Karen people became under attack by the military regime which has lasted until today. In seeking peace and freedom in Karen State, Karen people formed the Karen National Union and its fighting wing KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army), which has been defending against Burmese Military attacks on Karen people. The conflict continues today.

In 1994-95, Minority Buddhists in the KNU formed a splinter group, named the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, due to political conflict among KNU. The DKBA went over to the side of the Burmese military regime through a ceasefire agreement. The conflict between Karen people and Burmese military escalated more and more, creating lots of fighting, and driving many Karen civilians out of their home; fleeing to the neighbouring country of Thailand.

Due to the conflict between KNU and the military government in cooperation with DKBA, Karen State became like a war zone, and most areas came under control of the military and its so-called alliance with DKBA. Since the ceasefire agreement has been reached between DKBA and the military government, the economy of Karen State has changed in many different ways. Trading with Thailand became more open and it was also the beginning of the massive migration of Karen people to Thailand. Many people came to the border town of Mae Sot in search of jobs.

The road from Hpa-an, capital of Karen State, is rutted and unimproved, the road heads 143km southeast to Myawaddy Township, on the western bank of the Thaung-yin River (Moei

---

2) Interview#23 with a government staff in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author

River in Thai) opposite the northern Thai town of Mae Sot.<sup>3</sup> Because of this road the economy of Hpa-an was called developed. However, the development does not benefit local people. Instead, it resulted in a dramatic change in culture and social life of Karen people.

Only a few people, such as the head of the military staff and their relatives, can profit from this economic opportunity. The other group, who gets the chance to trade is the Karen ceasefire group who get this special privilege, as a result of signing a cease fire agreement with government to do export and import freely without paying taxes. In Hpa-an, the only rich people are government leadership and the people from ceasefire groups. Everyone else has to endure difficult lives, because of a lack of job opportunities.

### *Job Opportunity, Youth, and Migration*

The SPDC government is not concerned about the ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. Especially in Karen State, they do not create jobs for the people. The youth from Karen State have received a poor education. Even though there are thousands of youth who have graduated from university annually, they don't have job opportunities. So the only way to survive economically is by going abroad to work. They have graduated, but their education level is very poor. So, most of the people have to work in other countries as low paid workers while some unlucky women become sex workers. But they believe that they can earn more money than they did in Myanmar.

Nowadays, the youth from Hpa-an, are not interested in education because they believe that they do not have any job opportunities even if they graduate. Even the parents of the youth want their children to go abroad to make money, because the expenses to support their livelihood is increasing daily. Also youth want to earn money like the cease fire groups with good houses, cars and phones in their daily life. The other people want to live like them and see the only way to live like that is to migrate to another country.

The people who leave Hpa-an Township have to cross the Karen State-Thailand border to reach the working sites. Most of the people work in the border district of Thailand called Mae Sot. As illegal workers, they have to work as low-paid workers including factory workers, day laborers, farmhands, construction workers and house maids. Commercial sex worker services are available near and around the working sites. Among the sex workers, there are also sex workers from Burma who can communicate with the workers easily. Thus, the male worker feels comfortable to go to them. For the migrant workers living in the border town of Mae Sot, the healthcare and awareness programs are weak. Thus, the migrant workers do not know how to prevent diseases such as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.<sup>4</sup>

### **Current Situation of HIV in Burma**

The government of Burma does not concern itself with the health of its civilians. Among the healthcare issues, HIV cases are a major problem for the people. Nowadays, some of the people

3) "Hpa-an, Myanmar," Guide for Myanmar, <http://www.guideformyanmar.com/kayin.html>

4) Jadson D.Theede and Pimonpan Isarabhakdi, 'Assessment of Mobility and HIV Vulnerability among Myanmar Migrant Sex workers and Factory Workers in Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand (Bangkok: International Organization for Migration, 2007), 15-22.

living with HIV are becoming aware of the possibilities for a chance to live like other ordinary people by accessing antiretroviral treatment. Currently, Myanmar has an estimated 240,000 HIV cases; among them 75,000 people require antiretroviral treatment. In 2009, the government provided treatment to 9,700 patients through the Global Fund. So, 40 per cent of the HIV-positive population is on antiretroviral treatment.<sup>5</sup>

## HIV and AIDS Estimates in Burma<sup>6</sup>

Number of people living with HIV	240,000 [160,000 – 370,000]
Adults aged 15 to 49 prevalence rate	0.7% [0.4% – 1.1%]
Adults aged 15 and up living with HIV	240,000 [150,000 – 360,000]
Women aged 15 and up living with HIV	100,000 [63,000 – 150,000]

## Cultural Vs. HIV

The main source of HIV transmission in Hpa-an is from sexual contact. Most of the people who have HIV are returning from other countries, especially Thailand. Other people get HIV from having sex with local sex workers. As they lack information about HIV/AIDS, young people who consume commercial sex do not know they should use a condom, and are ashamed of buying one.

Since the ethnic groups generally lack access to health education, they do not have much knowledge about HIV/AIDS. In their view, the people who are HIV positive are regarded as sinners. They believe that they broke the rule of the culture and all of the HIV positive people get this disease as punishment for their actions and betraying their spouse. Also, most of the people believe that this disease can be transmitted by causal contact and therefore do not want any contact with HIV positive people. Moreover, most people believe that there is no way to live anymore if they get HIV.

## Limited Health Care Support for People Living With HIV

### *Inadequate medicine for HIV Victims*

Most of PLHIV from Hpa-an cannot access the necessary HIV medicine that can prolong their life and improve the quality of it greatly. In Hpa-an there is only one government hospital, State Hospital of Hpa-an; it has 200 beds. That is the only one place for PLHIV to get antiretroviral therapy (ART) and other medicine. They can get the medicine such as Septrin freely from the hospital. Septrin is good for prevention and treatment of pneumonia caused by the bacterium pneumocystis carinii (PCP). This infection is most common in people with decreased immune system function, due to HIV or AIDS. This is the only medicine which every PLHIV can get who

5) "The Three Diseases fund," UNOPS, [http://www.unops.org/english/whatwedo/Locations/AsiaPacific/ Myanmar-Operations-Centre/Pages/MyanmarOperationsCentre.aspx](http://www.unops.org/english/whatwedo/Locations/AsiaPacific/Myanmar-Operations-Centre/Pages/MyanmarOperationsCentre.aspx)

6) "HIV/AIDS estimates," UNAIDS, <http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Countries/myanmar.asp>

is listed in that hospital.

Currently, there is a limit of only 40 people who can access ART drugs. ART is expensive, unlike Septrin. If they take ART, they have to continue taking it till the end of their life. So, the people cannot afford to buy it from the pharmacy. Now, nearly hundreds of people are waiting to get this medicine. On the other hand, most of HIV positive people are infected by tuberculosis. So they had to take anti-TB drug for at least six months. Although they can access this medicine from the government freely, people don't know to take this medicine regularly. They are not counselled well by qualified medical personnel. So, they have to take anti-TB drugs for more than six months. And then, some people give up taking the anti-TB drug.

A man living with HIV said,

*"Last year, I took anti-TB drug. But I didn't take all. Later, I cure TB with herbal medicine. I didn't check my TB bacteria again. I cannot take this s medicine anymore because I had to take again and again."*<sup>7</sup>

In the hospital, there is no need to pay to test for HIV. But it is only on paper; actually they collect a donation for the blood test. Therefore, the people from Hpa-an Township want to test their blood in private laboratories, without counseling.

### *Difficulties Accessing ART Due to Strict Government Rules*

Everybody living with HIV in Hpa-an cannot apply to get ART. If they want to apply for ART, they must have an identity card and census in Hpa-an township because there is no adequate support for all of PLHIV who need ART. In addition, the people from the villages near Hpa-an township cannot access ART, because they live outside the city. The government cannot provide ART to everyone, so they limit ART to only those patients living in the city. Moreover, in Hpa-an there is only one physician who can give ART to the PLHIVs. Without a physician, no one can access ART because only a physician can give prescriptions to take this medicine. But only one physician is not adequate to give to all the people who need ART. That is another reason why this rule exists. All of PLHIV do not know that they can apply for ART from the government, because they don't let all the people from Hpa-an township know about that.

*"In our hospital, there is a kind of ART that we called first line. We don't have other treatment. So, that is why we choose the people from urban. Moreover, we don't have enough medicine for all of the people who need ART."*<sup>8</sup>

- ART board member

Otherwise, the People who get ART and the other who are on the waiting list are not treated

7) Interview# 3 with a man living with HIV in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

8) Interview# 14 with an ART board member in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

well by medical officers. They speak to them rudely when the PLHIVs are patiently waiting to get medicine. If they need to get treatment from a hospital, their hospital fee costs more than ordinary people. There is no special opportunity for PLHIV and there is no care centre for PLHIV in Hpa-an.

*"The behaviours of the medical officers are very rude. They scold me all the time. They look down the people like us. Sometimes, I feel like I don't want to go to see them anymore. But I don't have money to buy medicine to survive my life. So, I have to still go to hospital regularly though I don't like their behaviours."*

– An HIV positive man<sup>9</sup>

### *INGO and Local NGOs are Limited by Government Restriction*

Most of the NGOs in Myanmar are working under many government restrictions, which greatly limit their movement and activities. The government controls most of what the people do, because they are afraid that they might participate in political activities. So, NGOs have to report to the government what they are going to do and what they have done and, this especially applies to the NGOs in Hpa-an. In Hpa-an there are only two INGOs which work with HIV cases in rural areas. On the other hand, only two local NGO's which work for PHIV in urban areas. The resources of those organizations cannot meet all of the needs of their target groups. All INGOs cannot conduct their activities for HIV everywhere that they want to. They can do so only within the areas that the government permits from Hpa-an township, because they had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministries. They can carry out their activities only in the project areas of the ministry that they have signed an agreement for.

Conversely, there are difficulties for local NGOs which work in urban areas. One local NGO is a church based organization and is not registered with the government. In Myanmar, it is very difficult for local NGOs to be registered with the government. Moreover, local NGOs have to request permission before they can organize any action, especially for training because the government does not give permission easily to let so many people gather in the same place. Some NGOs are limited in their response and not stable enough for a long term sustained commitment to HIV activities. One reason for this is because they may have to change their focus to another target group, depending on the donors. Raising awareness to the people living in the target area by short term actions is not enough. Thus, PLHIV in Hpa-an still need a more long term commitment from INGO and local NGO's. An INGO officer I interviewed said:

*"We cannot do in rural area because we don't have permission in that area. If we want to do social development activities, we need to sign MOU with a ministry. Now, we have signed MOU with "Ministry of Border Region Municipal". In Hpa-an township, their projects area is within 21*

---

9) Interview # 11 with a man living with HIV in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

villages. So, we have to do our activities only in these villages.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Lack of Resources for PLHIV*

In Hpa-an, there is no care centre for PLHIV. People from the villages face financial problems when they need treatment from the hospital. It is very expensive to go to the hospital. HIV positive people have to give more than other people, because the staff from the hospital have to use special materials for PLHIV. That is because of the lack of special funds for HIV positive people from the government. Also, INGO and local NGO have only a small budget to support PLHIV. Even though there are two local NGOs which support the basic needs of PLHIV in Hpa-an, not all of PLHIV can obtain the support from local NGOs. A local NGO worker from Hpa-an said that:



*A child living with HIV (photo by TT)*

*“Now we support them as 6 kilo of rice, one and half kilo bean and one litre of oil for their nutritious food. But we cannot support all of PLHIV. We can only support only thirteen people per month.”<sup>11</sup>*

Another strategy to uplift the morale of people living with HIV is organizing self help groups (SHG). But the government and NGOs cannot support them to expand the role of self help groups. The government does not have any concern for these kinds of human resources:

A local NGO worker said,

*“We want to do more to help people who live with HIV in Hpa-an township. To do like that, we need SHG (Self help group) and human resource. Now, we have a peer group in our community. They want to do fund raising as Micro Finance now. But we cannot support them about technical. They are so poor to survive and very weak to work hard.”<sup>12</sup>*

The SPDC government does not have the community home based health care (HBHC) programs that are essential to the needs of PLHIV. There are many benefits of HBHC programs for PLHIV and their families. They are more sustainable, cost effective, and compassionate than going to the hospital or clinic because of the personal care and relationship that develops between the patient and the home based health caregiver. This benefit is very important in reducing the stigma against PLHIV. Furthermore, there are not enough medical staff who work for PLHIV.

10) Interview # 12 with INGO worker in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

11) Interview # 21 with local NGO worker in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

12) Interview # 13 with local NGO worker in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.



## Less Awareness about HIV/AIDS

The government of Burma does not care about awareness raising programs for the people who live in Hpa-an, and the activity of the NGOs and CBOs which are working for PLHIV is still weak. So, much of the community does not receive HIV education. An important role for the members of the community who are HIV positive is to serve as advocates in HIV education programs to build awareness. In this way, grass roots efforts can play an important role in filling the awareness gap. Many HIV positive people lack awareness of basic information about HIV and PLHIV can help raise awareness.

This situation exists because the HIVAIDS awareness programs are still weak. Free access to HIV testing is not yet available for everyone. Currently, pre-test and post-test counseling in the state hospital of Hpa-an is available, but most people are afraid to test their blood even though they suspect they may be infected because they fear the results. Moreover, people do not realize they can test their blood with good counseling in the hospital which is another reason why we need a strong awareness program.

People are not aware to use condoms, especially the young people who have sex with the sex workers. On the other hand, HIV positive people do not want to use condoms even though they know their HIV status. They do not understand that their health situation will be worse when they have sex without a condom; even when both spouses are HIV positive.

Another important issue is that there is less awareness raising activities for the target groups such as taxi drivers and sex workers. The taxi drivers transport sex workers to the customers or customers to the sex workers. Since both sex workers and their customers are the main target groups and because they both use taxis for transport, taxi drivers are an important link in the transmission of HIV.

According to an INGO worker,

*"Before, our target group on rural township is Motor Cycle Taxi Driver. We had a lot of achievement when we worked with them. They are the important target group for us because no one come and take condoms from us except them. They are very important groups to raise prevention. But now, we have changed project area. So, there is no organization which works with them. Even government does not concern this target group."*<sup>13</sup>



*A billboard in Hpa-an promoting condom use (photo by TT)*

13) Interview # 12.

Furthermore, the last role which is important for the people is media. However the media in the study area is very limited in reaching the people. Raising awareness could be improved by distributing educational materials such as pamphlets and booklets or using billboards to give information about HIV to the people. All of these kinds of media are very weak for the people who live in Hpa-an township.

In addition, SPDC government is neglecting the health awareness for entire nation. Most people do not know about HIV disease and even educated people are not well informed about HIV disease. The SPDC government does not include HIV information in the national Education curriculum of Myanmar as one teacher commented, “In our curriculum, there is no lesson about HIV. Also, I don’t know about HIV education.”<sup>14</sup>

## Social Impacts of Insufficient Health Care Support and Less Awareness for PLHIV

### *Weak Immune System*

HIV positive people have weak immune systems and little protection against common diseases. Unlike HIV negative people who have healthy immune systems, PLHIV can get sick very easily and die from very common illnesses. People with advanced HIV infection are vulnerable to opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis, malaria, bacterial pneumonia because the diseases take advantage of the opportunity offered by a weakened immune system. These kinds of diseases can infect the HIV negative people, but the rates of opportunistic infections with the PLHIV are higher. If the HIV negative people get these diseases, they can recover easily. But, for PLHIV, it takes a long time to recover from these diseases, because their immune systems are so weak and opportunistic infections are a constant threat to their health. People living with advanced HIV need ART because ART can help HIV positive people stabilize the immune system by reducing the number of HIV virus.<sup>15</sup> But not all of HIV positive people in Hpa-an who need HIV can access ART from government and without it, they become weak and get other diseases as consequence. A woman living with HIV said that:

*“After my husband is passed away with AIDS, I didn’t do testing. I could not imagine that the situation with HIV. But soon, I got TB. So, the doctor said me to test my blood. Then I became know that I’m HIV positive.”<sup>16</sup>*

### *Chronic Illness and Death*

The worst thing that HIV positive people without awareness have to face is chronic illness.

---

14) Interview # 5 with a high school teacher in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

15) “HIV related opportunistic infections: prevention and treatment,” AVERT, <http://www.avert.org/hiv-opportunistic-infections.htm>

16) Interview # 6 with a women living with HIV in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

With low immune systems, they can get other diseases very easily. Most of the PLHIV in Hpa-an cannot eat enough nutritious food regularly. A local NGO worker said,

*"We can see that PLHIV are dead because of lack of nutrition. Even some people have the food to eat, but they don't know which food is suitable for them."*<sup>17</sup>

Simultaneously, their immune systems become weak because of lack of nutrition. As a result, other diseases such as opportunistic infections are entering their body and attacking their immune system and they develop chronic illnesses. Most of them cannot afford to take medicine to recover from the opportunistic diseases. They have to endure not only the physical problem but also mental problems. For the people who are HIV positive, they need care and encouragement when they are sick, more than the healthy people. But, no one wants to care of them when they are extremely sick. Finally, their weak immune systems lead to their death. A family member of a PLHIV who already passed away said,

*"My aunt could not have enough nutrition food because she had to support herself and her children. Finally, she felt weak and passed away because of lack of nutrition."*<sup>18</sup>



A 49 year old man living with HIV (photo by TT)

## Unemployment

A negative impact of less awareness on the people, is the problem of unemployment. The family members of PLHIV do not want PLHIV to continue their regular job, even if they are strong enough to do their work. So they feel useless to their families. In government offices, such as the military government, the people who got HIV have to quit their jobs.

A man living with HIV said,

*"I was a soldier. When my officer knows that I'm HIV positive, I had to quit from the job. There is the rule in military, if we have HIV we had to quit from the job without compensation."*<sup>19</sup>

## Migration to Thai-Burma border

Some HIV positive people from Hpa-an move to the Thai-Burma border in order to get medi-

17) Interview # 22 with a CBO worker in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

18) Interview # 9 with a family member of PLHIV in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

19) Interview # 4 with a man living with HIV in Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma. On file with author.

cine. They have access to medicine that can recover from opportunistic infections and are also able to access ART. Some go to refugee camps to access ART and live there as refugees. Moreover, they want to go there because they believe that the people who live there are more aware than the people who live in their native place. Even though not all the people who move to Thailand get ART there, they can get the other kinds of nutrition and medicines. But, they have to worry about that the donor do not want to support them ART anymore.

Their lives in a Thailand border or refugee camp are not perfect. They also have to face the problem of high living expenses, because the cost of living in Thailand is more expensive than Myanmar. On the other hand, there are some people who go back and forth from Hpa-an to Thailand to access ART, but not all the people can access ART all the time. Some HIV positive people have to face high transportation costs and security problems, because they go there by an illegal way. But this is the only way to get ART for their future:

*"The reason of the some people who is living here is to get the medicine. They have so many social difficulties when they live here as the refugees. They hope that one day they can access the medicine in their own country, Myanmar."*<sup>20</sup>

- NGO worker from Mae La refugee camp.

### *Depression- A New Disease after HIV*

Everyone can be depressed because of different problems. But, HIV positive people can get depression more than others, because they are more vulnerable. So, this is a big challenge for them. Also, depression can make the HIV disease proceed faster. According to the information from the internet source of the total people who suffer from depression, 60% of these people are HIV positive whereas only 5% to 10% of HIV negative people report being depressed.<sup>21</sup> The people living with HIV in Hpa-an also are depressed because they cannot access medicine. They think that they cannot live long lives without taking medicine which makes them feel hopeless. The other kind of people who suffer from depression are those HIV positive people who cannot tell their family and spouse they are HIV positive for fear of their reaction. At the same time, the people who cannot work for their family also feel guilty for being jobless. According to a man living with HIV:

*"I want to live long life and I want to work again as before. I want to look after my sister. Now she has to care me. So, I feel very depressed because of that."*<sup>22</sup>

The family members and the neighbors of HIV positive people should support them to escape from depression. Moreover, the government and NGO can support them by counseling HIV

---

20) Interview # 1 with a CBO worker in Chiang Mai, Thailand. On file with author.

21) "What is depression?," The AIDS infonet, [http://www.aidsinonet.org/fact\\_sheets/view/558](http://www.aidsinonet.org/fact_sheets/view/558)

22) Interview # 3.

positive people. But, there is no counseling program for HIV positive people who are depressed in Hpa-an township until now.

### *Stigma and Discrimination*

Stigma and discrimination are very familiar to the people with HIV/AIDS. If the people are known to be HIV positive, they will suffer discrimination by their family and their community. Even the medical staff discriminates against PLHIV. For communities where people are not aware of HIV, such as Hpa-an township, those kinds of stigma and discrimination are uncountable. Firstly, HIV positive people are discriminated against by family members who do not have an awareness of the facts. The role of the family is very important for the HIV positive people to live their lives pleasurable. Second of all, the stigma of the community makes the PLHIV not to mingle with others. Therefore, most of the people living with HIV do not want to talk about themselves. But, the communities that the people living with HIV have to participate in, is very small. They cannot hide their status, especially during the time that they get opportunistic infections:

An HIV positive man said that,

*"I rented a room in a house. First, I have good relationship with my neighbours. But soon, they became knowing I'm positive. So, no one from my surrounding wants to communicate with me now. Moreover, my host wants me to leave the current room that I live now.."*<sup>23</sup>

Among the most important people who contribute to increasing stigma and discrimination to HIV positive people, is the government. The SPDC government is not concerned about awareness raising and healthcare support for their people. This leads the HIV positive people to suffer discrimination more and more. Finally, the stigma and discrimination can make the people to be depressed and hopeless about their future.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, HIV/AIDS should be seen as a health problem, not as a misery. PLHIV should be treated equally as a person who is HIV negative. People of the country should be educated about HIV/AIDS and the prevention of the disease. HIV positive people are more vulnerable than other disease infected people, because they have weak immune systems which make them highly susceptible to opportunistic infections. In the case of Burma, HIV positive people feel like they are not equal to other people. They are depressed when they know they have HIV, because they receive the news as a "death sentence". Moreover, communities in Burma are not willing to accept that HIV is a disease, since people are not educated about HIV/AIDS, which usually leads to discrimination against people living with HIV.

The healthcare system and awareness programs in Burma are still very weak, as the government is spending so little money on health and denying most of the support from other countries.

---

23) Interview # 11.

NGOs working inside Burma to eliminate HIV/AIDS often face obstacles from the government, because of political reasons. The roles of the government, NGOs, and local communities are very important in prevention of HIV/AIDS. The government, which is a key player in the prevention of the disease, is ignoring the HIV/AIDS problems in Burma, because they are embarrassed to face the international community with an explanation of how widespread the problem is. Because of that, the disease is spreading quickly over the whole country and is an increasing threat to people living in Burma.

Finally, the government must take serious actions against HIV/AIDS in the country. It must provide more funding for healthcare and HIV awareness programs. It must also cooperate with NGOs and local communities to perform the adequate steps toward preventing HIV/AIDS in the country.

## Recommendations

### *To the State Peace and Development Council*

- » Increase the budget for HIV infected people by fully supporting adequate healthcare programs, including access to free ART and other medicines to relieve suffering.
- » Allow INGOs and local NGOs to do awareness raising, home based care for PLHIV and HIV prevention activities and cooperate with NGOs in the actions for PLHIV, especially in treatment.
- » Give job opportunities to PLHIV instead of firing them from their jobs.
- » Open the care centre for PLHIV and make healthcare for PLHIV available by eliminating the extra hospital fees they must currently pay to be treated in a hospital.
- » Raise HIV awareness through media including television, radio, and IEC materials.
- » Integrate HIV/AIDS awareness and education into the national curriculum of Burmese Education.
- » Support free HIV testing for the public

### *To International NGOs, local NGOs and Donors*

- » Support HIV awareness raising programs for the people who live in Hpa-an township, through training and media.
- » INGOs and local NGOs must build good relationships in order to continue to increase the support, prevention and healthcare education programs.
- » Create a good network within NGOs to continue their activities.
- » Continue supporting the funds for PLHIV in Myanmar, especially adequate ART for PL-



HIV in need of ART.

- » Donors must monitor and evaluate the implementation of HIV/AIDS activities by the Government and NGOs.

### *To the Community, Church Leaders and Religious Groups*

The community must avoid actions of discrimination against the PLHIVs. The community should encourage and support PLHIV to live enjoyably.

The community members must share information and education about HIV/AIDS education within the community.

The church leaders and religious groups should be involved in awareness raising programs in the name of charity work.

### *To the People living with HIV/AIDS*

- » Eat nutritious food to keep their immune systems to prevent opportunistic infections
- » Care for your hygiene to live healthily
- » Participate in self-help groups to get and share health knowledge and encourage each other

## Acronyms

SPDC = State Peace and Development Council

KNU = Karen National Union

DKBA = Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

HIV = Human immunodeficiency virus

AIDS = Acquired immune deficiency syndrome

ART = Antiretroviral Therapy

INGO= International nongovernmental organization

IEC = Information, education and communication

HBHC= Home based health care

# Major Health Problems from Lack of Health Care and Health Education in Pruso Township, Karenni State, Burma

by Rose Lone

Healthcare is very important and it is necessary for all people. However, in Burma, the healthcare system is very bad for citizens. The citizens have very little opportunity for treatment from the government. In Karenni State, the healthcare system is also very poor. For people who live in rural areas, there is no health care at all.

The people in Karenni State are facing many problems, especially because of the lack of health care. There are many Townships in Karenni State, one of which is Hpruso Township. In Hpruso Township, there are many villages. In this area, the health situation is very bad. The local people in Hpruso Township are facing many diseases, including malaria, diarrhea, acute respiratory problems, anemia, malnutrition and skin disease. These problems are caused by a lack of healthcare and health education which leads to poverty and education and health problems.

The villages that I visited and researched are very far from the town and there are no clinics in those areas. They do not get any support from the Burmese government or the local ceasefire group the KNPLF, even though Burmese authorities demand money from the villagers and the KNPLF collect taxes. Villagers have to go to the main town for treatment, which takes an entire day to travel to during the rainy season. However, if they do not have money, they do not receive treatment. The poor systems of transportation and communication, along with the high cost of visiting a doctor and buying medicine, makes it very difficult for villagers to access healthcare.

The villagers in that area are very poor so they do not have enough money to support their health or to build a clinic in the villages. In the villages, they do not have educated people to give them health education. So they do not know anything about health care or proper sanitation. Even if they are sick, they cannot receive any treatment. The lack of healthcare and health education is the largest problem for the villagers. Because of the lack of healthcare, they are facing family problems and livelihood problems. They can't work when they get sick so they are not happy and the social life is disrupted between the villagers.





*The cultivation and farming of the villagers*

As a person who works with a community-based organization located in Karenni State, I wanted to know more about the problems and how to solve them. So I would like to report about the lack of health care in the villages. When the villagers are facing such serious health problems, why do they still not have any healthcare in the region? I wanted to know more about the situation so I went to the villages for my research. This report shows the problems in the villages and shows how the region needs to develop.

## Methodology

I conducted research in Homotee, Htaykho, Raipra and Rekhebu villages, in Hoya District, Pruso Township, of Karenni State. I left on 9th September 2011 to begin my research and remained in villages conducting research until 27th September 2011.

First, I met with the heads of the villages and afterwards I started to interview the villagers. I interviewed over ten people in total from the four villages. The information for this report was received through interviews and my own observations. I asked questions to the villagers about the health situation, access to health care and their background situation. At first, I wrote down the information in a book but the villagers did not like me taking notes so I interviewed and took notes afterward.

## Background of villages

Karenni State is the smallest and poorest state in Burma. It is situated in the east of Burma. Karenni State is a brown area, meaning an area controlled by both the government and ethnic armed groups. There are many ethnic armed groups such as the KNPLF (Karenni Nationalities People Liberation Front), the KNPP (Karenni National People Party), and the KNDP (Karenni National Development Party). The SPDC (State Peace and Development Council), the Burmese army, also controls that area. Many different ethnicities live in Karenni State. The ethnic groups are Karenni, Kayan, Kayaw, Yinbaw, Yintalel, Monu, Bwe and Keba, among others. They have different languages and different religions. The KNPLF have had a ceasefire agreement with the

SPDC government since 1994. Neither the KNPLF nor the Burmese government provides any support to the villagers.

In Hpruso Township, there are nine villages. I visited and researched four of these villages. The four villages that I researched were: Rihihbu village, with 17 households and 87 people, Htaykho village, with 76 households and 292 people, Raipra village, with 59 households and 251 people, and Homotee village, with 46 households 232 people. The total population of all four villages is about 861 people. People in all villages are of Kayaw ethnicity. Kayaw ethnic people earn their living by rice farming, fishing, corn, rice, sorgan, upland cultivation and by other means. Their religion is Catholicism and their language is Kayaw.

People in those areas build their houses with wood and build the roof with thecae leaves. The roof can last for three years; after that, they have to repair it. Most houses in these villages are of a similar design, with the house raised above the ground on wooden pillars. They do not have any toilets and do not know how to build them. Most of the children in that area do not go to school because the parents are poor and cannot afford their children's education. There is no government support for education or healthcare in this area.

The villagers have to work the whole day, from 6:00 am to 7:00 pm, in the upland area. Although they have to work hard to produce food to eat, they don't have any income from their livelihood because transportation is very bad, making it difficult to travel to other areas to sell their food. Furthermore, production is only for their household consumption and there is no surplus to sell for regular income. Due to lack of income, they can't support their own health to gain a secure life.

## The Irresponsibility of the Burmese Government

The Burmese government has the responsibility to provide healthcare for all citizens in Burma. The 2008 Constitution states,

According to the Fundamental Principle and Detailed Principles adopted by the National Convention in drafting the State Constitution, in connection with health, it is laid down that-  
“17(a) the state shall earnestly strive to improve education and health of the people;

(b) The state shall enact necessary law to enable the national people to participate in matters of education and health of the people.”<sup>1</sup>

The Burmese government should increase the budget use in health care section.

“Burma is one of the developing countries in South East Asia; it was ruled by State Peace & Development council (military regime) from 1988 to early year of 2011; the new government has been reformed recently (VOA News, April 2011). The estimated population is 58.377 million in Burma (2008-2009) and the budget for health care sector is just allocated 1.3% of total budget for the whole nation; it is equivalent to about \$2 per person a year (Voice of America (VOA), 2011). The healthcare system in Burma is provided jointly by the public (government) and the private sector.”<sup>2</sup>

1) The fundamental principle and Detailed Principles adopted by the National Convention in drafting the State Constitution

2) Health care in burma

The Burmese government wants to be legitimate but the health care sector is only 1.3 percent of total budget for the whole nation so the rural people can't receive health care. This irresponsibility of the Burmese government toward improving the health of the people gives no legitimacy to the government in its claims as a government for the people.

Even though the Burmese government has the responsibility to provide healthcare, they have failed in this responsibility in Pruso Township. Karenni State is controlled by the Burmese government but the government does not support any medicine, clinics, or doctors for the villagers. The government has not built a clinic for the villagers and villagers do not receive any medicine from the government.

According to UDHR section (3),

“For all of the citizens have the right to life, liberty and security of person.”<sup>3</sup>

The Burmese government signed the UDHR in 1948. However, the health situation in these villages shows that the government has not taken responsibility for the UDHR agreement.

There is not only a lack of health care but also a lack of education in these areas. They do not provide any education for the villagers. Also in the 2008 Constitution,

According to the fundamental principle and detailed principles adopted by the national convention in drafting the state constitution, education it is laid down that:

17 (c) “the state shall implement free compulsory primary education system,”<sup>4</sup>

In reality, the villagers have been denied this opportunity for education.

One villager stated,

*“I have five children but I can't support all of for my children's education because I do not have money to give to the school for my children's school fees. I can support only two children. But I can support only for the primary school for them. After primary school, they have to work and help me for family. Because for the secondary school the children have to go to attend the township so I can't support them for it. So if they become a little bit adult they help us and family.”<sup>5</sup>*

## Transportation Difficulties

It is very difficult to travel to the villages that I researched because they are very far from the township. This causes a major problem when the villagers are sick and must travel to the township to receive medical treatment. The 2008 Constitution states,

According to the Fundamental Principle and Detailed Principles adopted by the National Convention in drafting the State Constitution,

---

3) According to UDHR section 3

4) The fundamental principle and Detailed Principles adopted by the National Convention in drafting the State Constitution

5) Interview 1 with villager on in Htaykho village pruso township 16th Sep 2011

*"In connection with the national races, it is laid down that- section 11(c) the state shall promote socio-economic development including education, health, economy, transport and communications of less developed national races."*<sup>6</sup>

In reality, this is only a promise on paper; none of this development has reached the Kayaw people in these villages. The government does not provide any of this development to support the villagers. If the villagers become sick, they have to go to Pruso where the clinic is located. The villages and Pruso are only connected by one road which the villagers must maintain themselves; the



*The road is very bad and people have to pull the truck along the road because it is stuck and slip along the road*

government does not help with the maintenance of the road. During the rainy season, it is not possible for motorbikes or cars to drive on the road from the villages to Pruso Township. During this season, the sick must either walk or be carried the whole day to reach the hospital to receive treatment. During the dry season, a truck runs 3 times per week connecting the villages and Pruso but many villagers cannot afford the transportation fees. So many people must walk even when the truck is available. Transportation is one of the greatest problems because the villagers must walk the whole day even for any emergency case.

A villager from Htay Kho village said,

*"I had to carry the patient to the main town to get treatment. It was very difficult transportation, especially in the rainy season; it takes about one day to reach the township hospital. If we have a clinic, medicine and doctor in our village, we don't need to try hard for a cure like that. As for me, there is no relative in the township, and to live in there even one day is very difficult for us because everything is so strange to us. And we don't know how to go how to buy something so it was also the biggest problems for us."*<sup>7</sup>

The transportation is a central problem for the villagers because it stops the villagers from reaching doctors to receive treatment. If transportation situation was improved, even if there was no clinic in their villages, it would be easier for the villagers to receive treatment and to visit the doctors. A villager said,

*"Last week, I was sick but I did not get any treatment and I did not go anywhere. Because of the*

6) The fundamental principle and Detailed Principles adopted by the National Convention in drafting the State Constitution

7) Interview 2 with villagers in Htaykho village pruso township on 15th Sep 2011.



*rain, the road was very rough so I couldn't walk to visit the doctors.”<sup>8</sup>*

If the villagers go to the township with the truck, they have to pull the truck along the road because the road is very bad. There are often stuck along the road. It is a dangerous for the villagers.

## High Costs of Health Care in Pruso Township and the Economic and Social Consequences

The villagers in this region are too poor to support their health care. Their average income is less than 1000 kyats per day. Their income is only enough to support their livelihood, not enough to provide for the health care.



*Children with diarrhea without any treatment*

A villager said,

*“When I go to the hospital, the doctors ask me for the money first. If I don't have money, he will not give me treatment. I have to borrow money from others for my medicine costs. It is difficult for us to go to the clinic.”<sup>9</sup>*

Most of the villagers cannot afford to go to the clinic or hospital to visit the doctor because the average cost for one visit is 4000 kyats or more, more than the income of 4 full days of work. This does not include the cost of medicine. To buy medicine to treat the common problems of malaria, diarrhea, cough and skin disease, villagers usually must pay between 2,000 and 7,000 kyats for one person. Because the villagers' income is extremely small and inconsistent, they cannot afford either to see the doctor or to buy the medicine prescribed.

A villager said,

8) Interview 3 with villagers in Homotee village pruso township on 12th Sep 2011

9) Interview 4 with the villager in Homotee village pruso township on 11th Sep 2011

*"I do not know how to prevent diarrhea. We don't have clinic doctor in our village. If I get sick but if I can still move, I do not take any medicine and I don't care about it. After that it becomes better. Last year, my child got severely sick and I went to the hospital but did not have enough money for medicine so the doctor did not give care to him. [Because he did not receive care] I lost him. So I don't want to go to the hospital any more. They just ask me for the money first. So now if I get sick, I don't go anywhere. In my village we have traditional medicine. I just take the traditional medicine. The communities do not respond when the villagers get sick. I don't want to spend lot money to pay for the health care. Because I don't have money for it."*<sup>10</sup>

The high costs of health care can cause social conflict between the villagers. The villagers cannot afford their health costs but in the emergency, they have to borrow money from someone for treatment. A villager said,

*"My husband got sick and I went to the doctors in town,, I did not have money for my husband so I borrowed from the other. But until now I can't return money to her so she does not like me so much and talks about me to others. We don't have any more relationship,"*<sup>11</sup>

Most doctors and nurses earn their living by getting money from patients since the government gives such little money to support health care. Even if the patient is having an emergency, the doctors ask about the money first; without money, they never cure the patients. The medicine costs are also very expensive; even one Paracetamol is 50 Kyats, a large amount of money for villagers. The high price of seeing a doctor and buying medicine means that even if people are sick, they do not get any healthcare.

## Taxes

Both of the local ethnic armed groups, the KNPFL (Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front) and the KNPP (Karenni National Peoples Party), tell the village leaders to collect money from the villagers. So the village leaders become responsible for collecting money. Both armed groups claim they will use this money to better the transportation infrastructure and to build a clinic but in reality, there is no improvement. If the village leaders do not collect the money from the villagers, they will be punished by the armed groups and forced to do work for them. This places the village leaders in a very difficult position. The village leaders ask the villagers for money, claiming it will be used for infrastructure development, but until now nothing has changed for the villagers.

A villager said,

*"The village leader asked money from us for building a clinic in the villages and for the transportation but, until now, we don't see any clinic and nothing has changed for the transportation. Where*

---

10) Interview 5 with the villager in Htaykho village pruso township on 16 Sep 2011

11) Interview 6 with villager in Homotee village pruso township on 12th Sep 2011

*the money goes I don't know; they just ask often. If I don't have money, I have to borrow from my neighbor to give to the village leader.”<sup>12</sup>*

The village leaders have to be afraid of the ethnic armed groups and also try to protect the villagers. The leaders know about the villagers' situation and the poverty of the villagers. This creates a major problem for the village leaders. A leader from Haty Kho said,

*“I want my region to really develop but because of the situation, it has not developed yet. Some of the villagers think that I took money from them [for myself] because I did not do anything for them. But in reality, the money is not in my hand, it all goes to ethnic armed groups. I don't know what they do [with the money].”<sup>13</sup>*

## Lack of Health Care

Since there is no medicine, no clinic, no doctors and no nurses for villagers, the health situation is very bad. Villagers suffer from many infectious diseases, especially malaria, diarrhea and skin infections. If villagers are sick, there is no doctor and no medicine at all so they have to depend on traditional healers to cure their diseases and illness.

A villager said,

*“I took the medicine from traditional healer when I was sick. But I can't give her cost of medicine yet because I have no money to pay it. In this situation, I have to work for her the whole day in farm work when I feel better. One good point is we can share our labor in our work alternatively. If our families are in good health, we are sure to be happy in a secure life.”<sup>14</sup>*

In the rainy season, many villagers suffer from diarrhea but do not get any treatment. Due to lack of treatment and healthcare, two villagers in Homotee village died from diarrhea during this rainy season. As the children have weaker immunity than adults, they have an even greater problem with diarrhea. Outbreaks of the disease occur and outbreak quickly and children are very vulnerable. In Rikhibu village, a villager said,

*“During this time [rainy season], most children are feeling the diarrhea outbreak and it spreads from one to another in the village consequently. But we do not have treatment for our children. We just look after and just give them the traditional medicine. We want a clinic, medicine and a doctor for our villagers.”<sup>15</sup>*

The lack of health care creates a very bad situation for the local people. Everyone should have

---

12) Interview 7 with the villager on in Homotee village pruso township 11th Sep 2011

13) Interview 8 with the villager on in Htaykho village pruso township 15th sep 2011

14) Interview 9 with the villager on in Htaykho village pruso township 16th Sep 2011

15) Interview 10 with the villager in Rikheebu village in pruso township on 25th Sep 2011

the chance for health care but in rural areas, they did not get any treatment.

Most of villagers are facing many diseases, especially malaria, diarrhea, skin disease and others. They have many diseases but they do not have any treatment. Malaria is a common disease in the villages. This disease occurs every year and most of the villagers suffer this disease. It can occur in every season.

A villager said,

*"I have to work and try hard for my family very much but I don't have enough money to use. I can't spend the money when my family member get sick and can't reach the hospital because of no money and have to go to the town for treatment so I can't afford it. I grow the paddy, corn, beans and other vegetables. I have to go to the hill land and I have to sleep in my compound for working my cultivation. After finished my growing and cleaning my plants, I came back to my house and I got sick. I got headache, body pain and weakness. I can't eat very well after my working. I want to go to visit the doctors but I don't have money. Until now it does not get better yet."*<sup>16</sup>

The villagers do not know how to prevent the malaria. They need mosquito nets and medicine to prevent malaria. Because in this region, malaria is the main outbreak disease for the villagers.

Diarrhea breaks out immediately in the rainy season. This disease mostly affects children. This disease occurs because of the lack of hygiene, lack of sanitation and using the dirty water. The villagers do not have general knowledge about the sanitation. So they are suffering the disease. A villager said,

*"In our village we face many diseases but now the most is diarrhea and skin disease. Most of the children suffer these diseases but we do not get treatment anywhere and we do not get any support. A person who has money goes to the town for treatment but most of us can't reach to the township for the treatment. Because of the lack of health care, one patient died last month and four patients are still facing the disease without treatment."*<sup>17</sup>

When the villagers are sick, they just ask and visit to their traditional healers. Some of them are better but some are still not better yet.

A villager said,

*"My child has had itching in his body for three weeks. I do not know what I have to do for my son and how can I do [it] for him. I go to the traditional medic to treat my son, and she give me some medicine lotion but it does not get better yet. If you have some medicines, give them to me."*<sup>18</sup>

---

16) Interview 11 with the villager in Raipra village in pruso township on 21st sep 2011

17) Interview 12 with the villager in Raipra village pruso township on 21st Sep 2011

18) Interview 13 with a villager in Raipra village in pruso township on 21st Sep 2011

She does not take care of her son very well; his clothes are very dirty, he has no slipper and he is very dirty. Because of lack of the hygiene, his skin disease can spread to other children. If they know about the hygiene and sanitation, the diarrhea and skin disease will not be happen as commonly.

## Lack of Health Education and Lack of Sanitary Infrastructure

Villagers in this area need to know about health education in order to have secure, healthy lifestyles and to prevent the spread of disease. Because they have no health education, the villagers live with very poor sanitation and disease commonly spreads; this causes villagers to live with very poor health conditions.

In all four villages, there was no one with knowledge of health education that could share this information with the villagers. There is not even a single high school graduate in any of the four villages. In Raipra village, there are two teachers who only finished secondary school and now teach primary school students. They do not have any knowledge of health education.

Drinking beer is a tradition among these villages. Sorghum, a type of grain, is used to produce the traditional beer. The beer pot is put in the centre of the stove with a pipe inside it, without any lid. Not only the adults but also children regularly drink the beer. Due to lack of systematic storage methods, disease carriers such as houseflies and other insects can rest in this pot. This causes the beer to become infected and it becomes one of the factors causing the outbreak of diarrhea and other diseases in the village.

There is no sewage system or toilets in the villages. Most of villagers do not know how to use a toilet and so they do not build them. This causes very poor sanitation which causes the spread of disease. The villagers are unaware of the problems caused by the bad sanitation. The people use the area directly under their house as their bathroom. The waste remains directly beneath where the people live. This attracts many flies and other disease carrying insects which remain very close to the villagers' homes. This behavior creates a very unhygienic environment for the villagers, especially the children. In Rekhibu village, a villager said,

*"I do not use a toilet because it is natural for me to waste outside."*<sup>19</sup>

The water system is another major source of illness for the villagers. In each village, there is only one source of water for the villagers: a stream close to the village. They use this stream for cooking, drinking and washing. Because there is no sewage system, during the rainy season, the human and animal waste is washed into the stream, causing the water to become contaminated. This is a major cause of skin disease, and diarrhea outbreak in these villages. After only one week spent in the research area, I developed skin irritation on my leg due to the unclean water.

People in this area only bathe once or twice per week. In fact, the villagers who do own soap use it to wash their clothes and do not want to use it up by washing their hands. They never wash their hands with soap. Because of eating with dirty hands, diarrhea and other outbreaks are common. Most villagers own two or three sets of clothes; some only own one set. The villagers

---

19) Interview 14 with a villager in Rikheebu village in pruso township on 25th Sep 2011

only wash their clothing every 2 or 3 weeks, the same clothes wear all day while working in the fields. Most don't have enough soap for washing their clothes.

*"I just wash my clothes 3 times per a month and I take a bath 2 times per three weeks. Because this region is very cold, I don't want to wash and take bath any more. I do not have any soap for washing too."*<sup>20</sup>

- Raipra villager

*"In my village there is no one to tell us about health education and how to use water. So I know nothing about what is sanitation. I want to know but I do not have a chance to know. If I know about the sanitation, I hope the disease will be reduced more than before,"*<sup>21</sup>

- Woman from Reghibu village.

The government does not provide any teachers for the villagers. When a teacher was assigned by the government to Htaykho village 2-3 years ago, the teacher only remained for 1-2 months because the location is far from the township and there was not enough support given by the government, villagers or KNPLF.

Because of lack of the health education, most families in those areas are large; they have many children in their family. They do not know about the family planning so the population is increasing in those areas and the parents cannot support for their children's education and for their children health care.

As a result of having no teachers, people are illiterate and children have less chance of becoming educated people. If there were people who could share their knowledge to the villagers, the villages' situation could change positively. All of the villagers are of a recognized ethnic group in Myanmar; they have national identity cards and citizenship. Still, the government ignores this kind of minority ethnic people who live along hill sides very far away from urban states.

All of these problems can be solved by the government doing things such as providing teachers for the villages with enough salary, creating infrastructure development, building one clinic for each village tract, and providing qualified medics and enough medicine for villages' health care. If the children can learn very well in the school with skillful teachers assigned by the government, they can get the knowledge from school about how to live in a healthy and happy life style with their family members. This lack of education causes many diseases like diarrhea, skin disease, and malaria to spread.

---

20) Interview 15 with a villager in Raipra village in pruso township on 21st Sep 2011

21) Interview 16 with a villager in Rikheebu village in pruso township on 25 Sep 2011



## Conclusion

Healthcare and health education are is very important for people to live healthy, happy lives. The villagers in Pruso Township are very unhealthy because of their lack of healthcare and health education. According to the 2008 Constitution, in accord with the health policy laid down by the state, every citizen in Burma should have the right to health care. But the government does not take the responsibility for the people who live in rural areas. Because of the lack of the responsibility of the government, the villagers in those areas do not receive any treatment; the ethnic armed groups also do not support anything for the villagers so the disease outbreaks in those areas increase. The villagers in those areas can produce their own food if they are healthy. So the villagers need a person who knows and understands health education to share this knowledge to the villagers. Without any support from the government and ethnic armed groups, the villagers cannot develop the villages in systematic ways. If they have health care and health education, the villagers are can work well for their livelihoods and can be happy. The villagers also need sanitation and need to use the water in systematically clean ways. The health care in Karenni State really needs to improve and really needs the support from the government, ethnic armed groups and from the other organizations. My organization also provided some medicine for health care and also for the education but it is not enough because my organization is a small organization. But we helped the villagers as much as we can. We really need to join to the border organization for helping villagers.

## Recommendations

### *To the Burmese government:*

- » Provide a clinic for each village
- » Support enough medicine and doctors for the villagers
- » Provide health education to local leaders and/or hire teachers to provide information about health care and hygiene
- » Allow the NGOs to implement health care project in those areas
- » Provide teachers for the children to get knowledge of health education and other subjects
- » Build the infrastructure for the villagers

### *To the Ethnic Armed Groups*

- » Reduce taxes asked from the villagers
- » Set policy to raise health care system by discussing with the government about the education status of their people and infrastructure development
- » Stop collecting child soldiers

### *To the village leaders*

- » Clean compound and have personal cleanliness
- » Advocate to government and armed groups explaining their current situation
- » Stop getting bribes from poor villagers
- » Contact the ethnic armed groups and the government to provide the health care and health education for the villagers

### *To the villagers*

- » Build toilets with locally available materials such as bamboo and wood far away from the drinking water source
- » Prevent any waste from the household from being thrown into the stream to protect the drinking water from pollution
- » Create systematical ways of disposing waste by digging compost holes at the corners of the compound

# Dawei Development Project is Creating the Negative Impacts of Land Confiscation, Changing Lifestyles, and Lack of Livelihoods for Local People East and West of Dawei

by Thukha Thakhin

## Introduction

A place which is rich with white sand beaches, crystal clear water and an abundance of marine life, a place with honest and innocent people with beautiful smiles, will be destroyed by the deep sea port and industrial estate with cross-border road and railways corridors that is being constructed in Dawei/Tavoy district, Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Region, Southern Myanmar/Burma.<sup>1</sup>

A new deep sea port and special economic zone will cover about 250 square kilometers (97 square miles) and will affect a total population of 32,274 including 3,977 households within 21 villages in Yebyu and Launglon townships near Tavoy.

Problems related to the loss of local livelihoods and land confiscation will occur not only at the place where the



1) Dawei is formerly known as Tavoy. This report uses both of the words Dawei and Tavoy.



*Tavoyans rowing a boat*

deep sea port and industrial estate is being built but also in villages all the way to the Thai border. The Nabule area, the original homeland of the Tavoyan people and a place rich in cultural heritage, will be destroyed because of the industrial zone project.

Even though preparatory work on some parts of the project such as road building and construction of houses for workers has already begun, residents of the area still haven't been told how the plan to build what is expected to become Southeast Asia's biggest special economic zone will affect them. They have not been informed how compensation will take place and who will take responsibility for compensation. They also don't know how they will survive after relocation if they have no land to grow food and no place to fish.

A villager from Htein Gyi, one of the villages to be relocated, said,

*"We are worried about our land. We want to know the procedure [concerning compensation and the possibility of land confiscation] clearly but so far no information has been provided. So we don't know whether we are going to grow our crops or if we should stop our job. Some of my neighbours have stopped working on their plantations with the feeling that it is meaningless to grow crops on land that could be confiscated. We all feel upset about this project."*<sup>2</sup>

This report focuses on the issues of livelihoods and land confiscation in the area of East and West of Dawei and potential impacts that will occur because of this project. Although this huge project will have many negative impacts on the local communities, most domestic and international institutions have tended to focus mainly on its possible impact on the country's economy. Most reports have highlighted how Dawei will become the region's biggest and most modern

---

2) Interview 1-9-2011



(Left) A truck carrying building materials travels to a construction site of Dawei Development Project on a recently constructed road

(Upper Right) Housing and accommodation for Thai workers on the Dawei Development Project site

(Lower Right) Signboard near Development Project site

seaport, providing a shortcut between Europe and mainland Southeast Asia. They believe it could possibly help transform Burma's economy in the same way that Shenzhen marked China's first step along the way to becoming an economic superpower.<sup>3</sup> However, they don't mention the lack of opportunities for local people who are being exploited and their rights that are being abused.

## Research Methodology

Most of the data in this report comes from primary sources from the villages of Htein Gyi, Mudu, Nyaung Bin Seik, Le Shaung, Ma Yin Gye, Yebyu township and Kamaung Thwe village tract from Myitta township and some is from secondary sources such as websites and reports. Quantitative and qualitative data will be provided in this report. Data was collected for this report between the 1st of September 2011 and the 6th of October 2011.

Altogether there were 15 interviewees: 5 from Myitta township Eastern Dawei, 8 from Yebyu township in Western Dawei and 2 are from sources who are currently doing research at the deep sea port area. Additionally, I conducted two focus-group discussions, one east of Dawei and one west of Dawei. Most data was written but some interviews in Eastern Dawei were recorded.

## Background of ITD and Dawei Development Project

ITD (Italian Thai Development Public Company Limited) was founded on the 15th of August 1958 and registered on the stock exchange market (SET) on the 9th of August 1994. At present,

3) < <http://dengruo.info/201011/dawei-myanmar-hong-kong-special-economic-zone-started-weaving-shenzhen-dream/> accessed on 22.10.2011





*Children play at the entrance to village in Nabule area*

ITD is the biggest construction company in Thailand with assets totally 51,826 million baht<sup>4</sup> or 1,727 million USD. Most the business operations of ITD are involved in 9 major categories:<sup>5</sup>

- » Building
- » Industrial plants
- » Pipelines and utility works
- » Highways, railways, bridges and expressways
- » Airports, ports and marine works
- » Dams, tunnels and power plants
- » Mining
- » Steel Structures
- » Telecommunications

The four main key activities of ITD in Burma involve, firstly, giving a 3.79 million USD loan in 2007 to the Defense Ministry of the Union of Myanmar to finance the construction of a steel mill in Myanmar. Secondly, they are building a coal mine and coal power plant in Muang KoK in Shan State to export coal and electricity to Thailand, in agreement with a tariff MOU with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to sell 369 megawatts of electricity to Thailand over the next 5 years. Thirdly, they are conducting feasibility studies for the construction of hydropower dams that could produce up to 800 megawatts of electricity in Shan State and

4) As of 31.3.2011

5) ITD annual report 2010



Tanintharyi Region. And finally, they are conducting a feasibility study to investigate the Dawei Deep Sea Port and the creation of a special economic zone.

On the 19th of May 2008, in Singapore, Myanmar and Thailand signed an MOU<sup>6</sup> for the development of the Dawei Deep Seaport and a road link to Bangkok. On the 12th of June 2008, the MOU was signed between Myanmar Port Authority (MPA) and (ITD). ITD has created the Dawei Development Company Ltd to operate and construct the deep-sea port and related infrastructure.<sup>7</sup>

On the 2nd of November 2010, the Company signed the Framework Agreement in Nay-Pyi-Daw with the MPA and the Ministry of Transport of the Union of Myanmar to develop the Dawei Deep Sea Port, Industrial Estate and Road Link to Thailand. This agreement is a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT)<sup>8</sup> concession which will be valid for a term of 60 years; plus an extension period as agreed upon.<sup>9</sup>

The project includes the construction of the Dawei Deep Seaport, creating buildings for the shipyard and maintenance work and the establishment of zones for petrochemical industries, an oil refinery, a steel plant, power stations and the Dawei-Bangkok motor road and railroad with the laying of oil pipelines along the motorway and railroad. The project will be implemented in three phases over ten years.

An area of 250 square kilometers has been designated for the total project: 20.9 square kilometers to build two heavy industrial zones, 65.1 square kilometers for one medium-heavy industrial zone, 58.9 square kilometers for one medium industrial zone and 43 square kilometers for one light industrial zone. 13.5 square kilometers will be reserved for a public area with roads and parks and 20 square kilometers will serve as the township community center. A power station that can generate 4000 megawatts will be built for the whole project. For distribution of adequate water supply in the project area, a dam that can store 219 million cubic meters of water will be built and water will be supplied through a water purifying plant that can supply 975,000 cubic meters a day.

## Reasons Dawei was Chosen as the Location for the Deep Sea Port

There are many reasons why Dawei has been chosen to build the deep seaport and the industrial estate that will be the first-ever special economic zone in Burma. It is both a geographically and commercially strategic location. Furthermore, it is likely to allow Thailand to relocate its dirty industries to Myanmar. Furthermore, in Burma, there is a lack of resistance and obstacle towards such large scale, and potentially environmentally destructive industries.

---

6) Memorandum of Understanding

7) Thailand Country report on The Twelfth Sub regional Transport Forum Meeting 12-14 August 2008 in Danang, Viet Nam

8) A type of arrangement in which the private sector builds an infrastructure project, operates it and eventually transfers ownership of the project to the government.

9) "ITD signed the Framework Agreement to develop the Dawei Deep Sea Port, Union of Myanmar," Italian-Thai Development Plc., available at < [http://www.itd.co.th/en/news\\_02Nove53.php](http://www.itd.co.th/en/news_02Nove53.php) > accessed on 18 Oct 2011

- » It is a good location geographically for port development because:
- » Natural water depth is able to accommodate large-size vessels
- » Natural shelter is good for anchorage
- » No physical underwater and sub-soil obstructions for approach channel and port basins
- » Sufficient flat hinterland for Industrial Estate in order to support or create throughput for the port
- » Economical transportation for the road and rail links between Dawei Port and Thailand
- » Sufficient supply of local construction materials

Commercially, it stands as a strategic location that lies within the East-West corridor of Asia. On completion, the deep-sea port will play a major role in removing trade barrier in some regions in Asia including Myanmar and Thailand. The present Dawei deep-sea port project stands as one of the main priorities among future programs of the seven-member Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which now comprises of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal. On completion of the project, cargo vessels from the Middle East, Africa and Europe can avoid crossing the Malacca Strait for access to China, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos. A study carried out by Myanmar experts also revealed that these cargo ships from the region could save about 1,250 nautical miles (2,316 nautical km) and four days' time compared with transiting through Singapore. Once the project is implemented, it could carry out trade from the Dawei deep-sea port with Bangkok within a day, which is only a 300 kilometers' voyage, maritime officials also said.<sup>10</sup>

On the 11th of October 2010, the Bangkok Post published a revealing interview with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. In this interview, he said, "Thailand needed to diversify its development strategy and stop relying so much on heavy industry. I don't think the people want it in their backyard." He also assured his fellow Thais in his weekly television address that dirty industries are moving to Burma: "Some industries are not suitable to be located in Thailand. This is why they decided to set up there [in Dawei]."<sup>11</sup>

For Thai companies, the business environment in Myanmar could hardly be more different, or convenient, from that at home. In Thailand, new private development requires environmental impact reports and hearings with local residents, obstacles that have hindered a number of high-profile projects. There has been significant resistance to the construction of such factories on the grounds that they are known to cause a wide variety of serious environmental and health problems. Rather than address these concerns, however, Thai companies now see the Dawei Special Economic Zone as way of avoiding them. By moving to Burma, Thai companies can leave behind

10) Xinhua News, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/business/2010-12/02/c\\_13631933\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/business/2010-12/02/c_13631933_2.htm)

11) According to an article in The International Herald Tribune (An Industrial Project That Could Change Myanmar, Nov. 26, 2010),

some of environmental problems of Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate in Thailand<sup>12</sup> which caused at least 2,000 cancer-related death local residents or seriously sickened by the intense pollution.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Burma has no laws mandating environmental impact assessments for large-scale projects<sup>14</sup> and because its citizens don't have the freedom of speech or assembly, therefore, the communities have no say in the decision-making processes that may lead to their destruction.



*Mab Ta Phut Industrial Estate in Rayong Province, Thailand*

## Background of Dawei

The Thaninthayi region, which is the most southern part of the Myanmar, is comprised of three districts, which are divided into 10 townships and some sub-townships. It borders Mon state in the north, Thailand in the south and east and the Andaman Sea in the west and covers an area of 16,735 sq miles. Dawei is the capital city of Thaninthayi region in the coastal area of Southern Myanmar. Dawei District is one of the three districts of Thaninthayi region and is bounded by Mawlamyine District to the north, Myeik District to the south, Thailand to the east and Andaman Sea to the west. The Dawei District covers an area of 5407.09 sq miles.

The Dawei area is notable for the local dialect, a highly intonated variant of the Myanmar language. Although often linked to Bagan words, a majority of Dawei's particular vocabulary is indigenous Dawei. Dawei is endowed with natural resources and has many ancient cites with a long history.

12) Bangkok Post , <http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/214463/>

13) <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/101east/2010/04/20104219545638882.html>

14) In 2011 January, The Dawei Special Economic Zone Law was released, however it seems to cater industries rather than protect environment.



(Left) A child carries vegetables collected from the forest

(Upper right) The entrance of Htein Gyee village with paddy fields

(Lower right) A signboard of ITD that shows zone near the cashew nut plantation

## Deprivation of Livelihoods

### *Livelihoods of Local People*

*“There is no other place like our village. We have a lot of resources such as food and materials for building. We don’t need to work here; we can survive without doing a paid job. Just by going to the chaung (small river), we can catch fish, and picking up vegetables here and there, we have enough to cook and eat. Now such a wonderful place will be destroyed. I am very concerned that we cannot access such a place elsewhere.”<sup>15</sup>*

These words are from a villager of Ma Yin Gyee, one of six villages that are going to be relocated soon. The villages, Htein Gyee, Ma Yin Gyee, Pa Ra Dat, Mu Du, Le Shaung, from Yebyu Township and one village, Nyaung Bin Seik, from Laung Lon Township are going to be relocated. The main livelihoods of these villagers are farming, fishing and working on plantations. The total population of these six villages is 10,430 of which 59.3% are farmers. There are altogether 4,038 acres (16.34Km<sup>2</sup>) of paddy fields in these villages with one acre producing about 50 baskets of paddy. According to local farmers, the market price is between 350,000(542 USD) and 400,000 kyats (620 USD) for 100 baskets of paddy.

Plantations currently account for 26.9% of the workforce. The main crops that the villagers grow are cashew nut trees, areca nut trees and rubber trees. They also grow some trees such as mango, coconut, tamarind, durian and jackfruits. There are about 9,270 acres (37.51 Km<sup>2</sup>) of plantations in these areas. The market price of the best quality rubber is 3,100kyats (4.8 USD) per

15) Interview 2-9-2011



one viss (about 1.63Kg). They earn 14,400 kyats (22 USD) per one rubber tree in one year. The market price for cashew nut is 12,600kyats (19.4 USD) per one viss (1.63Kg). This illustrates that over 86% of the workforce depends on their land which is the source of their jobs, their food, their lives, and their society; this is the place they love.

Fishing accounts for 2.4% of the work force. They earn on average 4000 to 5000 kyats per day. There are usually between 4 and 7 people per fishing boat. However, now most of the fishermen have stopped fishing because they can no longer easily fish where they did before. This is because ITD is carrying out surveys in the area and there are many technical tools that limit the fishermen's access, as well as a number of restricted areas in the water itself. The fishermen are also reluctant to carry on fishing because they are intimidated by the arrival of many strangers. This has led to many fishermen choosing instead to take jobs as daily workers for ITD Company and Max Myanmar Company.

*"The place full of peace has been faced with storm. There is no crime such as rape or stealing. Girls who work for rubber plantation go out to produce rubber at about 4am in the morning. But they are safe. You can leave your property anywhere in the village and no one would steal it. Now there are many strangers coming and going all the time and the community, which was previously peaceful and unified, now has many problems. Some people want to sell their land for compensation that hasn't been agreed yet. Some want to keep their land to grow crops. We need land to grow. This is our survival. We can do nothing without land,"*

- Villager from Mudu village, Yebyu Township, Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region<sup>16</sup>

Some local residents have also stopped working on long-term plantations such as rubber plantations, fearing that these rubber trees are going to be cut down seeing little point in continuing to cultivate the plantation. However, some continue their work but are worried that if they lose their lands, they will face difficulties. One of the villagers from Nabule area said,

*"I have no idea of how we will survive if our lands were gone. We have been working on these lands for generations and this is our traditional job. I heard that there will be a big project at our village. I prayed it would not come true. But my hope was not fulfilled. It seems bad luck is coming to me."*<sup>17</sup>

Some of Burma's top businessmen as well local business people have bought land near the project site, hoping to cash in on what they see as a place with the potential for delivering large profits. Residents of villages near the project area, most of whom make a modest living through farming or fishing, have said that locals can no longer afford to buy land because the price has increased 5 to 10 times by 3-4 million kyats (4651 USD –6201 USD) per acre, extreme price inflation. This is a consequence of speculative outsiders coming to the local community and

---

16) Interview 3-9-2011

17) Interview 4-9-2011

opening banks, hotels and other businesses.

Before the project, many local people had hoped that the project would create many high paying job opportunities. But in reality, they have to work very hard from 9 to 5 and they earn just 3,500 to 4,000 kyats per day. One youth who graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering and applied for a construction engineer position said,

*"We hoped that we would get paid as much as the Thai workers, but actually [the payment] is different. Also the accommodation where workers live is also different, with Thai workers staying in good conditions while we have to sleep on the concrete floor with a small mat. So I quit my job and now I am working my own job. It is said that this project could bring many advantages, but we are in trouble now. We have no opportunity. Even brick kiln that sells bricks for construction is not from Dawei. That is owned by a businessman from another place. What opportunity is there for us?"<sup>18</sup>*

## Land Confiscation

*"I have depended on my rubber plantation throughout my life. I have no skills for other work. We can do nothing if the plantation is confiscated because my whole family relies on this plantation. I feel very worried that my land is on the list on the government's document. I'm also concerned that my land will be confiscated without compensation or with a very low price"<sup>19</sup>*

In Yebyu Township, township authorities and the local land-surveying groups started to collect ownership lists of the locals who live in the area of Dawei deep-sea port project in January 2011. But until now, there has been no information provided to the local residents whether their land is going to be confiscated or not, as well as how they will be relocated.

*"As they [local authorities] marked our plants, we felt awkward. I have 10 acres of cashew nut plants, but, I can't decide whether to continue my cultivation or neglect my plants. I don't mind to continue my work. I know my plantation will be confiscated one day. In this region, cashew nuts are the first choice to cultivate and the second most popular is rubber plants. We have made an investment for a long time and now our plantation will be destroyed due to this project. We can't hope that the compensation will be a great amount for our plantations as compensation will pass through government and local authority."<sup>20</sup>*

People in Tavoy have already had a similar kind of experience in the case of the French gas pipeline compensation 15 years ago in Kanbauk.<sup>21</sup> The company gave nearly full compensation

---

18) Interview 5-9-2011

19) Interview 6-9-2011

20) Interview 7-9-2011

21) Kanbauk is in Kalein Aung Sub-township north of Dawei.



but the government appropriated this and landowners got only one-fifth of the value of their property. Therefore, the people in this region do not believe in the promises of the government for providing compensation.

*"Whatever project is implemented, we are the people who suffer. In this region, over the 20 year period of this military government, the railways, the roads and the French gas pipeline were built [supposedly] for this country's development. Wherever the project was implemented, the civilians were driven to rock bottom. Only the foreigners who cooperated with the government have benefited from the development. As a result, we have declined from our original lives and have become paupers. This project will mirror the old events. We have to move from our places and work like slaves in a foreign country. The process will happen in this way. Nothing is different."*<sup>22</sup>

So the acquisition of land for the project will be the main issue in Tavoy. Under Burma's domestic law, certain land types are protected and cannot be confiscated by authorities without following procedures for fair compensation.<sup>23</sup> Burma also recognized additional land confiscation protections apply to indigenous ethnic minorities when it endorsed the U.N Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration provides that,

*"No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation, and where possible, with the option of return."*<sup>24</sup>

However, cultivators in Burma have effectively lost the right to own land, as under sections 9-12 of the Agricultural Lands Act 1953 the right to transfer, partition or lease land can only occur with permission of the authorities. In the 1963 Tenancy Act, the State usurped the right of landowners to lease their land and the 1963 'Protection of the right to cultivation' Act stipulated that land would be protected from confiscation, except in the case of a) non-payment of dues owing to the State, and b) disputes arising from inheritance cases or actions taken by the State for security reasons. The State was further granted authority to confiscate land through Notification No. 4/78, which was enacted on September 18, 1978. This notification states that failure to sow the allotted land with the earmarked crops to obtain optimum results, or failure to sell the full crop quota to the government at the stipulated price, would result in confiscation of land. Currently village and township administrators have the power to confiscate land and the cultivators are compelled to follow their dictates with no means of protest.<sup>25</sup>

Villagers are worried about where they will be relocated and how they will be compensated for the loss of their land, but do not expect to have any consultation in the matter.

---

22) Human Rights Foundation of Monland

23) Burma Land acquisition Act(1894)

24) UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, article 32,

25) <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/yearbooks/5.%20Deprivation%20of%20Livelihood.htm>

“If they order us to move, we can’t resist,”<sup>26</sup> a villager from Nabule, in the project area.

In the east of Dawei, in Myitta sub-township, land and tenure has historically been regulated by customary law, a type of law created by community consensus. From the British colonial era, customary law was formalized in some parts of Burma and this practice continues to an extent today. Though all laws passed since the 1962 military coup extend to the whole country, customary tenure may be taken into consideration up to today. The land in this area is not formally or fully registered with the Settlement and Land Records Department (SLRD) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MoAI), which is responsible for the certification and tax assessment of agricultural lands. The standard and most widespread rule of customary law that is now applied in Myitta is “dama-ucha” in Burmese, which means that the one who cultivates the land becomes the owner. The land is inherited from parents by children by the parents deciding which child owns which portions of the land; there is no official government document. Lands are also sold just by pointing the boundaries. “We all trust each other. We don’t need paper for selling and buying lands.”<sup>27</sup> The boundaries of plot ownership of each household are generally known by all villagers. At west of Dawei in Nabule area, there has been no land tax since British era.<sup>28</sup>

In Myitta area, ITD and Max Myanmar Company, which is owned by U Zaw Zaw,<sup>29</sup> counted plants to calculate compensation. But the compensation they intend to give is very low compared to the actual income that a plant can produce. The appraisal is 9,000 kyats for one cashew plant, 15,000 kyats for one big rubber plant, 9,000 kyats for one middle rubber plant and 5,000 kyats for one small rubber plant. This amount of money is very low considering that only one rubber plant can earn up to 14,400 kyats per year. The villagers from Myitta village submitted a letter<sup>30</sup> to the regional Minister to get fair and adequate compensation. But there has, as yet, been no response. In the letter, they asked for 30,000 kyats for one big rubber tree.<sup>31</sup>

In both the areas east and west of Dawei, the local people have not been consulted about the project but were told by a local leader that they would have to move. They were offered land elsewhere, but it was not suitable for grazing cattle or cultivating rice, their main occupations, due to the mountainous geography and sand. Representatives from ITD have not made any offers to the villagers as of yet. Some negotiations have taken place but there was no progress or agreement. The Supporting Committee, formed by relevant government departments and organizations, developer or investor organizations and-representative(s) under the Dawei Special Economic Zone Law in order to support the Management Committee in the Dawei Special Economic Zone,<sup>32</sup> is now approaching local monks, which are powerful figures within the communities, hoping they can help to persuade the villagers to sign contracts on compensation.

---

26) Interview by Irrawaddy <[http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=20508](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20508)> accessed on 12.1.2011

27) Interview

28) Interview

29) He is known to maintain personal relations with Senior General Than Shwe, the country’s authoritarian military ruler. He is also the president of Myanmar Football Federation.

30) Appendix one, Page no.1

31) Appendix one, Page no.2

32) The Dawei Special Economic Zone Law , page no. 5

On September 19, the Burmese Parliament approved a Farmland Bill, which stated that if the government wants to confiscate land, the authorities must conduct a land survey, following which land may be confiscated by presidential order. But in Mindat village in Yebyu Township, land confiscation has already occurred. The plantation owners were forced to sign agreements for the confiscation of 123 acres of plantations located in the designated zone for the Dawei deep seaport project, part of the Dawei Development Project being carried out by the Italian-Thai Development Company based in Thailand.

*"We were forced to sign an agreement that said the buying and selling of land was on our own volition. Khin Maung Swe told people who refused to sign that their land would be confiscated whether they signed it or not. Owners did not want to sign the agreement, but they signed it because they didn't want to lose their land without some compensation,"*

- An owner who signed the agreement

Some owners asked for compensation of 2.5 million kyat per acre of land, but accepted lower prices to avoid loss of their land without any compensation. The amount of the compensation was tens of millions of kyat less than the current price of the land.

*"I was afraid that my plantation and inheritance would be taken at a very low price. But, it's better than losing my land without [any] compensation. I signed the agreement at their price. The notice letter did not say who or which department issued the order,"<sup>33</sup>*

- Villager

Indeed, the local residents are seriously exploited in terms of the compensation they received on their land. ITD intends to buy land for a very low price and resell at a much higher price. But ITD doesn't want to give fair and adequate compensation; they just want to profiteer from the local residents. ITD has signed a land purchase agreement for 160,000 rai for US\$37mn, which at the end will yield 110,000 rai of sellable land for industrial use. Only US\$1mn has been paid; the remaining sum will be paid after the completion of the land development.<sup>34</sup> The 110,000 rai was acquired at an average cost of 7,000-7,500 baht per rai and ITD hope could fetch an equivalent price of 4-5million baht.<sup>35</sup> In this way, ITD will get a huge profit. However, local residents will have no benefit. Not only will they lose of productive systems, commercial activities, and livelihoods, they will also lose the family homes and the group's cultural space. Many individuals will not be able to use their earlier-acquired skills at their new locations and this will lead to

33) Mizzima < <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/6032-authorities-of-dawei-deep-seaport-threaten-land-owners-to-sell-at-low-price.html> >

34) "Italian-Thai Development Plc, Weak financials; Dawei Project could exacerbate the weakness," J.P. Morgan Asia Pacific Equity Research, at 7, 23 Nov. 2010.

35) "Italian-Thai Development Plc, Weak financials; Dawei Project could exacerbate the weakness," J.P. Morgan Asia Pacific Equity Research, at 8, 23 Nov. 2010.

social and psychological problems and cause a profound unraveling of existing patterns of social organization.

While the project is developing day by day by constructing the access road from Dawei to Phu Nam Ron, local Tavoy villagers living on or near the future construction site have serious concerns for their lands. Many say that they fear that they will be relocated to make way for the project, and consequently lose their plantations, livelihoods, social communities and homeland. Communities are entirely dependent on their ability to cultivate their rice paddy, rubber and cashew crops. Without compensation that would allow these cultivators to begin new crops elsewhere, Thailand will likely see a larger number of migrant laborers arriving, as well as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in camps located along the Thai-Burma border. It is important that before this happens, communities are paid fair compensation for the land and provided with opportunity to learn about their rights and options when approaching companies to negotiate the compensation provided for land.

## Potential Impacts

Due to the lack of transparency, environmental laws, good governance and public participation in decision-making, local people will suffer severe negative impacts such as landlessness, joblessness, loss of access to common property, food insecurity as they lose their livelihood and experience health problems caused by pollution. Other possible risks are the loss of access to public services, loss of access to schooling for school-age children, and human rights abuses such as the loss of property without fair compensation, violence from security forces or risks of communal violence in resettlement areas.

The main issues that will arise from this huge project are:

- » Getting fair and adequate compensation for houses, land, plants, trees and other properties
- » Fulfilling basic economic, social and cultural rights
- » Following social responsibilities for relocation
- » Changing social and cultural life
- » Environmental and health impacts

## Conclusion

And according to The Dawei Special Economic Zone Law, article 34, “the developer or investor shall bear the expenses of transferring and paying compensation of houses, buildings, farms and gardens, orchards fields, plantation in land within the Dawei Special Economic Zone permitted by the Central Body if these are required to be transferred. Moreover, he shall carry out to fulfil fundamental needs of persons who transfer so as not to lower their original standard. The relevant management Committee shall coordinate as may be necessary for the convenience of such works.”<sup>36</sup>

---

36) Page 35, The Dawei Special Economic Zone Law issued on January 2011

## Right to Development and Self-Determination

In 1986, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration on the Right to Development, which states that “every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.” The Declaration, moreover, asserts the right of peoples to self-determination and “their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources.”<sup>37</sup>

## Right to Participation

So it is clear that the affected communities must be able to participate in different levels of decision-making. The right to participation is well grounded in the International Bill of Human Rights.<sup>38</sup> The 1991 International Labour Organisation Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries stipulates that indigenous and tribal peoples shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of national and regional development plans that affect them.<sup>39</sup>

## Right to life and livelihoods

If authorities force the local residents to move or threaten the local people, this may violate “the right to life”.<sup>40</sup> The right to livelihood is threatened by the loss of home and the means to make a living and when people are displaced from habitual residences and traditional homelands. The rights to own property and not to be arbitrarily deprived of this property<sup>41</sup> as well as the right to work<sup>42</sup> are also guaranteed. Local residents must be able to access the standard of living not lower than previous condition.<sup>43</sup>

So, affected populations must be consulted directly through their formal and informal leaders, representatives, or non-governmental organizations with respect to the social and economic aspects of the various alternatives being considered for resettlement.<sup>44</sup> They should enjoy some of the benefits of the project and their standards of living should, at the least be improved and not degraded.

It is also needed to monitor as to whether local residents may have been gradually and system-

---

37) UN General Assembly, 1996, Declaration on the Right to Development (A/RES/41/128). Article 1 <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r128.htm>

38) ICCPR art.25

39) indigenous and tribal peoples have the right to “decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control over their economic, social and cultural development. Article 7 of ILO Convention No. 169

40) UDHR article 3 and the ICCPR article 6

41) UDHR article 17

42) UDHR article 23

43) ICESCR article 11 “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions”.

44) Page 15,16 -Involuntary Resettlement in Development Projects ,Policy Guidelines in World Bank-Financed Projects By Michael M. Cemea

atically forced out from the designated area.

While foreign investors consider the potential for future spinoffs from the Tavoy project, Burma's domestic media has focused mainly on its possible impact on the country's economy. Most reports have highlighted how Tavoy will become the region's biggest and most modern seaport, providing a shortcut between Europe and mainland Southeast Asia and possibly transforming Burma's economy the way that Shenzhen marked China's first step along the way to becoming an economic superpower.

What Burma's heavily censored domestic media has not mentioned, however, is the cost of this project for those who will be most directly affected by it. This cost will be measured not only in the loss of land by farmers currently working their fields in the area, but also in the long-term environmental degradation it is expected to cause.

So it is necessary to do further researches concerning with EIA, HIA as well as Social and cultural conditions. The domestic media should also have the right to present information and should provide right and accurate information without bias.

## Recommendations

### *To government of Republic of the Union of Myanmar*

- » Describe the political, social and economic backgrounds clearly
- » Disclose information about the project clearly
- » Make sure that local community know about the project clearly
- » Make sure local community have voice and they know the impacts of the project
- » Pass and enforce the laws that ensure the benefits of local people due to development
- » Pass and enforce the laws that protect environment and local people being exploited
- » Make sure development of the project and the development of local people at the same time
- » Make sure to maintain the cultures and traditions of Dawei
- » Fair and not corrupt process for land confiscation
- » Stop until EIA, SIA and HIA are conducted by reputable companies that are not affiliated with the Burmese government
- » Finally, RECONSIDER SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE PROJECT THAT HAS HUGE NEGATIVE IMPACTS



*To ITD and other companies involve in the project*

- » Follow the social responsibility guidelines of World Bank
- » Follow the local laws and Thai domestic laws
- » Respect community's voice
- » Take responsibility for pollution
- » Make sure the transparency of the project
- » Make EIA, SIA and HIA before implementing project
- » Give fair and enough compensation to local people
- » Finally, STOP BUILDING INDUSTRIAL ESTATE THAT IS NOT ALLOWED IN THAI ACCORDING TO THE 2007 THAI CONSTITUTIONS

*To Local People of Dawei*

- » Keep every record and document as much as possible
- » Know your rights
- » Fight for your rights
- » Unite and collaborate with each other
- » Finally, NEVER GIVE UP, YOU ARE NOT ALONE

*To The Thai Government*

- » Respect rights of citizens of neighbouring countries
- » Stop outsourcing in Burma
- » Safeguard the environment of neighbouring countries
- » Finally, REQUIRE THAI COMPANIES WORKING OUTSIDE OF THAILAND RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS



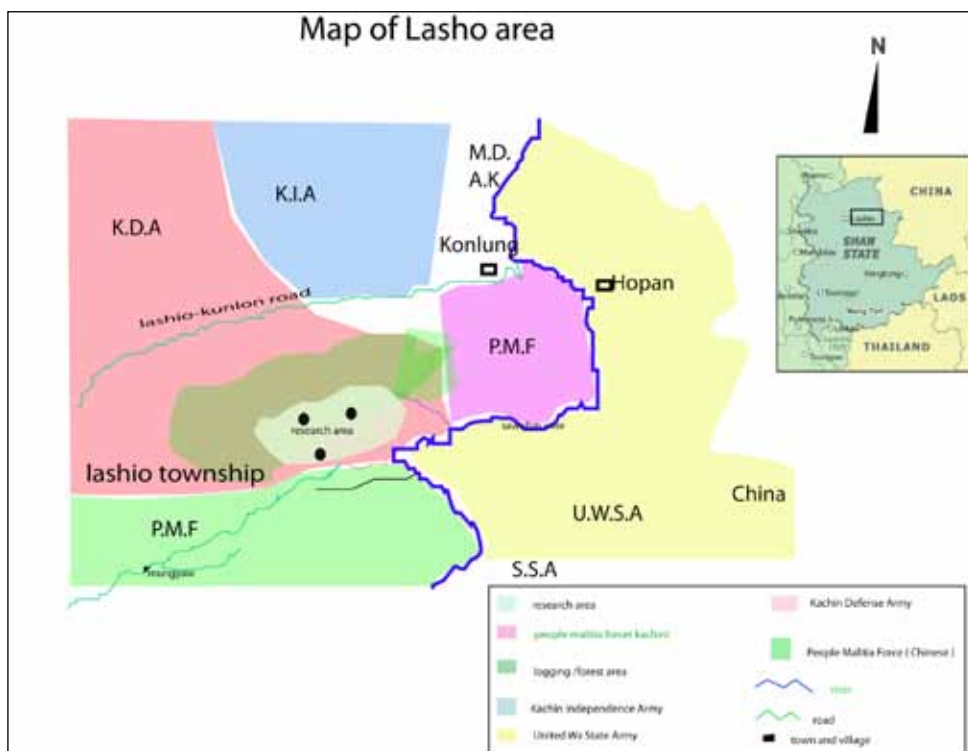
## Development vs. Human Rights and the Environment

In recent decades, Burma has embarked on a race towards “development”. The government has encouraged foreign investment in natural resource development projects such as oil and gas infrastructure, dams, mines, and logging. These produce profit for the military government but rarely benefit the lives of ordinary citizens.

There are essentially no environmental and social standards for these projects in Burma, and increased militarization around project areas frequently results in the use of forced labor, forced portering, forced relocation, and other abuses. Burma’s laws allow for no public participation in decision-making, no environmental, social, or human rights impact assessment, and effectively no access to justice. With no safeguards in place, development projects often result in environmental devastation, land confiscation and destruction of livelihoods for those communities that depend on the land and natural resources.

# Negative Impacts of Deforestation on Indigenous People in Bangshau, Kawngmu, Hohap Villages in Lashio Township, Northern Shan State

by Jhon Zau Shan



## Introduction

In Northern Shan State, within the Lashio Township, three villages, Bangshau, Kawngmu, and Hohap, are suffering greatly from the devastating impacts of deforestation. Virgin forests and big trees are being destroyed by wealthy businessmen and authorities. Many villagers are becoming more impoverished with the loss of their natural resources. Burma (Myanmar) is richer in natural resources than any other Southeast Asian country. But, we have no rights and therefore no chance to protect the environment and our ancestor's heritage. Because of this, we are exploited by Chinese logging companies and government authorities while cronies from the military get the

opportunity to benefit from natural resources. Local people, if given employment, cannot move up the ranks and remain labourers.

If we measure by modern standards, native people would be considered very poor in possessions, education, transportation and communication; compared with the other divisions or regions, we are far behind in every standard of development. However, the native people are rich in culture, environment and natural resources. Shan State is rich in both natural resources and ethnic diversity, with many ethnic groups living in the same villages. This provides a great chance to learn and cooperate in traditional knowledge and intercultural relationships. Before the

ceasefire, the local people thought that peace talks would provide an opportunity for indigenous development. However, after the peace talks, Chinese companies and wealthy people took over any development opportunities and exploited the indigenous people. Since the ceasefire, there is no longer any risk to the SPDC or Chinese businessmen from armed groups. Since the ceasefire, deforestation has increased greatly and has created major negative impacts on the native people.

Regionally, 90% of local people's livelihoods are reliant on the natural forests and resources; we can say that they are a part of nature. Very recently, they were very rich in natural resources with wildlife, timber, natural foods, herbal plants and fresh water; however, the situation is changing for the worse in this region. After ruthless logging, many of these treasured resources are declining. By 2009, 20% of water resources had been lost and valuable wildlife, natural foods, housing materials, traditional instruments have also decreased dramatically. Local people's livelihoods are in danger because of the loss of their natural environment. Now instead of farming, some villagers are working for the logging companies as labourers or as rubber plantation workers. 40% of the youth go to China and work at the sugarcane plantations, restaurants, or stevedore to solve their family's financial crisis.

Ruthless logging, industrial scale rubber plantations and the change from shifting crop cultivation to poppy production are all causing deforestation. Subsequently, social and environmental impacts are affecting the whole region. However, logging groups and government departments have paid no attention to these impacts. In total, over 300 hundred acres of natural forest were wiped-out during the one month period of research alone.

## Methodology

I interviewed many villagers who had been involved in disputes related to logging, as well as villagers who work on rubber plantations, own poppy fields, are labourers on poppy fields.



*Wealthy owners of poppy plantations bring rations for workers from Lashio. Most locals do not have access to vehicles.*





*Agriculture, drinking water, livestock, and fishing all rely on this stream.*

## Background of Armed Groups

Shan State is the biggest state in Burma. It has 60,155.23 square miles and a population of 4.7 million according to governmental records. The state is located in the eastern part of Burma. There are three parts of the Shan State. It is divided into Southern, Eastern, and Northern regions. My research area was the Northern Shan State, Eastern part of Lashio Township, 40 miles from Lashio; the location is between Lashio Township and Kunlone Township. In total, there are over 400 households in these three villages. The majority ethnic groups are Kachin, Shan, Palawng and the

minorities are Lahu, Lisu and Chinese residents who live in the same villages. This area is very difficult to access by car. Most of people travel by motorbike or foot.

In the past, the region was ruled by Shan dynasties until independence from the British. From 1948 to 1962, it was ruled by the Burmese government but after the Ne Win military coup in 1962, many armed groups began to take control of the whole region, especially the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which was formed on February 5 1962, led by La Htaw Zau Seng. He had started the KIA by organizing his classmates and siblings in this region of Bang Shau village. They revolted against the Military Junta for the freedom of the Kachin and other minority ethnic groups. Later, they expanded to Kachin State, the northern-most state of Burma, and the whole of Northern Shan State. During 1990, the Burmese Military cut communication and travel between the KIA and the villagers in northern Shan State. The villagers in this region were faced with forced relocation, forced portering and the arrest of civilians suspected to have ties with the KIA. In order to undermine the KIA, the Burmese military used a strategy to destroy the property of any civilians suspected of having connections with KIA.

Under these conditions, on February 13, 1991, the Fourth Brigade of the KIA broke away from the KIA to form a partnership with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), becoming the so-called Kachin Defense Army (KDA). Since this time, the region is intensely under control of the KDA; in 2010, under pressure from the Burmese military, they changed their name to Kawngkha People Militia Force (KPMF). Now, following the command of the Burmese government, the KPMF is responsible for all governance in the area, except for immigration issues. Close to this region, there is another armed group, also supported by the Burmese government, called the People Militia Force (PMF). There are two branches of the PMF, one organized by Chinese and Shan people while the other is organized by Kachin people. Both the KPMF and the PMF have special economic opportunities granted by Burmese Military Junta, such as

opportunities for logging and gold mining. All civilians have to obey the Military Junta and the armed groups supported by them.

## Background of Local Livelihoods

During the rule of Military Junta SPDC, people from this region have had no opportunity to attend school or further study. For that reason, the indigenous people lack education, general knowledge, and property. They have to serve the SPDC as forced labourers, and also serve the armed groups with payments and labour. No one would dare to go against either the SPDC military or the armed groups. They have to obey the military in every aspect of their lives. People live in fear and have no security in their livelihoods.

They have no knowledge to communicate with the international community or the UN; they cannot even communicate with the national community because they do not know Burmese or English. They have no knowledge of international law or national law. They have no knowledge of human, environmental or indigenous rights; they have never even heard the word “rights.”

However, concerning natural resources, indigenous people have experience and ideas how to manage the natural forests in a sustainable way. According to interviews, indigenous people have their own methods to deal with natural forests without causing harm. Indigenous people should have the right to protect their environment and natural forests, not only for their own sake but also for the biodiversity of world. International Environmental Law, Charter Nine, Principle 12 says: “Resources should be made available to preserve and improve the environment.”<sup>1</sup>

Until about 2000, this region did not have convenience stores or bazaars, only a rotational market day (one day per week), which did not rely on the national or global economic systems. They lived on their own farming and their own jobs, largely removed from the national and global economies. Only stationary, crude oil, salt, and steel was bought from town. Until 2005, they had no clinic or modern doctors but they had cultural and indigenous knowledge of healthcare, finding various kinds of natural medicines from the forests. They treated many patients with such indigenous solutions. Even though they had no market, they had micro incomes from their farming and foraging. They did not need to buy meat or fish from the town or other regions. Local meat or fish was available, differing depending on the season.

Many different ethnic groups live together in the same village. Each ethnic group has their own unique traditional instruments, most of which are related to natural things. For farming, all farm tools are created from materials from the forests. Generally, the local indigenous people cultivate lowland and upland rice as their main livelihoods. For this cultivation, farmers need many tools for farming. All of these farming necessities are available in the natural forests. Geographically, there are many creeks and sources of fresh water to provide irrigation for farmlands and drinking water. The irrigational systems rely on the nearby upstream creeks and these creeks depend on the forest. If the forests are not destroyed, upstream water sources remain stable and the local people can farm in harmony with the environment. Currently, since the forests are being cut down, however, the farming situation is getting worse because water sources decline more every year.

---

1) D’amto, Daniel. International Law Course Book. Name of publisher, year of publishing.



Biogeographically, the region is richer in biodiversity than others parts of the Northern Shan State. The region has many valuable and rare trees and diverse micro-climates. There are many areas upstream that are managed by the indigenous people. They do not allow anyone to cut down trees in this upstream area because of their cultural and spiritual doctrines. For many years they have had demarcated specific areas that can be used for firewood and housing materials. The indigenous people of this area have managed these natural resources and protected the environment.



*An interviewer speaks with a youth leader about the extent of Chinese logging in his community*

The indigenous people understand how manage the resources for the long-term benefits: to sustain the environment and its inhabitants. Forests play a major role in the health of all living things. Over 20 villages in this region rely on the water sources that originate from the forests. There are two streams in this region flowing from the west to the east ends of the Salween River, which are set out of from these forest areas. Along the streams, people get benefits from farming, drinking water, raising livestock and animals, and also the creation of precipitation for the whole surrounding areas and its inhabitants.

The people in this region have no history of a major food crisis. They have had no disasters or epidemics and weather is normal. They have a convenient climate and various crops grow successfully with no need to apply chemical fertilizers. The natural forest has supported local people in every aspect of human life for countless generations. However, if the government and armed groups continue to exploit the natural forests in an unsustainable way, the forests will not be able to recover themselves within a few decades.

## Background of the Logging Problem

Although the region is full of valuable timbers, the indigenous people have gained no benefits from logging. During a short period (1991-2011), the richest people and the authorities sold timber to Yunnan Province in China. The local people were powerless to protect the forests from being sold by the government. During the civil war from 1962-1990 between the KIA and the SPDC, no Chinese companies or even the SPDC could do logging because armed groups were protecting the forest in order to gain long-term benefits.

Since the 1991 ceasefire between the ethnic armed groups, especially between the KIA and the SPDC, the SPDC and Chinese companies have collaborated in logging. As a precondition for the ceasefire, no armed group could oppose the logging. Around 1997, the armed groups also began logging in order to help solve their financial problems, pay their soldiers salaries and to build the school apartments. The armed group has no source of income to operate or feed the group except for logging and mining. That is why the deforestation rate increased quickly and now the region is full of logging.



Logged timbers by KDA armed group

Over 70% of natural forest deforestation is caused by logging carried out by the SPDC, armed groups and Chinese whilst rubber and poppy cultivation only account for relatively small amounts deforestation.

## Causes and Impacts of Deforestation on the Region

*"Between 1991 and 1993, when I was attending this Bangshau village primary school, I had seen uncountable heaps of logs along the whole paved road and*

*I was surprised that they were able to cut down such huge trees. Every summer, they had load logs heading towards Salween River. At the time, I did not notice the effects of the logging. But, as more and more logging took place in this region, the environmental impacts became clear"*

– Farmer from Bangshau village<sup>2</sup>

Between 1991 and 1997, none of the ethnic armed groups were involved in the logging; this was because the SPDC would not issue them permits to carry out logging in their territories. The villagers and local leaders could not have imagined the extent of the deforestation.

When logging was allowed, it began on a massive scale. The offices of the KDA have no records of the amount of timber that was being cut down by the SPDC and Chinese. Logging trucks damaged the earth roads, forcing local villagers to rebuild the roads. Later, in 1997, KDA asked permission from the SPDC to begin logging with the Chinese businessmen. Since permission was granted by the SPDC, military-backed elites, Chinese businessmen and the armed groups have all cooperated in logging. Meanwhile, the armed groups, especially the KDA, have asked the villagers to work as labourers in logging to get income for their families.

*"When the armed group KDA asked the labourers to cut down the trees and to take them out of the valley, we got some income from them. Some of the well to do villagers helped to collect the logs with the KDA. We got over 3000 kyats per day and some stronger men got 4000 kyats for their labour. We cut the trees down with an axe or long handsaw and we used this material. Villagers worked in groups or individually. We local people had meagre income. But, we local*

2) September, 20th, 2011, 2:30 - 5pm, Bangshau villager, Occupation: farmer, Age: 34, Sex: male

*people were not more than labourers, and had no chance to make our own logging or protect the forest areas,”*

- Farmer from Banshau village.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1997 and 2000, Chinese businessmen collected a specific sort of timber, the local maimawksawm (hard wood) trees. By 2000, the timber production had declined from 3000 tons to 50 tons as the maimawksawm trees began to disappear.

The major timber produced in the area and years of production are:

- » Maimawksawm (1997 to 2005)
- » Wild cherry (2005 to 2008)
- » Yemane and Sakarwa (2008 to 2009)
- » All kinds of hardwood trees (Dec 2010 to present)

The three-year logging project agreement from 2010-2012 is different from earlier years. Previously, Chinese businessmen came to log themselves, mainly permitted by the Kunlong District Chief Commander and later collaborating with armed groups; my focus group is KDA. In 2010, they started to use large-scale equipment which was able to cut down big trees (2 square metres) in a manner of minutes. They cut down all hard wood trees and any other trees they could use in saw mill from the target zone.

When the project started, the Chinese businessmen had notified the armed groups but not the village leaders. They brought from China bulldozers, trucks, and saw machinery. First, they cut down all the selected trees; there were over 2000 tons logged of a variety of big trees. Chinese logging group members had over 25 people in a work group, who worked from the first week of December to the last week of April. At the beginning of the period, they first dug roads and then cut down the trees; afterwards, the timber was transported from the logging area to Wa region, and then on to Yunnan Province in China. There were disputes between local indigenous people and the Chinese but every time the Chinese had the upper hand because of permission granted by either the KDA or by the SPDC. Many forests and upstream areas, which were kept for village use, were cut down by the Chinese.

*“Two times, we farmers had confronted the Chinese who were cutting down the trees, on upstream areas or in the village. The Chinese responded that the farmers should not go against*



*A man sleeps on a tree cut down by a Chinese logging company*

3) September, 11th, 2011. 8:30-10 am, Banshau villager, Occupation: farmer, Age: 78, Sex: male.



*A paddy pound, used by indigenous people to pound the rice instead of using a rice-mill*

*them or they would report them to the district officer and the government. But we farmers did not dare to confront the district officer and government departments”*

*- A farmer from Hohap village<sup>4</sup>*

*“We villagers did not know the date the logging group had started, but we had heard the voice of Chinese bulldozers digging the road during Christmas celebrations. As soon as the Christmas celebration was over, we farmers and villagers went there*

*together. When we got there, the situation was terrible; Chinese people were digging the road on the farms and also along the irrigation canal and earth dam. We told them to stop right now, if not we will be killed unintentionally”*

*- Reverend from Bangshau village<sup>5</sup>*

Shan (Huhap) and Kachin (Bangshau, Kawngmu) village leaders had appealed to the township department office and armed officials (Bangshau) village to stop the logging, but no one responded to their appeals. They felt angry and sad, but no one dared to confront the higher levels. Due to the support of officials, Chinese people could do what they wanted. Meanwhile, the Chinese bulldozers had destroyed one-third of the irrigation canals and the dam. Due to destruction of the irrigation canals and the dam, the farmers could not grow the rice paddies for ten acres. Previously, the farmers had yielded around 80 baskets of rice annually, but during this year they could not grow the paddy at all. From this year forward, they will face food crisis within families and surrounding families. Through the month of December 2010 up until the last week of January 2011, the Chinese companies built roads in order to transport the timber out of the forest or upstream areas. By February 2011, they had cut down the trees and delivered them to the Wa region controlled by the United Wa State Army. Chinese businessmen set up a sawmill in Wa UWSA region near the Salween River.

*“From February to the last week of April 2011, three Chinese big trucks were loaded from our upstream areas and farmlands every day and taken to Salween River. Each truck was loaded*

4) September 15th, 2011, 7:30 pm – 10:00 pm, village hohap, occupation: farmer, Sex: male Age: 35

5) September 12th, 2011, 7:00 – 10:00 am, bangshau villager, position: Rev, Age: 50, Sex: male



*with three tons of timber. They had come into our area in the daytime with empty trucks and at midnight they had taken our timber. We could not document their movements but all the villagers imagined that would not be less than 1500 tons. I am a man but shamelessly I cried three times because our old timber had been taken by the Chinese; I pity them [the tress] very much. Now our ancestors' heritages are gone. If I could, I desired to put a deadly curse on them by a magician. Not only had they taken the timber but also widely destroyed villagers' farmlands. We have five family members and I got 100 baskets of rice every year from this farm, but from this year [on], our family will be in food crisis. Why did our village's township office and government not stand up for indigenous people? Who will stand for us?"*

- A farmer<sup>6</sup>

As time went on, the emotional effects caused by the logging continued to worsen. On April 24th the Christian Association Council negotiated between the logging companies and the farmers to receive the compensation needed in order to repair the dam and irrigation canal. At this time, a small portion of the compensation promised was given to the farmers as a remedy. The farmers were unhappy with this compensation, however, because they have no other livelihoods except as company labourers.

*"We didn't just want the money; we wanted a repaired dam or irrigation canal. We were waiting for them to repair them like they said they would but up until they left, there were no repairs to the dam or the irrigation canal. For that reason, we had an offer of money to repair the dam or irrigation canal [but] not more than 200 million in kyats, which are just for repair the damaged farmlands and irrigation system. Finally, the logging group compensated 16 million kyats. We were not offered compensation for the damaged farmlands or up stream areas. They had cut down every kind of hard wood tree. Next project term, they will start in the east of our region. For next time we should prepare a strategy to stop logging in upstream areas" -said a villager.<sup>7</sup>*

## Impacts of Deforestation

### *Social Impacts on Indigenous People*

Before the ceasefire with the KIA, there were no modern doctors, no clinics, no modern medicine and the villagers never thought that they needed to hospitalize any patients or treat disease in a hospital. Whenever someone was sick or got a disease, they could collect natural medicine from the forest. Moreover, they had income from herbaceous products from the natural forests. After the ceasefire with the ethnic armed groups, transportation improved and communications, marketing and travelling became more accessible.

6) September 15th, 2011, 2:00 pm – 9:00 pm, village hohap, occupation: farmer, Age: 29, Sex: male

7) September 16th, 2011, 7:00 am – 9:00 am, village hohap, occupation: farmer, Age: 45, Sex: male

Due to this situation, Chinese businessmen were not only involved in logging, but also set up convenience stores, selling processed food, medicine, and others modern things. Today, the use herbaceous products have declined and one cannot collect many products from the forest like before. Today, 40% of indigenous people are unwilling to go foraging, because the herbs are hard to find. People now have to depend on modern medicine and manufactured products. Since 2005, many previously uncommon diseases, including cancers, skin diseases, and eye problems, have been introduced to this region. Local people are also facing the loss of herbal medicines because natural forests cannot serve the people like before.

*"In the last two years, I cannot find the herbal medicine easily; I needed lots of time to find what I wanted."*

- Traditional medic<sup>8</sup>

### *Impacts on Livelihood*

Typically, every year, the villagers grow the rice paddies in upland fields in May and lowland fields in July. The harvest time of upland fields is in August and lowland field in October. In upland fields, they used to grow by manpower alone while in lowland fields they used animals, primarily buffalos and cows. At harvest time, they used only manpower – no machines or animals were employed. When they are harvesting or growing paddy, families share the labour responsibilities without wages. During times when they are not growing or harvesting paddies, they have to collect the natural foods, materials for making traditional crafts, trees bark for making raw material paper, farm tools, herbal medicines, housing materials, and fishing and hunting. Regionally, the main natural products of this area are: wild meats, husbandry products, herbal medicines, gun powder (made by woods), traditional crafts and farm tools. The imports for this region include salt, crude oil, iron material, which come mainly from town areas. All of the ethnicities have the same livelihoods in this region. They also share their knowledge, foods and labours, in their own villages or surrounding villages. Because of the ruthless logging, however, these livelihoods are disappearing.

*"When I was young I could collect the fish in a few hours to sell at the local market 'Mungyaw' and also if I needed more money to support the students or my children I used to go hunting for a few nights or days, but now it can take week or more to get the wild animals"*

- Villager<sup>9</sup>

Under these conditions of deforestation, over 2,000 people in this region have faced social impacts, affecting every ethnic and religious group. Some older people have to do domestic work

8) September 20th, 2011, 6:00 am – 8:00 am, village Bangshau, occupation: traditional medic, Age: 70, Sex: female

9) September 20th, 2011, 2:30 pm – 5:00 pm, village bangshau, occupation: farmer, Age: 34, Sex: male



such as feeding the pigs, chickens and other livestock while others have to do farming in rubber plantation or collecting the natural resources. Among the youth or future generation, only 50% are in school; 30% of youth have gone to China in order to solve the income crisis and the remaining 20% have to work in rubber plantation or to help as general labours.

*"Last year, in 2010, my youngest son went to Yunnan, China to find the jobs; he wanted to support the family so he could send the money back. Now, he came back from China empty-handed and now he is helping with poppy cultivation for family food security" -said a farmer from Bangshau village.<sup>10</sup>*

According to a community development facilitator, 70% families are still facing food insecurity. The population is increasing every year but at the same time, the natural resources have been decreasing every year. The natural resources are being undermined in this region by the ruthless logging and the destruction of natural forests. The indigenous people cannot afford to buy everything from the market and the natural resources which they have depended on are rapidly declining. According to a community development worker, 50% of villagers are now in debt.

*"In previous years, we didn't need to buy any foods from the market or town, but today we have to buy everything we need. We had no money, but we were happy with our neighbours and relatives; sharing food, sharing labour, and helping each other. We never needed to be in debt with money and there was no need to work very hard. But today, we have to work very hard all the time in order to educate the children; we have to pay every armed group and must partake in forced labour; and we need to buy food from the market because we cannot look for natural foods easily," said a farmer from Hohap village.<sup>11</sup>*

## *Impacts on the Environments*

Biogeographically, the region has various landscapes, including high mountains, valleys, plains, caves, grasslands and forests. The mountainous areas are covered by forests and in some mountainsides they have caves and bamboo forests. The lowland areas are covered by grasslands and in the valleys there are creeks and ponds which originate from the streams in the highlands. At the top of high mountainous areas, it is cold the whole year and lowlands have moderate weather all year. Tigers, bears, peacocks and deer inhabit the mountainous areas whilst crocodiles and otters live in the wetland areas and streams.

*"Until 1990, [there were] 5 tigers, 10 wild goats, about 2 bears, over 10 otters, over 10 crocodiles and many peacocks and deer existing. 5 years ago, I heard the tiger roar with a big voice, [but] after that no more voice. Bears and tigers have already disappeared and otters, crocodiles, and wild goats are facing extinction. There are not more than 5 peacocks and only small deer. If our*

10) September 19th, 2011, 8:00 am – 9:00 am, village bangshau, occupation: farmer, Age: 56, Sex: female

11) September 15th, 2011, 7:30 – 10:00pm, Hohap villager, Occupation: farmer, Age: 35, Sex: male

*villagers do not have the vision to protect the wildlife and natural forests, all of these [animals and nature] will gone too"*

- Farmer from Bangshau village.<sup>12</sup>

When people started logging, in every jungle you could hear the sound of the cutting down of trees and hand saws. Most of the animals fled to other regions and some were hunted by people. 10% of villagers do hunting for family income in order to educate the children and ensure survival. If forests are still deep, local indigenous people can rely on hunting. But today, wildlife cannot live stably in their territories because in every jungle there is a lot of logging. Valuable wildlife including tigers, otters, bears, crocodiles and wild goats have disappeared.

There are two large streams in this region: Namleng and Hohap streams. These two streams originate in the upstream forests. The streams flow into the Salween River and between the upstream and the Salween River, 10 villages rely on these streams for farming, raising livestock and, in some villages, also for drinking water. The streams have lost 20% of their water volume. That is why, in the last three years, over 10 acres of lowland farms could not grow paddies because the waterways have changed and water sources are scarce. This causes farmland families to have to work at the rubber plantations, poppy fields, or move to towns or abroad, especially to China, in order to support their family's survival. In this region, 60% of villagers rely directly on upland rice cultivation or the natural forest. With the natural forests decreasing every year, the indigenous people have no hope for family survival on natural resources and lowland farming. The other 40% of village families live on lowland paddy fields. Each family owns about 2 acres, which rely on the streams for their source of water. In previous years, there were many lakes around the whole region but now, 50% of lakes have been lost.

The rains also do not come consistently as before. Earlier, the rains started every June. Now, sometimes the rains come earlier, sometimes later, but the rains are always less than before. The weather is getting hotter than before and cool zone plant species are not as successful as before. If the forests are gone there is no way to produce oxygen and water vapour for the environment. When the oxygen and water vapour decrease, the temperature of environment will increase, making it hard to absorb the rains. For that reason, the weather has changed and the temperature is higher than before. The tropical insects have been increasing: mosquitoes, dog fleas and chicken fleas cause the animals to get diseases. Because the temperature is higher than before, tropical insects can breed more easily. Since around 2005, local people cannot raise livestock such as chickens and pigs easily because the weather is hotter than before and there is less rain. In every year, around the months of April and May many pigs and chickens become sick with flu. When this happens, the animals cannot be treated and die.

*"When I was young, I saw much snow during the Christmas period, but now I see nothing. I could catch fish in the creeks and lakes in our surrounding area. Today, the lakes have no water and the creeks are much smaller than before. In the last two or three years, there have been unbelievable*

---

12) September 20th, 2011, 2:30 pm – 5:00 pm, village Bangshau, occupation: farmer, Age: 34, Sex: male

*weather changes; the rain is not normal and it is hotter than before. We cannot see the snow today where we had seen the places. In the past, there was mist the whole day during December and January months in our region, but now [the mist lasts] only a few hours and then the mist disappears. Before, I had not seen such heavy flooding. I believe that this could be the effects of deforestation."*

- Village leader.<sup>13</sup>

Natural foods are declining, diseases and insects are increasing, drought has become a problem, weather is not normal, and valuable wildlife are migrating to other regions or being killed by the loss of natural habitat. All of these negative effects are occurring in this region because of deforestation.

## Conclusion

The impacts of deforestation on this region are recent but the effects of these impacts are seen in many aspects such as livelihoods, environment, health issues, farming, and climate change. Today, wildlife in this region has migrated and continues to migrate to other regions. Furthermore, 40% of youth from this region have gone to China or town areas in order to get family incomes. Previously animals and indigenous people could sustain themselves completely on natural forests and resources. However, this is no longer possible. Indigenous people have no chances to protect the natural resources or environment. They lack the knowledge to defend the environment from logging and also lack general education because in the past, they had no chance to attend school because the SPDC suspected them of having ties with the armed groups.

*"Logging businessmen took advantage of indigenous people because of our ignorance; we had no idea to make logging for exportation, armed groups also had not led the way for exportation. Today, any logging group does not consult the villagers to cut down the trees from restricted upstream [and] in some ways they insulted us a couple of times."*

- Shan villager.<sup>14</sup>

For the SPDC-backed elites, local authorities and Burmese-Chinese in this area, the standards of living are quickly improving from the profits from the logging. Today, these elite people are extending the land they use for industrial agriculture with rubber, corn, long-term crop plantations. Furthermore, they are setting up saw mills, rice mills, and engaging in mechanized farming in this region. Apparently, they live in gorgeous mansions and they can ask for cheap labour from the villagers in the region whenever they want. The elite can bring-up their children and relatives with higher education and send them abroad to inherit their positions and posses-

13) September 9th, 2011, 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm, village bangshau, occupation: farmer, Age: 40, Sex: male

14) Interview 4. September 15, 2011. Hohap village.

sions. However, 95% of indigenous people cannot support their children to go to colleges or to study abroad. Indigenous youths have to leave school around the tenth standard of education because of their family's food and income crisis. When they are old enough to work, they either have to go farming, work as labourers for the companies, go to Yunnan to work, or enlist with the armed groups. For these reasons, the gaps in living standards between indigenous people and elite people in this region broaden more and more. Meanwhile, indigenous knowledge, traditional instruments, and the social relationships involving shared food and shared labour are being lost.

## Recommendations

### *To Environmental Organizations and other NGOs*

- » Give trainings in communication and participation in the international and national level to indigenous people
- » Negotiate between the local military and the Chinese logging companies in order to take care for indigenous livelihoods.
- » Notify related governments or companies concerning ruthless logging in the Sino-Burma border areas.
- » Help to restore sustainable livelihoods and knowledge or self-reliance for those who lost their traditional livelihoods.

### *To the Burmese Government*

- » Ensure that companies are acting legally and responsibly and not cutting down more than they had agreed
- » Support indigenous people to gain the technical skills for reforestation and to conserve the natural forests.
- » Maintain regular field observation in every region to find out what difficulties the rural people are facing, according with environmental issues.

### *To Chinese Companies and Authorities*

- » Chinese district government officials should ensure that logging companies are acting legally along the Sino-Burma borders.
- » Respect the International Environmental Law and the rights of ethnic minorities groups.
- » Ensure natural resources are only traded legally (including orchids, wildlife, herbaceous plants and timber).
- » Stop destroying the natural forests with illegal and ruthless logging.

- » Respect and protect biodiversity in every region.

### *To the PMF Armed Group*

- » Pave the way to sustainable livelihoods instead of relying on and exploiting natural forests. Otherwise, every year will have an increased population rate but reduced natural resources due to environmental degradation.
- » Provide the indigenous people not only with livelihoods, but also with opportunities to improve their lives.
- » Build-up the knowledge levels of indigenous communities, including improving overall education and appreciation of indigenous knowledge.
- » Support local young people to develop their leadership capacity and education

# The Impacts of Rubber Plantations on the Ceasefire Area in Mongla Township in Eastern Shan State

by Sai Lieng Lem

## Introduction

People can use many resources from nature. The lowland people and hill tribes in Mongla Township in Burma's Shan State depend on the community's forest for many of their basic needs. The National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), the ceasefire group in Mongla, uses natural resources such as teak and wildlife to make money to support the group and the people. In recent years, the teak has been over-logged. At the same time, there is a high demand for rubber liquid in China, so the local people have begun to plant rubber trees in the ceasefire area, including in Mongla township.

Because the teak and wildlife were overused, the NDAA allowed local people to plant more rubber trees, which, according to my research, destroys the communities' forest. Farmers think the rubber plantations will bring them long-term benefits,







*A view of the landscape: a rubber plantation in Mongla Township*

but they actually cause many negative changes. Rubber plantations negatively impact the environment and animals, cause social and economic changes and contribute to local climate change. Farmers face further negative impacts from that local climate change; for example, they may not have enough water for farming. Because of these impacts, people who depend on the forest for hunting, collecting food and gathering herbal medicines cannot continue their ways of life like in the past. Not only have some animals lost their habitat and migrated to other areas, but also soil erosion has made the land unsuitable for agriculture. This makes farming impossible and creates hardships for the local people, and people have to change their work from hunting to some other job to earn an income.

To solve these problems, the NDAA should consider the impacts that will come in the future and ban the planting of rubber trees. Also, the NDAA should raise awareness about forest conservation and the impact of rubber plantations, and take responsibility by creating a reforestation program which will provide alternative jobs for local people. Hill tribe people also should be concerned for their environment, rather than just thinking about money.

This report finds that rubber plantations have many impacts on the communities' forests, causing destruction to the ecosystem and local livelihoods in the ceasefire area. It is based on interviews with local people and observations of the peoples' livelihoods and the effects of rubber plantations on the communities. The sections in this report include: background on Shan State, the history of the NDAA, NDAA policy, background on rubber plantations, deforestation, wildlife habitat loss and its effects on hunters, weather changes, social and economic impacts, monocrop plantations and a comparison to Kengtung Township. The final section of the report will be a conclusion and a set of recommendations to the various stakeholders in the plantations.

## Methodology

Most of the sources for this report were local farmers, youth, and hunters, as well as hill tribe members, rubber plantation owners and NDAA officers; all of whom I interviewed during my field research session in July and August of 2010. I conducted my research at Ba Kha, Wan Bao, Wan Ka and Nam Yad villages, which are located in rural areas, as well as Mongla's city. I traveled to rubber farms, mountains, and jungles in order to get my information. It was difficult to obtain information in my primary research area, Mongla, due to the unstable political situation there. Therefore, in order to collect additional information, I travelled to Kengtung Township which is located 56 miles far from south of Mongla. Kengtung is under SPDC control, but more people from Kengtung go to treat the goods which are imported from China in Mongla.

## Brief Background on Shan State

Shan State is located in the east of Burma. It borders China to the north, Laos to the east and Thailand to the south. The territory of Shan State covers 60,155 square miles, almost one quarter of the area of Burma. The state gets its name from the Shan people, one of the largest ethnic groups in Burma. The ethnic groups in Shan State are Shan, Chinese, Wa, Kachin, Danu, Intha, Palaung, Pa-O, Indian, Kokang, Ahka and Lahu. Most Shan people are Buddhist. Others are Christian, Muslim, and Hindu. There are 54 townships including three capital cities in Shan State: Lashio in the north, Kengtung in the east and the Taunggyi in the south. Shan State is also rich in natural resources such as minerals, teak, rubies, gems, gold and silver. Most Shan people live in rural areas and farming is their primary source of income.

In March 1962, General Nay Win gained power in a coup in the Union of Burma. After that, many people in Shan State suffered abuses from the military such as rape, murder, land confiscations without compensation and forced relocation from their native homes. Many escaped from these abuses and fled to Thailand or other neighboring countries to be migrant laborers.

Moreover, most of the teak and wild animals from Shan State were exported to China and Thailand. Because there is no more teak for logging and wild animals for hunting some people have started working and farming in order to support their lives and family. In some areas of Shan State, people planted rubber trees to try to have better lives in the future. People thought they would have better lives in the future because of the long lives of rubber plants, the good price of rubber, and the high demand for rubber in China.

## History of the NDAA

The National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), the ceasefire group in Mongla, signed a ceasefire agreement with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (Burma's military regime) on 30 June, 1989. The NDAA controls Special Region-4, eastern Shan State. It is one of 17 ceasefire groups in Burma.

The NDAA-ESS, officially known as Special Region No. 4, has three brigades: Headquarters (three battalions), 369th (five battalions) and 911th (seven battalions). Each battalion is 300-

strong. Independent sources however say the battalions are only half as strong.<sup>1</sup>

Before 1989, there were war lords in the Mongla area. In order to support their battle against the SPDC, the group supplemented its income with teak logging. Additionally, many local people were also logging and trading wildlife in order to earn their own income. They also exported the teak to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Laos, and China. As a result of this over-logging, there was no teak left and the people had to begin planting rubber trees to support their livelihoods.

To make peace in the Mongla area, the NDAA needed to make a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC. This allowed the NDAA to control its own territory.

*"We made a cease fire agreement with the SPDC in 1989, and they let us be in charge of our territory. They have only some civil servants' staff present here at the moment. Anyway, they have to follow our rule here after we made the agreement with them [...] In the 20 years before we made the ceasefire with the SPDC, we could see a lot of trucks carrying logs across border to China and also a lot of Chinese companies buying the logs. There are no more trees to log now. There is little for using but not for selling."*<sup>2</sup>

- 66 year old religious leader in Mongla

The NDAA controls its own territory in eastern Shan State on the Sino-Burma border; they traded logs and wildlife before making the ceasefire agreement with the SPDC.

### *NDAA policy*

During the last few years, the NDAA has allowed people to plant rubber plantations in the Mongla area because of the high demand for rubber in China. The officials say that it will help people to have higher incomes and higher living standards. In the past, not many people planted rubber plantations. This quote from an NDAA officer demonstrates the policy of development in Mongla:

*"It is our policy to develop our area and have income for the group at the same time, so we do not need to build [develop] by ourselves,"*<sup>3</sup>

The NDAA also allows Chinese people come to stay in Mongla and set up their own legal businesses. Chinese people have agreements with the group, such as when and where they are going to build a house. The land is free but they need to pay a tax every year to the group. The ownership of the house or building must be transferred to the NDAA after a Chinese citizen has spent 30-40 years in the area and after the contract between NDAA and a Chinese citizen has come to an end.

---

1) ( <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2006/08/22/shan-herald-agency-for-news-mongla-will-not-be-pushed/>)

2) interview 1-Religious leader in Mongla, first interview

3) interview 1-ibid

## Background on rubber plantations

Almost every house from Mongma village to Mongla city is planting rubber trees on the sides of the mountains. Rubber is in high demand, especially in China, because it is used to make many goods such as daily use cups, slippers, chairs and other material which can make a lot of money. Thus, rubber plantations are very profitable for businessmen.

The following is the process of rubber plantations in Mongla. First, Chinese companies come to introduce rubber plantations to the local people and train them on how to plant rubber trees. After that, villagers buy rubber trees from China. One tree with plastic-covered roots costs 5 Yuan (\$0.75), and one without plastic costs only 2.5 Yuan (\$0.37). If people plant rubber trees with plastic-covered roots, it takes only 5 years to produce rubber liquid. The trees without plastic must grow for 7 to 8 years to get rubber liquid.

Second, people find a place to plant the rubber trees; it might be on the mountain because in Mongla the land is mountainous. Some people rent out the land in the mountain to plant the rubber trees. During the planting process, they have to clear the grass that grows near the rubber and the trees have to be planted one arm span apart.

Third, the rubber liquid is collected. When farmers collect the rubber liquid, they have to work from midnight to 2:00 am because there is more liquid from this time. When it dawns, rubber trees stop producing liquid. So, farmers go back to their house to relax. Farmers could collect the rubber for eight months and stop in the winter season for four months. Rubber trees can live for between 40 and 50 years, if the farmers take a proper care of them.

At Ba Kha village, every house owns at least 300 trees. A few houses started to plant rubber trees this year. Most people were told that they will have more income in the future because the good price of rubber. Additionally, the NDAA allowed people to cut down the forest to plant rubber trees without paying a tax on them. One villager said,

*"They allowed us to destroy the forest and plant as many rubber trees as possible. We can take the logs that come from cutting down the forest to our homes to use for firewood."*<sup>4</sup>

The price of the rubber differs according to the quality and maintenance of the rubber liquid. Normal rubber liquid can cost 20 to 30 Yuan (\$3-4.5) for one kilogram. Rotten rubber can make more money than the normal kind, but it has a very bad smell. It cost 40 to 50 Yuan (\$30-45) for one kilogram. Furthermore, the price of rubber is not stable. If there is a high demand and low supply, the price of rubber will be high. If there is a low demand and high supply, the price will be low. When rubber is ready to be sold, some farmers sell it at the market in Mongla township. Others sell it to Chinese businessmen who come directly to their homes.

Before rubber plantations were introduced to the local area, the local people's income from farming was good, but it could not make a lot of money even though they could support their family. After Chinese businessmen began demanding rubber, local people grew interested in planting rubber trees because they could make more money through that than through farming.

---

4) Interview 2- 49 year-old at Ba Kha village in Mongla, who owns 700 rubbers plantation.

*"We can make 100 Yuan (\$15) for one tree in each year from the rubber plantation. This means that, if we have a lot of rubber trees, we can make a lot of money in the future. If people don't have a place to plant, they will use the hill tribe mountain and have to pay the tax to hill tribes for three Yuan (\$0.45) per tree when they collect the rubber."*<sup>5</sup>

People plant rubber trees because it is easy to get and cheap to buy from China. When it is ready to sell, it also gets a high price from the Chinese businessmen. That is why the local people in Mongla are interested in planting rubber trees.

## Deforestation

Currently, rubber plantations are one of the main causes of deforestation in Mongla Township, because people got permission from the NDAA to plant as many rubber trees as possible. Everyone is interested in planting rubber trees and is hoping to earn a good income in the future.

*"The government allowed everyone who was willing to do so to plant rubber trees. We can cut down as many trees as we can if we replant rubber. The NDAA officials gave us permission to do this,"*<sup>6</sup>

- Anonymous interviewee

After getting permission from the NDAA, most of the lowland people planted the rubber trees, which directly affected the people. For example, in the past, they used the community's forest to build houses; however, currently, they cannot get teak to build houses because the community's teak forests are now becoming rubber plantations. Now, lowland people who want to build a house have to buy teak from the hill tribes who still maintain some parts of the forest in Mongla. An interviewee said the following:

*"If we want to build a house, we have to buy teak from the hill tribe people. After that we can cut the amount we need for one house by ourselves. The price for the log depends on our consumption."*<sup>7</sup>

Not only have the local people planted rubber trees, but Chinese businessmen have also migrated to the area and bought land from the hill tribe people to plant rubber. They hired some people to make huts and stay to guard the rubber trees. To plant rubber trees, Chinese workers also have to cut down many trees in the land that they are going to plant rubber. In rubber plantation areas, other kinds of trees cannot be planted because it will affect the growth of the rubber trees. Their jobs also negatively impact the community's forest and environment.

Additionally, the rubber plantation program has caused the attitudes of the hill tribe members

---

5) interview 2- Ibid

6) Interview 3- an interviewee who requested to remain anonymous

7) Interview 4- 76 old woman at Ba Kha village



*The Nam Ma River downstream experienced a drought.*

to change, because the Chinese businessmen have paid the hill tribes to rent or buy land on the mountain to plant rubber. A local woman explained:

*"Hill tribe people are also interested in money, so when the Chinese businessmen give them some money, they also allow the Chinese people to log and plant rubber trees at their area."<sup>8</sup>*

Because of the people's greed, there are negative effects on the forest, which provides them with many natural resources. The NDAA should consider the impacts on the local people instead of trying to solve the community's problems by giving them permission to plant

rubber plantations. According to information above, many negative impacts of the rubber plantations fall on the local people, while only a few businessmen receive the majority of the benefits.

## Habitat loss and its effects on hunters

Increasingly, many animals are hard to find around the villages, due to the lack of forests. Animals migrated to the deep forest because they lost their habitats to deforestation. This also affects the people who used to hunt animals for a living. Before rubber plantations came to the local area, animals like deer, snakes, birds, monkeys and bears lived in the community's forest. People could also catch animals and collect food such as mushrooms, vegetables and other foods near their communities.

The rubber plantations directly impact hunters. Their main source of income is hunting animals; without animals, they have no income to support their families. Some hunters have begun to plant rubber like the others in the area. Some restaurants in the market in Mongla, which sell wildlife like snakes, bears and deer, have had to close because there are not enough animals. As one of the villagers told me,

*"We cannot get food and animals like before. If we want to get animals, we have to go deep into the forest. It is hard for us to get there because we are not hunters."<sup>9</sup>*

Six years ago, I went to visit Mongla and I went to the restaurants that sell wildlife for meat. It was very expensive to eat snakes: one meal cost 800 Yuan (\$120) for four people. It made me consider that hunters can make a fair income for their families because wildlife could be sold for a great deal of money. It was an advantage for both restaurants and hunters.

8) interview 5- 40 year local woman

9) interview 4- 76 old woman at Ba Kha village





*The farms near the main road cannot access water*

*"We can't hunt animals like in the past, because there are more hunters, including Chinese people, and few forest areas. Now, we have to go to the deep forest for three days and stay in there in order to catch animals. It is not easy. Before that we could spend just one day in the forest and catch some animals,"*<sup>10</sup>

- 36 year-old hunter at Wan Ka village

Animals are losing their habitats because of rubber plantations, and this affects hunters' income. They used to earn a lot of

money for each animal they caught. Generally, the price of one snake is 120 Yuan (\$18) and one deer is 200-300 Yuan (\$30-45). I interviewed one of the hill tribe hunters about the situation in the forest. He told me that he was not able to eat animals like before. When he catches animals now, he goes to sell them at the market in the morning. It is his income. If he eats it, he does not make any money. When they still had a big forest, they could have extra to eat and sell the rest to the consumers.

In the hill tribe area as well as lowland, the residents must conserve the forest near their communities. If not, it will be hard to hunt and get food from the forest. The hill tribes' sustainable livelihoods depend on natural resources and the forest.

## Weather Change

The weather this year (2010) was hotter than any other in past years. It got up to 42 degrees Celsius: this has never happened before. Some people believe that the reason for the hotter weather is the rubber trees and the loss of forest in their area. Additionally, since there is not much forest area and there are a lot of rubber trees, the Nam Ma River is experiencing a drought. This affects the people who depend on this river. Without forest and trees, there are changes in the river.



*Farm owners have to sell their land to other people for development.*

<sup>10</sup> Interview 6- a hunter at Wan Ka village

*"I thought the weather change might come from the rubber tree because the rubber absorbs the water and can only be planted at hot temperatures [...] We also have a program to recover the forest, but we are not sure yet when it will be approved by the high ranking officials. We are trying to conserve some of the forest that is still left."*<sup>11</sup>

- Mongla religious leader

The weather changes, which caused the Nam Ma River to experience drought, also affected the farmers. The Nam Ma River flows from the high mountains to cross Mongla to China. In the past, this river was used by the lowland people for swimming, washing and farming. When it rained, it would flood upstream, enter the farms, and irrigate the rice paddies. When it was dry, the people in the downstream area of the Nam Ma River had to use a machine to bring water from the river to the farm, because they were no longer able to use the traditional wheel to bring water to the farm, like in the past.



*In the lowland are banana trees and on the mountain are rubber plantations.*

Using the traditional wheel requires water in the river, as without water the wheel cannot spin to bring water to the farm. Some of the farms near the main road that were unable to access water had to plant other crops like corn, mango and banana trees because those crop are less water-intensive. Some farms were so dry that they had to be sold to people for building houses. A local farmer explained the current situation of the river this way:

*"Before, there was enough water in the Nam Ma River. It also was very beautiful and clean, so people could use it for washing clothes and for farming. Currently, it is hard to get water to the farm without a machine, and floods can easily occur if it rains. It might be due to the lack of forest and the presence of many rubber trees."*<sup>12</sup>

The downstream of the river could not be accessed because at the center of the Nam Ma River there is a small dam which generates electricity for Mongla. This is the main cause of water shortages, which negatively impacted the farms and the farmers.

Many villages and villagers are affected by weather changes caused by the rubber plantations and the lack of forest to maintain the climate, the ecosystem, and biodiversity. The people should be concerned about the environment, and address the water shortage in the Nam Ma River by replanting many trees, which will help protect the area from flooding and drought.

11) interview1- a religious leader at the Mongla

12) interview 7- a farmer, age 26

## Social and economic impacts

Most of the people from my research area depend on their farms and the forest. A few people earn money from fishing, hunting, making other traditional blankets by using bamboo or handicrafts. Most of the materials come from the forest. The income earned from their handicrafts can be used for their daily necessities.

Because rubber plantations were introduced to the local area, the people who depend on the forest were negatively impacted. I talked with an old man who used bamboo to make traditional blankets. He had planted bamboo on his farm because he could not find any near his house. If he wants to collect bamboo from the wild, he needs go to the forest and find it. However, it is not easy for old people to get to the forest and carry bamboo back. Currently, most of the mountains with around his community have rubber plantations on them.

In my interviews, I also talked to one of the older women who used to have a shop in her house. She had just started to plant rubber trees in her garden. She said that she started planting because most people in Mongla were planting rubber trees and so she also wanted to plant them as well. It is also easy to get the small plants now from the rubber owners in Mongla. Before that, when people wanted to plant rubber trees, they had to go to Chianglaw (which is on the China side of the border) to find the small trees and bring them back to plant them in their area.

To do some of my research, I went to the hill tribe area called Nam Yad village which is far from Mongla (about one hour and half by motorcycle) and located in the mountain forest. The villagers are ethnic Palaung. There are 19 houses in their village. In our conversation, one of the women said,

*"We want to plant rubber trees because they are in high demand from China. We tried to plant them, but we could not because of the cool climate here."*<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the economic situation of the hill tribes is affected by the unstable political situation in Mongla, a result of tension between NDAA and SPDC. In 2009 the price of tea leaves was 70 Yuan (\$10.5) per kilogram. The hill tribe made only 20 Yuan (\$3) per kilogram in 2010. Political instability has caused fewer Chinese merchants to trade tea leaves from the hill tribes. This means that there is less demand for tea leaves, so the price is going down. On the other hand, rubber is in high demand from Chinese businesses.

Hill tribes belong to some parts of the mountain in Mongla, where they live by farming. When businessmen or farmers want to plant rubber trees or other monocrop plantations, they must get permission from hill tribes and make agreement about rent and taxes to hill tribes. A hill tribe member explained:

*"We have our own land which belongs to our community. If people want to plant something such as rubber plantation they [businessmen] must come to ask permission from us. In the past, some Chinese companies came to log on our land, but we did not get anything from them. Maybe they*

---

13) Interview 8- a 33 years old Palaung woman at Nam Yad village

*got permission from the Mongla government. Now, they do not come because we don't have a big forest like before,"<sup>14</sup>*

In 2004, I used to come to this village. Since then, it has changed a lot. For example, in the past, the hill tribe people lived together with many families in one house. Presently, they live separately from each other and build their own houses. Their main jobs are finding animals, farming, feeding cows, and taking care of their forest. Most of the youth in the village went to Thailand to find a job, believing they will have better lives. This belief is a result of rumors spread by other people.

The rubber plantations cause the lowland people to lose their traditional handicraft jobs, which are practiced by the elderly and have been done for generations. Additionally, the hill tribe people's tea leaf and paddy prices are also affected by the political instability. Chinese merchants are not able to come to trade the tea leaves like in the past.

## Mono crop plantations

Not only have people been growing rubber plantations in Mongla, but they have also begun to grow other cash crops like bananas, corn and mangoes. All of these crops are exported to China.

Though the main crop is rubber, Chinese people also invest in banana plantations in Monla as well as in the Chiang Law area near the border of China. The Mongla government allows them to plant there because banana trees can help maintain the water system.

Some houses also plant corn on the land near the road that cannot grow rubber. They buy corn seeds from China at 20 Yuan (\$4.50) per kilogram. Then, people need fertilizer (1 bag is 90 Yuan, or \$13.50) to put on the corn plants to produce good fruit.

Moreover, most people in Mongla cannot go to work in China, because they do not have Chinese identification cards. Consequently, people will work in their area using their own skills. One of the interviewees said:

*"Most people here cannot do jobs other than farming. So, they plant rubber trees and other cash crops like corn, which are in demand in China. Some land is useless because it can't be used to plant rice paddies because of the shortage of water and weather changes."<sup>15</sup>*

## Comparison to Kengtung Township

Because of the unstable political situation in Monlga during the time I conducted my field research, I was unable to travel to other parts of Mongla to collect more information. Therefore, I traveled to Kengtung Township, which is 56 miles south of Mongla, to find information about the rubber plantations there. Some people in rural areas along the mountains in Yaung Kio and Wan Vo villages have planted rubber trees owned by U Than Tun, a Chinese businessman. I went to observe and interview workers, sellers and villagers located near the rubber plantation. A seller

---

14) interview 8- Ibid

15) interview 9- a 60 years old woman from Wan Bao village.

woman located in Wan Vo village explained that:

*“All of the rubber trees planted here on our mountain belong to a Chinese company (the owner is named U Than Tun, a Chinese man). He agreed to give 300 trees to each house to get permission to plant in this village until it is ready to collect the liquid. They bought the small trees from Mongla about 4 Yuan (\$0.60) and plant in here now.”<sup>16</sup>*

I also met one of the sellers who opened a small shop at her house in her village where the rubber plantation was planted in the community's forest. She did not know about the rubber plantation. She also did not know whether or not the mountain near their village belongs to their village because there are rubber trees planted there already. She told me:

*“We do not know if mountain belongs to our community or not. The Chinese company just comes to plant in here. They bought the mountain from SPDC so we do not know about it. We just have a little forest here. But on the mountain are all rubber trees now. They also bought rubber trees from soldiers, who set up a battalion near our village, since some of the trees belonged to them [soldiers].”<sup>17</sup>*

These rubber trees belong to U Than Tun, who owns the biggest rubber company in Kengtung township. There are over 80 workers, including members of the Ahka, Shan and Burman ethnic groups, who work on rubber plantations. A workers' salary is around 120,000 – 130,000 Kyat (\$120-130) per month. There are 120,000-130,000 rubber trees planted on 600 acres in Yang Khio to Wa Vo villages in Kengtung Township. This company also sold small rubber trees to Tachilek Township, which is located on the Thai-Burma border. They sold about 20,000 trees this year, at 500-600 Kyat (\$0.50-0.60) per tree.

Some rubber trees have produced liquid already; it was sent to be sold in Mongla township for 11-12 Yuan (\$1.5) per kilogram of rubber. The dry rubber can make 20 Yuan (\$3) for one kilogram.

Since Mongla began planting rubber trees, other areas of Shan State such as Kengtung Township have also started to plant rubber trees in the local community's forest, which is now owned by Chinese businessmen. According to local farmers, their rights and their environment were exploited by Chinese businessmen.

## Conclusion

Shan State is rich in natural resources, but most of Shan people cannot enjoy their rights inside Burma. There are some ethnic groups trying to fight the SPDC for democracy and human rights in their area. Some groups, such as the NDAA ceasefire group in Mongla, Ko Kang, Ban Sang, also known as the Wa territory and SSA-N, made ceasefires with SPDC in order to enjoy some resources in their own areas. These groups have the right to use their own natural resources, but

---

16) interview 10- a seller woman from Wan Vo village.

17) interview 11- Yang Kio villager

only within the area delimited by the SPDC. Thus, people in the ceasefire areas try to work or plant rubber trees to try to improve their living standards and increase their income.

Because of the limited availability of land, people have to destroy their communities' forests to plant rubber trees, in order to secure their future financial stability. However, the local people do not know the current impact of the rubber trees on their livelihood and do not understand the problems related to rubber plantations such as flooding, drought, and loss of habitat for local wildlife or that these problems will become even worse in the future.

This report has shown that there are more negative than positive outcomes from the rubber plantations in Shan State. Most of the benefits of the rubber plantations go to China, and to private business groups such as the rubber companies and traders. The greatest negative impacts fall on hunters, farmers, animals and people who depend on the communities' forest for their livelihoods. Local people have unknowingly invested many resources in projects that are ultimately harmful for them.

The NDAA should take responsibility to rehabilitate the forest and help the local people who are facing problems as a result of the rubber plantations. As the NDAA has the power to govern the area, they should protect and preserve the forest ecosystem, including the soil, water, flora and fauna, and biodiversity, which is necessary for future generations to learn from nature.

## Recommendations

### *To NDAA ceasefire group*

- » Stop giving permission to plant rubber trees.
- » Protect the forest instead of exporting the logs to China.
- » Raise awareness about forest conservation and the impacts of rubber trees and create a reforestation program to rehabilitate the environment and provide jobs for local people.
- » Protect and preserve the forest ecosystem, including the soil, water, flora and fauna, and biodiversity.
- » Provide vocational training for local people.
- » Support the education of the local people and their children.
- » Establish a community forest team dedicated to the conservation of the forest.
- » Supplement incomes by making handicrafts or starting a small business that is not harmful to the forest instead of planting rubber trees.

### *To the SPDC*

- » Allow the people from NDAA area to move freely.



- » Give opportunity for the NDAA people to do their own businesses in other townships.
- » Stop political tensions with the NDAA.
- » Require the NDAA to respect the International Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity to which Burma is a signatory.

### *To the Palaung hill tribe group*

- » Do not sell or rent the land to Chinese businessmen for rubber plantations.
- » Do not sell logs from the community forest.
- » Use the forest sustainably for sustenance.

### *To the international community*

- » Help provide education about the environment to the local community.
- » Encourage the NDAA to do environmental impact assessments.

# Environmental and Social Impacts of Commercial Rubber and Banana Plantations on Local People in Hkaya Village, Northeastern Kachin State

by Myitsu

## Introduction

This report analyzes the environmental and social impacts of rubber and banana plantations owned by the Northern Royal Jade Company and the Hone Shin Company in Hkaya village in the northeastern part of Kachin State. Hkaya village is governed by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) joint government system. However, neither of these groups takes responsibility for the development of Hkaya village.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the Burmese Government started the Raw and Vacant Land Policy in Kachin State, which allows the Burmese government to seize land that has gone unused for three years. At the same time, North Royal Jade Company and the SPDC, using this government policy, started to plant rubber trees in Hkaya Village. In 2009, the KIO, the SPDC and the Hone Shin Company extended these plantations to include banana trees along the Myitkyina and Bamaw highways. According to an interview with the Lu Yang Company:



1) Interview#8 with community member in Hkaya village, Kachin State. On file with author.



*A banana plantation in Hkaya Village*

*Photo by: Myitsu*

*"To do this, they borrowed agricultural lands from the local people. In order to finance these plantations, they were categorized as part of the Chinese Government's opium substitution policy. This policy requires Kachin communities to replace their opium crops with fruits and vegetable crops that support villagers' livelihoods."<sup>2</sup>*

However, there are no opium crops in Hkaya Village, so the application of this policy in Hkaya Village is questionable. This research focuses on the environmental and social impacts in Hkaya village occurring

because of the cultivation of commercial rubber and bananas by the Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin companies. The local people have been forced, by the SPDC and the KIO, to rent their paddy fields and land to the Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin companies for six years. As a result of lack of access to their land for agriculture and other purposes, they are having difficulty earning money for their livelihoods and children's education. Furthermore, a chemical used in the commercial agricultural plantations has polluted the water and is causing health problems for the local people.

Involuntary confiscation of land and inadequate compensation for the land borrowed for these projects, constitutes a human rights violation. Northern Royal Jade Company, Hone Shin Company, the SPDC and the KIO should not neglect the rights of the local people. These rights include the ability to remain on their land and practice their traditional livelihood as well as the right to clean, unpolluted water. Because of this, they should not take the land by force. This report recommends that the Northern Royal Jade Company, the Hone Shin Company, the KIO and the SPDC recognize the rights of the local people and implement project policies that are more socially responsible and environmentally sustainable.

This report is divided into three parts. Part one describes the background history of the local and regional study areas, including Hkaya village. Part two provides a description of the projects and relevant government policies. The final section describes some of the social and environmental impacts of these rubber and banana plantations in Hkaya village. This section also provides conclusions and recommendations for the mitigation of these impacts.

## Methodology

This report is based on field research conducted in Hkaya village northeast part of Kachin State in July and August 2010. Twenty two people were interviewed including:

- » Old and young people living in Hkaya Village;

2) Interview#18 with Lu Yang Company in Banana plantation in Laiza, Kachin State. On file with author.

- » Farmers in the local area;
- » Staff members of Health Unlimited (HU), a local NGO that provides health care for plantation workers in the local study area;
- » Staff members of Jade Land Company, which built roads in Hyaka Village in 2003;
- » The current leader of the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO);
- » Northern Jade and Ho Shin company workers
- » Local people who have had land confiscated as a result of the project.



*Rubber plantation on Bumlen Hill in Hkaya Village (Photo by: Myitsu)*

Further demographic information on those interviewed during the field research is provided in Appendix A.

## Political and Socio-Economic Background

### *Kachin State – Regional Study Area*

Kachin State is situated in the northern part of Burma near Shan State and the Chinese and Indian borders. Kachin State is full of natural resources including jade, gold and teak and many other natural wonders. Kachin, Shan, Burmese, Chinese, and Indian ethnic people live together in the State. The majority of the State's inhabitants are Kachin, and their religion is Christian. Many Kachin people live in mountainous areas, and depend on shifting hill agriculture, hunting, fishing, and livestock farming for sustenance. The Kachin Resistance Organization, a branch of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), signed a ceasefire in February 1994 with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). This ended 40 years of fighting which had been causing many social and economic problems for the people of Kachin State. When KIO signed the ceasefire, they decided to work together with the SPDC to end these problems through community development initiatives, for example through electricity and road infrastructure in Kachin communities.<sup>3</sup>

The SPDC controlled all economic authority in Kachin State up until 2000. In 2000, the SPDC began cooperating with the Chinese government and established a joint venture company of the SPDC and Chinese Companies for the economic management of Kachin State.<sup>4</sup> The joint

3) Interview# 6 with one of KIO leader in Laiza, Kachin State. On file with author.

4) "Poverty and Environmental Issues in Kachin State," KESAN, [http://www.kesan.asia/kachin\\_background.html](http://www.kesan.asia/kachin_background.html)

venture created a development program for Kachin State that included building better transportation, infrastructure as well as providing sufficient electricity. The mining of natural resources such as teak, gold, and jade was permitted by the SPDC to be used as funds for the development program.<sup>5</sup> The Myitkyina - Bamaw road was opened across Hkaya village by cooperation between the KIO and Jade Land Company in 2003.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of this development program, there was a significant increase in mining (mainly jade, gold and teak) and commercial monoculture projects (banana, rubber and sugar cane) in Kachin State. Also this caused an influx of Chinese workers to Kachin State. Therefore, many of the local people have lost their land and basis for livelihood. High unemployment has caused many social problems in the villages including gambling, drug use and prostitution. The number of youth becoming drug users or sex workers has continued to increase. Some people work for the joint Venture Company of the SPDC and Chinese for very low salaries, but the workers do not complain because they have little general knowledge about their rights. They don't know what rights they have or how to protect their rights. This means they cannot protect their land and natural resources from unlawful use.<sup>7</sup>

### *Hkaya Village – Local Study Area*

Hkaya village is situated in the southeastern part of Kachin State, in Tawfuyang Township and on Myitkyina road to Bamaw. About 15 kilometers from Hkaya is Laiza, the territory of the KIO. Hkaya village and the surrounding the villages are remote. In Hyaka Village, there are 60 households and a population of about 600 people, including 80 school children. The village is surrounded by small beautiful hills including Bum Len, Bum Re Wam, San Le Bum and Hkaya Mountain. Hkaya Mountain provides a constant supply of fresh, clean water from the Ura Stream, Shi Sheng Stream and Hkang Hka Stream. This water is used by the people of Hkaya village. The villagers earn their living through their traditional farming system and they utilize the forests in Bum Len, Bum Re Wam and San Le Bum for multiple purposes such as agriculture, traditional medicines, income generation and cultural practices.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1965 and 1994, during the civil war, the villagers were forced to leave Hkaya during several different periods. They would only come back during times of peace. There was no formal government in the region during this time. The villagers suffered a great deal in the war. The Burmese army treated the villagers as they wished, killing them and taking their properties.<sup>9</sup>

The local school, called 'Self-Reliant' was opened during times of peace with the support of the village committee. This showed unity between the villagers despite experiencing many years of civil war. The school children at that time could attend the school through the support of

---

5) Tint Lwin Thuang. "Identifying Conservation Issues in Kachin State," from Myanmar: State, Community, and Environment. <http://epress.anu.edu.au/myanmar/pdf/ch12.pdf>

6) Interview#21 (Staff of Jade Land company)

7) "Poverty and Environmental Issues in Kachin State."

8) Interview#13 with current head of Hkaya village in Hkaya village, Kachin State. On file with author

9) Interview#6

their families' income from slash and burn farming. The villagers were also able to hire a teacher. Around 1978, the civil war forced all the villages to seek refuge in the jungle and hills outside of Hkaya. They did not return until after the cease-fire in 1994. During this time, there was no school to provide education for the villagers' children. There was a lack of education and information provided for the community as a whole. The Hkaya villagers were isolated from information and education about their rights and changing government policies in their country, state and village.

After the ceasefire, the villagers couldn't rebuild the local school quickly, so the school children attended the school at Narlone Village, nearby to Hkaya. All the families were able to afford to send their children to this school through income generated from their land. The main source of livelihood in Hkaya was rice and other vegetables grown in their fields. This was enough to provide them with all their livelihood needs. The economy was simple and they did not have many shops to spend their money.<sup>10</sup>

The joint development program, run by KIO and SPDC in Kachin State also applied to Hkaya Village. This has been the economic authority of the village since the war ended.

## Rubber Plantations in Hyaka Village

In 2006, the Burmese government planned a program of discovering unused or raw land. In the area around Hkaya Village such as Bum Len Hill, Bum Re Wam Hill, and San Le Bum Hill, Northern Royal Jade cooperated with the heads of the Burmese and Chinese governments to finance and begin creating rubber plantations in Hkaya Village.<sup>11</sup> They took about 1,000 acre of the villagers' land, which had already been planted with fruits and vegetables. The villagers were not given any compensation. Without the consent of the people, they started their project by cultivating the forests of Bum Len, Bum Re Wam and San Le Bum with advanced technology.<sup>12</sup>

*"My land, which has been planted with seasonal fruits since 2005, was confiscated by the SPDC for a rubber plantation. The SPDC said that they have given the compensation to the local authority but we have not received it yet. All of the compensation is kept by the local authority."*<sup>13</sup>

-Villager

During 2006, some of the local villagers tried to stop the Northern Royal Jade workers by confronting them on the plantation land. They were stopped by KIO and SPDC officials, who stated that the plantations were part of the government development program of Kachin State. The villagers were told that Northern Royal Jade would help to provide infrastructure, such as school buildings, a health clinic, water and electricity for the village's development. Although

10) Interview#11 with Deacon of the Hkaya Baptist Church in Hkaya village, Kachin State. On file with author

11) Interview# 21 with staff of Jade Land Company in Laiza, Kachin State. On file with author.

12) Interview#9, 10, 11,14,15,17 with Hkaya villagers in Hkaya village, Kachin State. On file with author.

13) Interview# 14,17



nearly all villagers in Hkaya had lost their land, they were content with what this development program had promised and said nothing more.

In 2007, Narlone, which is near Hkaya Village, received 10,000,000 kyat (\$10,000) as compensation, and Hkaya received 3,000,000 kyat (\$3,000) and 6,000 bricks compensation for land acquisition for the rubber plantations. With this, they built a small school and hired a teacher; they were able to keep the school open until 2009.<sup>14</sup> The villagers hoped for more compensation for the loss of their vegetable fields, but no further compensation was paid. They just received empty promises from the local authorities and representatives of Northern Royal Jade at village meetings.<sup>15</sup>

Compensation given by Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin for possession of the villagers' land is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Compensation provided to Narlone and Hyaka Village**

Village name	Kyat	\$	Other	Rubber area
Narlone	10,000,000	10,000	-	Approx. 400 acres
Hkaya	3,000,000	3,000	6,000 Pieces of brick & free electricity	Approx. 600 acres

In 2007, Northern Royal Jade started to supply electricity to Hkaya Village as compensation for the villagers' land, where fruits and vegetables had been planted. The electricity was free for those who settled in Hkaya Village before 2007. However, this changed in 2009. "We, the KIO, had to pay 3.5 million Yuan in 2009 to Northern Royal Jade for electricity. So it is unsure whether those who got free electricity before can still receive this benefit." said a KIA staff member who works in the electric department.<sup>16</sup> In 2010, the villagers found out that the management of Northern Royal Jade had changed; this was the reason for the changes in electricity costs. At the time this report was written, the cost of electricity for the villagers was still unclear.

## Banana plantations

In 2007, the SPDC limited the area of accessible forest for the villagers of Hkaya Village to a sanctuary (restricted) area on Ntap Mountain. The forest area was restricted as an environmental protection measure; however, it meant that the villagers had no land for farming. In 2009, the villagers farmed the remaining lands outside of the restricted area through the slash and burn method.<sup>17</sup>

In 2009, banana plantations were started in Hkaya, Shadan pa, Tingyen, Ja seng, Mung mu,

14) Interview#11

15) Interview#17

16) Interview#13

17) Interview:#11

Naw Nin, Nam Ngau, and Hka U. The two companies that own the banana plantations are Lu Yang and Hone Shin. The plantations currently cover 1,400 acres, and in 2010, 600 acres will be added. This is in accordance with a plan to have a total of 2000 acres of land as plantation for Lu Yang and Hone Shin Companies. In Hyaka Village, Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin are managing the banana plantation projects.

According to the Burmese government's Raw and Vacant Land Policy, lands in Hkaya Village that have not been “well planted for three years” can be taken by the government.

The SPDC has the authority to enforce this policy by confiscating land as they see fit. The villagers lent their land without resistance in order to prevent their land from being taken by force under this policy.<sup>18</sup>

In April 2009, Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin, in agreement with the chief of the village, borrowed the land for the price of 50,000 kyat (\$50USD) for one acre of land, per year, under a six year contract. Despite the fact that the villagers demanded 60,000 kyat (\$60USD) for one acre and payment two years in advance, so that they would have enough money to live, this was the outcome. In China, one acre of land for a banana plantation costs 1,000 Yuan (\$100USD).<sup>19</sup> Representatives of Lu Yang and Hone Shin spoke only with the chiefs of the village, and did not listen to the requests of the villagers.<sup>20</sup> This disparity in cost is unjust.

The following table compares the cost of Burmese land and Chinese land used to plant bananas.

Country/ State	Acre	Kyat	Yuan
China (border)	1	140,000 (per a year)	1050
Kachin State (Hkaya village)	1	50,000 (per a year)	300



*Chinese workers packing bananas for export to China (Photo credit: SL)*

## Environmental and Social Impacts

### *Environmental Issues*

#### **A. Reduction in water supply due to water used for commercial banana plantations**

For the banana plantations, the Hone Shin Company needed water, so they took it from the Ura, the Shi Sheng, and the Hkang Hka streams with a pipe. This water belonged to the villagers.

18) Interview#18

19) Interview#22 with Kachin Development Group (KDG)'s staff, INGO) in Laiza, Kachin State. On file with author

20) Interview#11



*The irrigation system, which takes water from the village's streams, on a banana plantation (Photo by: Myitsu)*

This reduced Hkaya Village's water supply.<sup>21</sup>

## **B. Pollution of local water sources from chemicals used in commercial banana plantations**

The high use of agricultural chemicals for the banana plantations causes run off into Ura, Shi Sheng, and Hkang Hka Streams. These are streams that the villages have been using as a water source for many years. Now the streams are polluted with chemical fertilizers and chemical plastics; it is a contaminated area which can no longer be used.<sup>22</sup> During field research, one of the villagers said,

*"Currently, there are only three wells that provide water for the villagers. It is not enough for the whole community. Before, the people could get enough water from the streams but now all of the streams are polluted by chemical fertilizer from the banana plantations."*

## **C. Reduction in biodiversity due to vegetation clearing for monoculture plantations**

In order to plant the plantation trees, forest areas including large forest trees and fruit trees around Hkaya Village were cleared. The clearing of large amounts of land for banana and rubber monoculture plantations around Hkaya village has resulted in vegetation loss, reduction in biodiversity and other negative impacts including habitat loss. Furthermore vegetation clearing has caused the loss of the traditional medicine obtained from herbal plants.<sup>23</sup>



*Log big trees and carry to the China (Photo credit: AS)*

## *Health*

### **A. Health problems from exposure to polluted water**

As mentioned, the water sources for Hkaya have been polluted from chemicals used in the plantations. Although, it is possible for adults to avoid the polluted water, the children cannot help themselves from playing in the water.<sup>24</sup> A Mother of five children, who lives in Hkaya said,

21) Interview# 8, 9,10,11,14,15,16,17 with Hkaya villagers in Hkaya village, Kachin State. On file with author.

22) Interview# 7,14,15,16 and 1 with Myanmar Friendship Foundation Staffs in Yangon. On file with author.

23) Interview #6, 11

24) Interview#16

*"After the banana plantation came, the water in the Ura Brook, Shi Sheng Brook, and Hkang Hka Brook became dirty, because a lot of chemical fertilizers are used on the banana plantation. When the children go swimming, their skin was affected by the water. As for me, I have a lot of children, so I can't always care for them all. It is very dangerous for children's skin."*

The pollution of the water supply has been caused by the use of chemical fertilizers around and in the streams of Hkaya village. Plastics, which are made chemically, are everywhere. Because of using the polluted water, the villagers have been infected with many diseases such as malaria, typhoid, cholera, cold and cough, and skin diseases.<sup>25</sup>



Water pollution in Hka Hkai stream, Hkaya Village (Photo by: Myitsu)

## **B. Lack of health services in Hkaya village**

In Hkaya village, there is no village medical clinic. There was a promise to provide a clinic for the villagers, but the Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin companies broke their promise and failed to provide any health care for the village. When they get sick, the villagers go to Health Unlimited Organization (HU)'s Numripan clinic, which is located in Laiza Township, 15 kilometers from Hkaya Village. A staff from Health Unlimited (HU) said:

*"In our clinic, we treat HIV/AIDS, STDs, and other diseases. The Hkaya villagers also come here to be cured, and most patients are banana plantation workers. We are amazed because their diseases are different from our other patients and we didn't know their disease until now. A staff from Health Unlimited (HU) reported that the laborers of the banana plantation were infected some kind of peculiar disease for they experimented and checked for malaria, TB, STDs, and HIV."*

## **C. Introduction of new diseases and health problems due to population increase**

As the population increases, health care plays a vital role. Many laborers came to live at the camp made for the banana plantation project. Many kinds of diseases were found in the village when the rubber and banana plantation program began. The number of sick people increased more and more, but there was no medical treatment for them and the village did not have a clinic. As there were no serious diseases in the village around 1964, local people believed that they had no need for a clinic. Normal diseases could be cured with herbal medicines, but now, there are many health issues related to contaminated or polluted water, a result of chemical run off into the stream and soils.<sup>26</sup>

25) Interview #7 with Nurse of Hkaya village. On file with author.

26) Interview#9

## D. Health problems for plantation workers from unsafe working conditions

Most of the sick people in Hkaya are workers. This is because they lack access to personal safety equipment (such as masks, gloves, and eye protection). An HU staff member explained a nurse's experience working in the village in this way:

*"A nurse who had a diploma certificate from KIA nursing training and midwife training of Health Unlimited (HU) and came to open a professional clinic in the village 6 months ago, has reported that the kinds of diseases from which the villagers are suffering are cholera, cough, skin diseases and other diseases that are still unknown, and most of the sick people were the laborers lived in the project camp"*<sup>27</sup>

## E. Changes in diet and nutrition from environmental changes

In addition to the many diseases caused by pollution in the river, the loss of subsistence base as a result of environmental degradation is threatening the villagers' nutrition and diet. Before the rubber and banana plantations projects began, Hkaya village had many seasonal fruits. Today, the villagers do not have a place to plant fruits and vegetables. In the past, the villagers had no need to spend money on meat or fish because they could hunt and fish on their land for free; however, now only the rich can afford these things because they must be purchased. The villagers of Hkaya are lacking many nutrients in their diets as a result of limited space to grow and hunt for food. One of the villagers said,

*"Before the rubber and banana plantation projects, villages produced their own fruits and vegetables, but now if we want to have fruits and vegetables, we have to go into town to buy them."*<sup>28</sup>

## Social Impacts

### A. Involuntary land acquisition for plantation projects

Although the Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin companies benefited from Hkaya Village, they did not help the village progress. Additionally, the Burmese government designated the area of forest as a sanctuary area, so the villagers have lost the land they once used for farming. The Northern Royal Jade Company cut down many big trees from their target land for rubber plantation; the trees were transported from Hkaya to China.<sup>29</sup> One of the village's deacons said: "The government occupies this hill and we do not have a field for our livestock. So we farm these lands secretly. If the government knew that we are farming on these hills without their permission, I'm sure we can be arrested." The government took many acres of land by force. The company not only took the remaining land with little compensation, but also lied in the treaties they signed.

27) Interview# 19 with Health Unlimited Organization's staff in Laiza, Kachin State. On file with author.

28) Interview #9,11,17

29) Interview#4 with Northern Royal Jade Company's former worker in Myitkyina, Kachin State. On file with author.



## **B. Change in social cohesion and population of Hkaya Village due to influx of plantation workers**

The Chinese companies prefer Burman workers over local people to guard the banana plantations. The plantations must be guarded 24 hours a day. Burman people can work full time, while the local people have to participate in the social activities for their community. Therefore, the number of migrant workers from lower Burma is increasing, because they can earn 100,000 kyat per month as plantation guards. As a consequence, Hkaya village has become the permanent working site for the migrant workers while the local people only have the chance to work as day laborers.<sup>30</sup>

## **C. Corruption and lack of plantation finances used for community development**

The local people have the opportunity to work as day laborers, picking the bananas when they are ripe. They can earn 500 kyats per branch of banana. Generally, they can earn nearly 10,000 kyats per a day.<sup>31</sup> However, they have to pay 500 kyats per a day as a tax to the local authority for the development program.<sup>32</sup> But, it is unclear whether or not the local authority really uses the tax for the development program, because it never shows its expenditures to the community.<sup>33</sup> The SPDC and the KIA get many taxes from banana exports which are marked with the Chinese code.<sup>34</sup> Although many individuals benefit from the project, there has been no development in education, health, or economic infrastructure in the village.<sup>35</sup>

## **Education**

### *Lack of resources for education*

In Hkaya Village, there is no funding or government support for education. The village does not have enough teachers, and they have other difficulties gaining access to education. Some of the villagers' views concerning their children's education are summarized by a reporter as follows:

*"For the 2010 academic year in Hkaya village, the primary school has not opened yet and the school committee has no funds for hiring a teacher."*<sup>36</sup>

In 2006, the villagers got a chance to promote education for their children when businessmen promised them some facilities, such as a school building, a clinic and purified water. In return, the businessmen demanded extra land on which they would plant rubber. The villagers did not

---

30) Interview #14

31) Interview# 18

32) Interview#13

33) Interview #11

34) Interview# 18

35) Interview #7

36) Interview # 14,15





Primary School of Hkaya village (Photo by: Myitsu)

hesitate to give away their land, as it was the only way they could access resources to develop the village's educational facilities. In reality, the businessmen only gave the village 300,000 kyat and 6,000 pieces of brick. They added these bricks to their saved money and built a small school.<sup>37</sup>

In 2008, the village hired a teacher and 20 students attended first and second grades. For the teacher's salary, the village tried to collect money from each family. In 2009, because of their low incomes and an economic crisis, they were not able to pay the teacher enough money. The economic crisis became a serious matter. When the banana

plantation started, the problem became worse. The village leaders encountered many problems.<sup>38</sup> One of the village's deacons explained:

*"Since we have a new chief in the village, we can't send our children to attend the Hkaya School because he does not support the children's education; he just thinks about his own business. So, we could have a meeting without the chief. It's hard for us to organize our villagers and discuss about the education for the children because we also face financial problems in this year."*

This year (2010), the villages cannot hire a teacher because it is uncertain whether or not the village school will open. Some children are waiting for the school's opening day.<sup>39</sup> Some children have already begun attending No. 1 Basic Middle School in Narlone Village, Thawponeyang Township, which is near Hkaya Village. Though the SPDC has said that primary education is free, in reality children have to pay a primary school fee of 12,000 kyats (\$12.00 US) per a year and a middle school fee of 18,000 kyat (\$18) at the Narlone Village School. These fees are very high for poor rural children.<sup>40</sup> They cannot afford to attend the government school in Narlone Village, so they must wait for the opening day of the Hkaya School. The children who decided to wait for the opening day of Hkaya Village's school are too late to begin studying at No. 1 Basic Middle School at the school in Narlone village.<sup>41</sup>

The primary school children had difficulties accessing transportation to Narlone to attend school. The Narlone School is 2 miles away from Hkaya Village. The headmaster of the Narlone School arranged school transportation with his car at a rate of 5,000 kyat a month per student, but the families cannot afford that cost. The village wants the SPDC to support their school and arrange for a school teacher. As one of the villagers explained, "Only preschool teaching was in the

37) Interview #13

38) Interview #9

39) Interview #11

40) Interview #13

41) Interview #7,11,17

church and sponsored by the Metta Foundation, an NGO.”<sup>42</sup>

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights each declare the right to free education. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the SPDC has ratified, also mentions the right to free education.<sup>43</sup> The governments did not take responsibility for the village children's education. Instead of funding the children's education, the SPDC took all the profits from the banana and rubber plantations.<sup>44</sup>

## Changes in Cultural Values

### *Changes to the traditional way of life as a result of the project*

Long ago, the villagers from Hkaya lived in unity and valued their natural resources. Money at that time was not as important as the ethics of the people. They lived and ate together. Their whole system of livelihood activities changed when they lost their crops, which they relied on for subsistence, to the banana and rubber plantations. Their traditional knowledge system was also devalued and lost. There were conflicts among the villagers regarding famine and benefits from the project. The Chinese brought their own culture as they moved to the villagers' lands. Money became the most important thing. Once they were owners of their land and other natural resources, but today they are laborers, and money is scarce.<sup>45</sup> The good ethics they once valued so highly are in decline. Many kinds of robbery and theft have occurred in the village. One of the villagers said:

*“Many people are fighting each other for jobs to carry bananas for the businessmen for their daily income because there are few jobs for the local people. So, I don't let anyone in my family go to work at the banana plantations because they are always fighting there.”<sup>46</sup>*

All the villagers were Christian and valued their good ethics before strangers came to the village. Now they no longer practice Godly living, and there is a lack of devotion to social work. This year there were no leaders who would take responsibility for the education of the village's children.<sup>47</sup>

---

42) Interview #7

43) “Member States of the United Nations (and the dates on which they joined the organization),” United Nation of Human Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/Pages/HumanRightsintheWorld.aspx>

44) Interview#7,9,11,14,15,16,17

45) Interview #9,10,11,17

46) Interview#17

47) Interview #9

## Conclusion

The SPDC, the KIO, the Northern Royal Jade Company, and the Hone Shin Company began rubber and banana plantations in Hkaya Village in order to assist economic development in the area. However, to do this, agricultural land believed to be raw or vacant land was confiscated by the government under the Raw and Vacant Land Policy of the KIO and the SPDC. Only a small area of forest land was left as a sanctuary area (restricted area). This has severely reduced the amount of farming land available for villagers in Hkaya Village. Many people have lost their land and the villagers have faced many social and economic problems because of this. The practice of their traditional farming methods is less common. The overuse of chemicals for the plantations has caused negative health and environmental impacts in the local area.

Both rubber and banana plantations are projects of the Opium Substitution Policy of Burma and China, an agreement that substitutes other long-term plants for poppy with official supports such as borrowed money and advanced technologies. The policy was implemented in order to develop the region's agriculture, society, economy, education and other associated facilities. The SPDC, the KIO and the Chinese companies were supposed to give help to provide purified water, a school, jobs and a health clinic for the development of the village.

Because of the policy, the local people become poorer while Chinese businessmen, the SPDC, and the KIO benefited from this project. This is a result of decisions made between the SPDC, the KIO, and the Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin companies. The local people who live in the project area have lost their land and are facing the loss of their means of livelihood, health problems, a lack of education, and other social problems.

The SPDC, the KIO, and the Northern Royal Jade and Hone Shin companies ignore all the problems they have caused in the local communities, where the situation is becoming hopeless. Children from the plantation project sites are facing a lack of education and find life more and more difficult because of their lack of knowledge. The local people do not have land to farm for their livelihoods. They are facing a scarcity of water caused by the use of chemical fertilizers on the plantations. While this report focused on Hkaya Village, there are many other villages in this area of Kachin State that face similar problems caused by banana and rubber plantations.

## Recommendations

### *To the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)*

- » Do not implement development projects without allowing local people to participate in the decision-making process. The villagers of Hkaya village should be consulted in an open, transparent manner, regarding project decisions that affect them.
- » Build social and economic development based on the local community's perspectives and concept of development.
- » Villagers should be given fair market value compensation for the land acquired for the projects.

- » Sufficient land should be provided to allow the local people to use traditional farming methods in Hkaya Village.
- » Sign and ratify the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its optional protocols.
- » Provide environmental education programs for the local people so they can learn environmental management methods to use on their lands.
- » Maintain biodiversity by planting other species in the plantation areas to prevent a monoculture system.
- » Establish an environmental agency in association with local communities to promote sustainable development.

### *To the Chinese companies*

- » Consider the traditions and livelihoods of the people at the project sites.
- » Respect the farmers, their environment, and their human rights.
- » Reduce the use of chemical fertilizers on agricultural plantations. Stop the run off of chemical fertilizers into local streams and water sources.
- » Reduce the use of plastic in the plantation projects and clean up plastics that have been collecting in the plantation areas.
- » Respect and obey the Opium Substitution Project's policies.

### *To the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)*

- » Consider the Hkaya villagers' livelihoods, health, and education.
- » Stop allowing the Chinese companies to use chemical fertilizers on banana plantations.
- » Provide training in organic farming to local people. Let the local people practice their traditional farming methods on their lands.

### *To the local peoples*

- » Demand that the SPDC make a new national and local curriculum that includes information on how to maintain a healthy environment.
- » Demand that the SPDC respect the international environmental treaties that they have signed.
- » Demand that the SPDC stop renting land to the Chinese companies without fair compen-

sation.

*To the international community and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)*

- » Pressure the SPDC to stop human rights abuses in Kachin State.
- » Stop investment with SPDC for development projects, as they can affect the local people's livelihoods and history.
- » Pressure the SPDC to stop allowing the use of chemical fertilizers on agriculture.
- » Provide education about the environment to the local community.

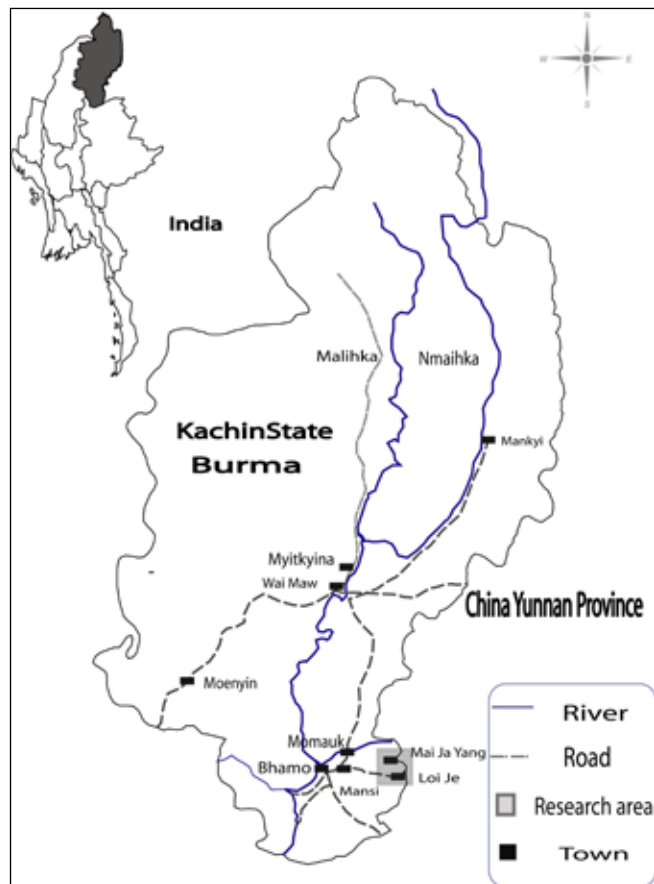
# Social Impacts of a Casino on the Community of Mai Ja Yang Village on the China-Burma Border in Southeastern Kachin State

by Pisi

## Introduction

In military ruled Burma, there are a lot of Chinese owned businesses. Political instability in the country creates a good opportunity for Chinese businessmen to extract natural resources and operate illegal businesses. Chinese companies are involved in building mega dams, logging, mining, and operating mega-casinos on the China-Burma border.

The main inhabitants of the China-Burma border are the Kachin, and their area is under the control of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) an ethnic ceasefire group. After the military regime called the State Law and Order Restoration Council, today known as the the State Peace and Development Council or ( SPDC ), and China signed a border trade agreement in 1988, the Burmese military and China have traded more openly.<sup>1</sup>



1) A choice for China, Global witness, Oct 2005, page 11



Since the KIO signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese military in 1994, there have been more Chinese companies operating in the border region. Before the ceasefire, the KIO used to get money from jade mines, opium farming, and logging. However, those sectors became controlled by the SPDC after the ceasefire agreement. Therefore the KIO lost a chance to manage their area and get taxes except in the town of Lai Za and Mai Ja Yang on the China-Burma border. In order for the KIO to get money for their operations, they needed to open up the region to the business sectors, which included logging, tax collecting, and building big hotel and casinos in cooperation with Chinese businessmen in Mai Ja Yang.



*The 80 Acres of the Sut Maden Company Area (Photo by Pisi)*

In 2000, the KIO signed an agreement with a Chinese business called Sut Maden, to rent an area of 80 acres for business sectors in the village of Mai Ja Yang. The land was used to build hotels, a big casino, cigarette factories and prostitute-bars. The agreement was supposed to be 25 years long. According to my research the KIO leader stated they received at least 120 million CNY per year, which is equal to \$1.76 million, from the casino taxes and rent fees.<sup>2</sup> Today, most of the operations of the casino have been shut down because local and Chinese people connected to the casino committed a lot of crimes and gambling within the casino area.

The impact of the casino is still left in the Mai Ja Yang Community, even though the casino is now mostly closed. The casino in Mai Ja Yang created an increased number of drug users and prostitutes among youth. In addition, the casino also created a breeding ground for human trafficking, and the crime rate in the region increased. The operation of the casino led to a change in the livelihood of the villagers. The casino was a bad influence on the local community.

The KIO which serves as the local government should take responsibility for overseeing the Casino's business activities to manage and reduce these problems. The KIO should use the tax

2) Interview 1, 14, 19 ( Sut Maden security worker, officer of Immigration Department and KIO Administration officer in Mai Ja Yang). On file with author

revenue collected from the Casino to help the local communities begin sustainable development projects and create special programs for youth capacity building such as resource and sport centers. In addition, the KIO should improve the education system in communities and should focus on building and supporting agriculture.

This research high lights the negative impacts on the community, due to the Sut Maden casino in Mai Ja Yang. The first part shows the character changing of youth. The second part describes the increasing number of drug users and their impact on the community. The third part explains how local young women became prostitutes, because of the casino. The causes of human trafficking occurring in Mai Ja Yang are described in the fourth part. The fifth part explains the relation between the crime rate and the casino and the sixth part describes the natural resource related conflicts among the community. The final part includes the conclusion and recommendations.

## Methodology

This report is based on field research that took place in a small border town called Mai Ja Yang as well as four small villages along the border. Twenty-seven people including KIO government staff, youth sex workers and drug dealers working inside the casino, villagers, church and local leaders, high school and teacher training teachers, NGO staff working on women's issues and Harm Reduction Program were all interviewed for this report. Some secondary sources include 2009 ERSB human rights report books and news websites, as well as my own experiences working and living Mai Ja Yang.

## Background Information of the Research Area

This research took place in a village named Mai Ja Yang which is located 160 kilometers north of the Kachin capital city, Myitkyina, on the China-Burma border.<sup>3</sup> Mai Ja Yang is filled with mainly Kachin inhabitants. According to the village-head, the village was established in 1975. It was destroyed twice in the civil war between the KIO and Burmese army.<sup>4</sup>

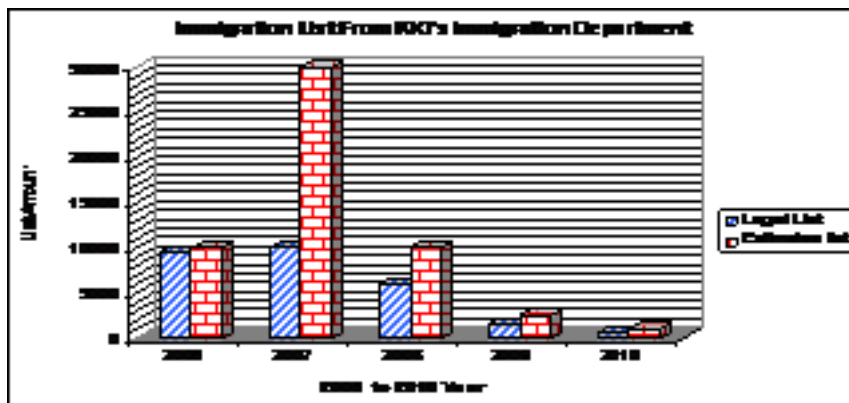
After the ceasefire between the KIO and Burmese army took place in 1994, the village as re-united. The inhabitants mainly do traditional farming for a living, and the community used to be a peaceful one. The people living in the village are mainly Zai-wa Kachin, and Shan. The estimated local population is about 2,000 with 286 families. Most of the local people are Christians. Some other people believe in animism.<sup>5</sup>

However, the village became more populated after the Chinese owned casino was built in 2000. There were 18 Chinese companies operating in the casino areas. Among them the big contractors are the brothers Wang Fie Ta and Wang Ja Htaik. They also own gambling areas around the world, including casinos in Macao. According to the Irrawaddy newspaper, the Mai Ja Yang

3) HKun Sam , "The Vanishing Lady Tycoon," 2005. [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=4825](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=4825)

4) Interview #8 with a local Church leader In Mai Ja Yang . On file with author

5) Roi Nu, master of rural development management graduate school Khon Kaen University, Land use pattern changes after economic integration in Mai Ja Yang , 2009, pg 54



*The population rate in Mai Ja Yang during 2006-2010*

population was actually 30,000. Most of gamblers came from Janghkong, Kunming, KongTong, Beijing, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, The Philippines, Hong Kong, Russia and Taiwan. From within Burma they came from Shan state in particular the villages of ( Pang sai and Kuthkai ), China and other parts of Burma. The highest amount of migration was in 2006-2007, when, according to the KIO Immigration Department list, the amount of foreigners visiting was over 600 per day.<sup>7</sup>

For this reason, there were many economic and social impacts on the this small community. Now the population of the Chinese people has gotten low and the immigration rate has decreased to 30-80 per day because the Casino was closed due to pressure from the Chinese government.

## Information about NGOs in Mai Ja Yang

In Mai Ja Yang, there are some NGOs working for community development such as for environmental issues, women's empowerment activities and health issues. But there is no organization working specifically for youth. Today, youth, especially young men, in Mai Ja Yang need to be empowered because they are using drugs, neglecting their education, losing their character and only focusing on getting money through short cut ways.

Currently an NGO named Health Unlimited is working, in cooperation with the KIO Health Department, towards the prevention of HIV/AIDS in Mai Ja Yang and Lai Za area. It contributes medicine and other technical support, such as laboratory testing and awareness materials. HU provides and changes needles for IDU and they substitute some drugs or tablets such as Naw Chyi Hpyen and Htamadaw called in Chinese for heroin. For people with HIV, they provide Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART). Through support from HU, the KIO was able to provide better health service to its people, especially drug users, and HIV affected people from 2006 until 2009. Unfortunately, HU's funding in the area got cut mid-2010. Since then, health related support has become limited, and the KIO is no longer able to provide adequate health support to its people. At the same time, the KIO isn't able to take full responsibility of healthcare as its position is still a

6) The Vanishing Lady Tycoon 2005,. [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=4825](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=4825)

7) Interview #14 with an officer of immigration department in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.



*Drug user fire needle in the machine and a bucket full of syringes collected in a month, in HU Drug in Center (Photo by Pisi)*

ceasefire group, which means politics and the struggle for democracy and freedom are their main priorities.

## Social Impacts on the Community

Over the past ten years, the casino created many social problems in Mai Ja Yang. A lot of young people in the community became drug users, prostitutes and contracted HIV/AIDS. Most of the local people's livelihoods were lost under the casino from gambling and drug using. Just a few people benefited from the casino; those who could sell their livestock or rent land and property to Chinese consumers.

However, according to the KIO immigration data, most of the gamblers and investors were from China.<sup>8</sup> So approximately 80% of the benefits of the casino went to Chinese people. The KIO only received the rent for 25 years and the youth were also involved as wage workers. About two percent of the local youth got benefit from the casino.<sup>9</sup> Most of the youth lost their way and changed their characters to become victims of drugs, gambling, prostitution and trafficking.

### *Behavior Changing Among Youth*

Youth are also a part of the community. Mai Ja Yang youth education have limited access to Education. Every youth cannot get the same opportunity in their further education. Since 1999 Mai Ja Yan has become popular with the center of the education area, under the KIO. There are two informal education programs which are Intensive English Program (IEP) and Pan Kachin College (PKC). However these programs are only intended for high school children. Other primary and middle level children are not eligible to join these programs. Thus there is no opportunity for children who ended their education at primary or middle levels. On the other hand, most of the local youth have to join the KIO as staff, because there is a rule that at least one person from every household must enter the KIO. Being a cease fire area, there is not much

8) Interview #14

9) Interview #1 ,4 with EEDY security officer and Local Youth leader. On file with author.



The biggest casino in Mai Ja Yang (Photo credit: Mun)

educated people who benefit from their professional education. So this is not a good sample for today's youth. This is why the number of the youth who are not interested in education is increasing and consequently, those kind of children have more favor to go to the Casino.

During the time of the casino, students were gambling and dropping out of school because of the casino. From 2006-2007, a lot of night clubs, bars, karaoke rooms, pool tables, and private video rooms opened to attract the local young people and gamblers. In the casino and night club areas, many kinds of drugs and sex workers were available for the customers. The fee of the night club was very cheap. The night club gate fee for men was 10 Yuan ( \$1.5 ) while the women did not need to pay. So local young people went there even though they did not have much money.

The casino was the place where young people who could speak Chinese and could make money easily. So youth who could speak Chinese well were only interested in working in the casino. Even the young people who could not speak Chinese could work in the casino as low paid workers.

This situation persuaded the young people in Mai Ja Yang to work in the casino area without concerning themselves with their education. One 18 year old translator for a Chinese boss who dropped out of school said:

*"I dropped out of school when I was in Grade Eight. I worked in the Casino since 2006. Because I was not interested in my education because my father never supported us, my mom had to support my sister and my school fees. At that time my sister was in tenth-standard. It was a very important time for my sister. So I wanted to make money for my mom and sister. I worked in the casino secretly at that time. I treated to my mom as if I was in my education. My purpose was to make money for my family. But it was not possible for me even though I got a salary of 4000-5000 Yuan (\$588-735) in a month. Because I spent it all back in gambling."*<sup>10</sup>



Casino Worker Ready to Change Duty (Photo by Pisi)

The casino created jobs for young people. Most of the young people were involved in these

<sup>10)</sup> Interview# 16 with a young boy 18 year old Chinese boss translator in casino, Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.



jobs, especially, the young people who are jobless (both degree holders and those who could not pass matriculation). Their duties were to work as security guards, hotel cleaners and servers, cigarette industry workers and dishwashers in restaurants. Their salary was higher than the average in Burma. So many young people came and joined the casino from all over Burma. That is the reason why the youth were not interested in their education and became more focused on making money for their life.

A Sut Maden security worker stated,

*"I did not pass tenth standard or matriculate, so I didn't want to continue schooling that's why I came to work here in the casino .I just worked in the security department, most of us are from Mongo in Shan State and Mo Gaung in Kachin State. We work 8 hours per day and now we are in night duty, The salary is 1500 Yuan (\$187.5) in one month and I support my family apart from my expenditures. This job is very useful for me and my family, this job is very difficult to get in Myanmar for who could not pass matriculation."*<sup>11</sup>

The Casino attracted, not only local young adults, but also children too. This creates a lot of worry for the young generation in Mai Ja Yang. In the casino, every body can gamble for any amount of money at minimum of one Yuan. Besides which there are areas like night club bars, karaoke and computer game rooms. Now most of the students from 9 years old, go and gamble and play computer games with their pocket money during their school time. Also the children became involved in small gambling communities.

One of the High School teachers said,

*"We punished the students all the time who were going to the night-club bars and gambling areas. But some students do not care and go every night and some dropped out of school with punishment. The worst thing is some children began smoking secretly since the second grade."*<sup>12</sup>

The parents have to worry about their children since they were young and could not control this situation. Mostly of the children most focus on hedonistic activities and they become less interested in their education.

### *Increasing Drug Use Among Young People*

The casino has made the community insecure because of drug users. The KIO already has rules related to drugs. In September 1991, the KIO Opium Free Operation started when they shut down the opium plantations and trading, and on June 26, Opium Free day is celebrated every year.



Young women drug user in Mai Ja Yang (photo by Pisi)

11) Interview #13 with a 19 year old boy who is Sut Maden company security worker in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

12) Interview #18 with a KIO high school teacher in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.



The KIO intended for the casino to be a drug free zone but this did not happen, because there are two types of administration systems in Mai Ja Yang. The Sut Maden Casino Company has authority inside the casino area and the KIO Administration has responsibility for the rest of Mai Ja Yang village. The KIO administration does not have direct authority for the casino rules except the serious crimes such as murder and kidnapping. These complex rules between the two groups created an increase in crime rates and open drug market within Mai Ja Yang.

In the casino, most of the drugs come from Shan State. Shan State is the biggest opium producing area in Southeast Asia and the second largest in the world, after Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> The SPDC had a 15 year drug elimination plan from 1999 to 2014 within 51 townships which has not worked, as drugs are easily available to drug abusers.<sup>14</sup> In the current situation, the SPDC staff are involved in drug dealing both personally and indirectly.

A drug dealer in the Casino said:

*"I bought 7-8 kg of heroin, most from Shan State. My friend who delivered to me has a brother in law who is a military officer so, we do not worry for the trade. I can sell one kg per day."*<sup>15</sup>

The most common drugs in Mai Ja Yang are Yabba (the tablet containing mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine) and heroin. The types of heroin that are available are called Yaban, Ya saw, Si hao or Hpau Yaw and Beifen in Chinese. Other drugs include an unknown named opium and eight kinds of Yaba. The most popular kinds of Yaba in Mai Ja Yang are MY ( pink color ) and WY( dark red ). Among all of those drugs the most popular drug is the heroin Sihao or Hpau Yau, because they are the cheapest ones.<sup>16</sup>

Some youth are using drugs only for pleasure with their friends, but some young people were forced to use drugs, depending on their jobs. The casino was open 24 hours a day. So the workers worked a rotation system of day and night duties. Therefore most of the casino workers became drug users, especially those who worked at night and needed to be active for their work.

A 22 year old young pregnant women drug user said,

*"I started to use the Yabba drug when I worked as a hotel cleaner. I had to work 12 hours a day. So I needed to be active and I used it. At that time 1 chip of Yabba is 15 Yuan ( \$ 1.875 ) and I used 3 times 3 chips in a day. And then I tried to test heroin in cigarettes just for a fun experiment with my friend. At that time my friends were all drug dealers and I got the drugs free from them. Now I have become a drug addict and stay with my parent until my baby's birth. I want to cut or withdraw drug using but it not possible when I met with my drug users friend"*<sup>17</sup>

13) From Grassroots to Global: voice from Burma on Earth Rights Abuses 2009, Page 208.

14) "Drug elimination plan of SPDC" Shan Herald Agency for news, 09 June 2010, page 3.

15) Interview #24 with a drug dealer inside casino in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

16) Interview #24 , 3 ( HU staff )

17) Interview #25 with a local young women drug user in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

Some youth become drug addicts, even if they do not like drugs, from their boss's pressure to use them. A casino worker who was forced to use drugs by his boss, stated that,

*"The casino makes our young people use drug easily. Now I also use Yabba, because my boss always uses various brands and I have to not only find for him all the time but also have to join with him."*<sup>18</sup>

Other casino area workers were using drugs to make their work better, even if they did not want to use them. For example, sex workers have to use drugs, as without using drugs the sex workers would not be able to satisfy their customers that they have three or four times a night. Also some young people are working as sex workers and drug dealers. A 27 year old sex worker said,

*"I started to use drugs when I started as a sex worker, the reason is that if we do not use drugs we can not serve as the customers' pleasure or likes. If the customer is not satisfied them we will not get much money. So we have to act or we try to make them to get satisfied. Now I usually use around 2-5 pills of Yabba per day."*<sup>19</sup>

As the result of drug user, the HIV prevalence is increasing among the local communities because of the syringe needle sharing among the Injection Drug User (IDU). From the Health Unlimited Drug In Center list, around Mai Ja Yang eight villages tested 750 people and among them 263 (23%) got HIV positive within the testing population. And within Mai Ja Yang village out of 72 people tested 15 were HIV positive. That was only testing for IDU drug user.<sup>20</sup> According to Mizima news, Kachin State has the highest HIV rate in all of of Burma. The total population of those living with HIV is 242,000 people, which is 0.67% of Kachin state.<sup>21</sup> This high rate is related to the activities of the casino and drug abuses.

According to this HU harm reduction Drug In Center DIC's list, one hundred and twenty seven people are now using drugs in MJY area as shown in this table:

---

18) Interview #16

19) Interview #24

20) Interview# 3 with a HU DIC worker in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

21) Kachin State HIV rates at least 16 times the national average, Mizima news, 3rd Aug 2010, <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/4199-kachin-state-hiv-rates-at-least-16-times-the-national-average.html>

### July 2010, Drug User List Around Mai Ja Yang From Health Unlimited (HU)

Village Name	Household	Population	DU male	DU female	DU total
Prang Ngawn	54	326	21	5	26
Ja Reng Yang	92	540	13	1	14
Hka San Zup	24	149	6		6
Nawng Ang	36	203	7	2	9
MJY	286	1493	58	14	72
Total Amount	492	2711	105	22	127

Among the Mai Ja Yang villagers there are seventy two intravenous drug users. Including Chinese people, the total number of drug users is around 258 people. A Health Unlimited harm reduction program worker said

*"In my experience from February to July of 2010, there were seven drug users who died, and among them only two people from outside the village. It means five people from Mai Ja Yang village (local people) died."* <sup>22</sup>

Overall the local people got more bad effects than good effects from the casino. The number of drug users and HIV rates are increasing but the worst thing is the increase in thieves and robberies.



*The City Hall Building's Ceiling Was Broken By Stealing Electric Wire (Photo by Pisi)*

## The KIO Drug Policy

In Mai Ja Yang, the KIO added special rule for the drug dealer in 2009, because the dealers did not respect the former rules. The police department under MJY administration explain the previous policy;

*"We face 5-10 drug crimes in a week in this area. We got permission to solve for the drugs under the size of the small 20 mm penicillin bottle. Our department has the funding for this. Over the penicillin bottle size we have to submit to the upper administration. A bottle of penicillin fine is 500,000 kyat's ( \$ 500 ), under a bottle of penicillin fine is 300,000 kyat's ( \$-300 ); however the dealer did not care about the fine. How we arrest the drug dealer they don't care they pay*

22) Interview #3

*the fine and they deal it again.”<sup>23</sup>*

The KIO has the drug policy already but the drug traffickers do not care about the policy. Thus, in 2009 the KIO added the new policy for drug dealers, which is that;

- » If the KIO arrests the dealer for the first time, the dealer has to pay a fine as the first punishment
- » For the second offense, they have to sign the agreement stating that they will give their property to the KIO if they commit the crime again
- » For the third offense, the dealer can be arrested by the KIO and their property can be occupied by the KIO.
- » If the dealer commits the crime four or five times again the punishment will be the death penalty.

This punishment started being enforced in early 2010 and the KIO has already occupied 60 acres of the land from two drug dealers in 2010.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the drug problem in Mai Ja Yang is not only created by the local villagers but also the Chinese drug users who are coming to stay in the area and use drugs. Thus on July 11, 2010, the KIO and Chinese government signed an agreement to create a drug cleaning operation. The Chinese government supports the KIO with the materials to test the urine of drug users. If the KIO arrests the Chinese drug users they will send them back to China and China will also do the same. That is a new approach for the drug-free policy.<sup>25</sup>



*Legal sex worker service apartment in Mai Ja Yang (Photo by Pisi)*

## Increase in Crime

During the past eight years (2003-2010) there has been a lot of crime. The biggest cases are robbery, kidnapping, murder, rape and also suicide in the gambling areas, night club bars and hotels. The reason for this, is a combination of gambling, debt and overusing drugs. In the casino area is where most of the people lost their livelihoods. Some people who were high bosses in the past, used drugs and began gambling they started to lose their livelihood and their family also did not want to care for them. So most of the drug user who are not working in the casino have to struggle for their livelihood in various ways.

23) Interview #9 ,19 with KIO government staffs in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author

24) Interview #19

25) Interview #9

As they do not get normal incomes, they have to find money for their daily drug costs by collecting plastic from the rubbish, collecting food from the restaurants to feed pigs and collecting scrap-iron to sell to the Chinese recycling trading center . If they are not able to collect these things they steal public property, such as electric cables, pieces of scrap-iron in other houses including iron fences, and crops.

One woman villager said,

*"We have to lock our house all the time, at least one person has to look after our house when we go somewhere."*<sup>26</sup>

The church security guard who is another woman villager said,

*"Look at the fence of our church and beside the long road electric power post, there is nothing- wire and water steel pipe are gone; stolen by drug users."*<sup>27</sup>

The communities are facing armed robbery attacks as well. Some drug users stay as a group of three to five people and they rob people when they come down the road by motorbike. Our community is not safe anymore when you travel in groups of less than three people, because the drug users always threaten and rob people.

One villager said,

*"Last December 2009, I was driving my motorcycle with my friend when two robbers banged with a bamboo stick in my face. I lost two of my front teeth, they also tried to rob the motorbike but they could not because my friend fought them back with a knife and they had to run away."*<sup>28</sup>

Around 30 rape cases also happened in the casino site, including KIO areas. But most of the rape cases happened in the casino area. In 2008, three local young people, under the influence of drugs, committed rape upon Chinese women who were working in the Casino.<sup>29</sup>

In a separate case one young person who lives 1.5 km from Mai Ja Yang said,

*" In 2008, four of our young people between the ages of 14-22 committed rape and robbery at the same time. The case was that they killed the boy and raped the girl when the couple with the motorcycle was on the way back home from Mai Ja Yang. The girl recognized them and now they all are in Chinese jail."*<sup>30</sup>

In another case, some local people, who had a place to hide people, got involved in kidnapping.

---

26) Interview #15 with a women who is KWA member in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

27) Interview #6 with a women Local villager in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

28) Interview #26 with a victim of robbery in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

29) Interview #9 ,6

30) Interview #22 with a women former youth leader in Je len Yang. On file with author.

For example, it is very dangerous for Chinese people who have a good income, because they can be kidnapped by other people. As the kidnapper is usually from China, they request their native local friends to organize a hiding place. Therefore local people are involved with sharing places such as their farmlands and they can get benefit from the kidnappers.<sup>31</sup>

The crimes related to the casino affect the morality of the local people. Some murder cases have happened in the local area. People are killed and their chopped bodies are buried in the lands of the local people. Some gamblers also commit suicide in their rented rooms which are owned by the local people.<sup>32</sup>

Overall approximately 25 murder cases, 20 robbery cases and 30 kidnapping cases happened between ( 2003-2010 ). Among them, local people committed two kidnapping cases in addition. Most of the minor crimes such as stealing and drugs usually occurred at least five to ten times in a week. These cases could be seen significantly from the eight years experience of police department.<sup>33</sup>

## Prostitution

The local community is still affected by prostitution, even though the casino is closed. During 2006-2007 was the casino's highest running time. The area became one of the most popular gambling places on the border, and many people came to the casino area, especially Chinese people. The company brought in prostitutes from China and other places. However, sex workers had to get permission from the Sut Maden Company to do sex work legally and had to pay a tax of 200 Yuan ( \$25 ) to the casino company every month. The company took the responsibility for the health care of the sex workers. The sex workers had to have a medical check up at least once every two months. The sex workers who were infected with HIV were not allowed to work in the casino area. In 2006-2007, there were around 200-300 legal sex workers in the casino area. The company provided special apartment for the legal sex worker. There were at least 10 people in each room. One 27 year old explained her experience,

*"My normal income is around 700- 1500 Yuan(103-221\$) per a day. I use to get three or four customers per night. I got 700 Yuan(103\$) for eight hours per day. When I was called by ordered I got 1500 Yuan( \$ 221 ) one day."*<sup>34</sup>

In the history of Mai Ja Yang , the local community never heard of these kinds of things in the community, like conducting legal sex work, except for some young women working in beauty saloons and massage rooms. Unfortunately, prostitution has become very common in our society at the moment. In this way, Kachin young women become prostitutes, because they do not see that the legality of prostitution hides the social, economic and health risks of that profession. Another reason is that parents are uneducated and could not support their children's needs. From

---

31) Interview #6

32) Interview #6 , 7

33) Interview #9 ,19

34) Interview #24



my observation, in some families both of the parents are using drugs and they could not guide their children in the right way. The children have to take responsibility for the whole family. This forces young women to make money in short cut ways, so the young women partake in sex work. But some young women are illegally looking for short cut ways, even though their poor family background is not a big problem. All sex workers are under 35 years old and are young women.<sup>35</sup> A situation to be worried about is that the sex workers who did not have a permit to work in the casino are still working outside the area of the casino.

The head of sex the workers said,

*"Currently, there are 40 sex workers in casino area. Among them there are five Kachin girls from Mai Ja Yang and near Mai Ja Yang village. I have to contact them with customers and I got 20% of fee from them. Now the casino is not good running so we do not need to do license and we can do freely without tax."*<sup>36</sup>

After the closing of the casino, the legal sex workers became illegal sex workers and their health situation is not safe.

## Human Trafficking

On September 13, 2005, Burma enacted Anti Trafficking in Persons Law. The Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, in 2003, led the solving of trafficking crimes in Burma.<sup>37</sup> As a result, Burma has banned the practice of human trafficking by punishment of life in prison. Though the law restricts trafficking, due to the poverty in Burma and lack of employment opportunities, many youth leave for other countries as migrant workers and refugees. It allows for an increase the trafficking rate daily.<sup>38</sup>

In 2005, the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand reported that Kachin women and girls trafficked to China were being forced into prostitution or to become brides to Chinese's men. While there are no reliable estimates of the number of Burmese people who are trafficked, most observers believe that the number of victims is at least several thousand per year. Most of the trafficked victim are from Northern Shan State, Kachin State and Bhamo, which are close to Chinese border.<sup>39</sup>

Trafficking also became a big problem in Mai Ja Yang, because there were a lot of people who came to work in the casino area. This situation created the opportunity for the traffickers. There were many workers and many businessmen from all over. Especially, there were a lot of low paid workers from Burma who could not speak Chinese well. It was a weakness which was an opportunity for the traffickers. The young people who did not speak Chinese got jobs as low-paid workers,

---

35) Interview #3, 6

36) Interview # 24

37) "Driven away :The Burmese military regime and the issue of human trafficking" KWAT 15 May 2005, pg. 16. [http://www.womenofburma.org/Report/Driven\\_Away.pdf](http://www.womenofburma.org/Report/Driven_Away.pdf)

38) The Anti Trafficking in Persons Law, The State Peace and Development Council Law No. 5/ 2005, September, 2005.

39) "Driven Away: Trafficking of Kachin Women China-Burma border" KWAT,

such as washing dishes in restaurants. Then, the boss would resend their worker to another boss. Their strategy was to say, “you are very smart in work, so you can lead the work in my sub restaurant in China. The salary is also higher than here.” That was the tool used to trick workers. And then they would send them to work as prostitutes instead of in restaurants.

Most Chinese traffickers did these actions to the young people from the Casino area. The people who became the victims of trafficking were also sometimes workers from other areas of Burma, because they were uneducated and unaware of their situation and their new location. The language was a big problem for them.

Local community women were also involved in these kinds of crimes. They made a partnership with the Chinese boss and transported young girls who had dropped out of school and had no job, to the boss. They could lie to those young girls easily.

Today, not only women but also men have become the victims of trafficking in Mai Ja Yang. Women are traded for prostitution or are forced to marry with the Chinese men, because the Chinese one child policy means that the Chinese male population is higher than the female population. Therefore they have to find women from other countries to marry. For example, some Chinese women find their daughter in law from the traffickers. But for men, they are traded as workers and they do not get the fair salary, which results in the exploitation of wages from workers. A Kachin Women’s Association (KWA) member shared her younger brother’s experience. In 2008, his friend’s uncle took a job in a grinding stone factory and worked very hard for three months but received only a small amount of pocket money. The owner of the factory lied and cheated him and his friend’s uncle took all of his advance salary.<sup>40</sup> Over these years, the thirty trafficking cases occurred in Mai Ja Yang. Three cases were committed by local people.<sup>41</sup> In addition, there were a lot of trafficking crimes related with the Mai Jai Yang Casino, which occurred outside the city. The traffickers deceived the people from other parts of Burma to work in the Mai Ja Yang Casino area. In these cases they never arrived in Mai Ja Yang and disappeared on the way because they were trafficked to China.<sup>42</sup>

The Kachin Women’s Association Thailand joined with the Kachin Women’s Association to try to solve the trafficking issue in Mai Ja Yang. But the budget support is a difficult for the groups and their actions were not fully effective.

## Resource Related Conflicts among Mai Ja Yang

The Casino brought many conflicts and problems within the communities of Mai Ja Yang. These include water problems between the businessmen and local villagers, electricity problems and the lack of waste management, which supported the income of drug users.

### *Confiscation of Natural Water Resources*

When the casino was constructed, some businessmen also brought different kinds of projects

---

40) Interview # 10

41) Interview # 9

42) Interview #15 ,10

to the communities, one of which was water distribution. Before the casino was built, the Matter Foundation NGO supported the community to make a water reservoir in 1998. In 2002, after the casino was built, a Chinese company came and made a big water reservoir in the upper part of the community's reservoir and constructed a drinking water factory. This made the community struggle to do paddy farming, because they did not have enough water. As the local villagers could not get enough water, they changed to plant mono crops such as sugar cane because sugar cane needs less water than paddy fields.<sup>43</sup>

One local old villager said,

*"We don't know how KIO manages about water and if Chinese company has to pay any tax for water to the KIO. The KIO leaders did not check if local villagers have enough water for farming."*<sup>44</sup>

The result of the local reservoir being taken by a Chinese businessman, was a big obstacle for local farmers to get water. They were no longer able to grow rice, because of a lack of water. Therefore, they changed their livelihood to growing sugarcane which can be sold, and needs less water. However, sugarcane needs commercial labor, and when the market price is low, the local farmer loses a lot of their investment money. All the sugarcane companies are from China, and they control the sugarcane market in the area. The local farmers are victims of competition between Chinese companies, since they have no knowledge about the market system. In some cases, conflicts broke out between some of local farmers and Chinese companies arguing about water control.



*Paddy farm converted into mono crop sugar cane plantation (Photo by Pisi)*

These changes affected the local farmers' lives in many different ways, and made their lives difficult. In the past, they grew rice which was their main source of food. Traditionally the Kachin community used an exchange-trade system, which means that rice farmers exchanged rice with fish from fishermen. Their life was a lot easier and happier, though they didn't have money. Since commercial farming was introduced in the community, everything became about money.

Not only the Mai Ja Yang community, but also the other villages have conflict with the casino over the water supply. In another village, named Prang Ngawn, which is 5km away, the natural water resource that the villagers owned was taken by one of the KIO leaders in 2004. That person created a pure water reservoir for water supply for the Mai Ja Yang casino. He persuaded the villagers using their desires for community needs. That leader promised that he would build a nursery school for the community, if he got the permission to make a pure water reservoir. But he did not support them with any water until 2006. So the village committee asked and requested

43) Interview #8 with a local Church Leader in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.

44) Interview # 8

again to ensure their agreement was me. After that, the KIO leader supported the community with just five bottles for each social activity of the community such as funerals, Christmas celebrations and New Year ceremonies, but didn't do anything for the nursery school. Thus, the villagers inquired about the nursery school again, but then he transferred his business to a Chinese Company. After that the villagers from that village could not complain to the company anymore.<sup>45</sup>

### *Electricity Supply*

Another problem is that the electricity supply of the eleven villages, including Mai Ja Yang, has come from China since 1996. All of the villages sold their community forests for an electricity supply.<sup>46</sup> After the casino closed, the electricity in all of these villages was cut off in February 2009 and has remained cut off up until now. The Chinese government gave pressure to cut the electricity within the casino area. Today Mai Ja Yang and the other eleven villages are facing an electricity shortage problem. This creates conflict between Mai Ja Yang village and the other eleven villages, because now only Mai Ja Yang is receiving electricity; which the other villages think is not fair.

An old lady from another village said,

*"I am not satisfied that the Chinese cut off our electricity. We are not related with the casino, we got electricity earlier than the Casino. Now it effects to us because of this Casino"*<sup>47</sup>

After 2009, the KIO tried to distribute electricity for all the villages, but it has not been successful. From my observation, the KIO can just provide part time electricity in Mai Ja Yang from half past six to half past ten in the evening. That is a big problem the communities have to face, because of the casino.

### *Land Confiscation*

The China Sut Maden company confiscated 80 acres of farm-land from the local people when the KIO started infrastructure development in 2002. In 2007, the casino company wanted to extend their area to make a golf-club and other economic sectors on land owned by Je Len Yang village, close to Mai Ja Yang, as well as on three other villages. The KIO ordered the villagers to give the land for the development projects and also the KIO negotiated for compensation with the company.

The village's land, which was 75 Mu (19 acres), was forcibly given to the Casino Sut Maden company. The casino company gave compensation of 10,000 Yuan (\$1250) for each Mu of land. Four 4 Mu is equal to one acre. It is just a small amount for the villagers. Every year, the villagers got 3000 Yuan ( \$375 ) per Mu from their crops. So the villagers got compensation only equal

---

45) Interview #12 with a KIO retire nurse who from in Prang Ngawn village. On file with author.

46) Interview #12 , 22

47) Interview #12

to three and half years' profit and they lost their land forever. That is one example of the land confiscation cases by the casino company.<sup>48</sup>

### *Waste and Fire-wood Threatens Community Forest*



*Collecting rubbish can support drug user's daily lives (photo credit: Pan Kachin Development Society)*

There are 31 hotels, 48 guest houses, and 18 restaurants within the Mai Ja Yang village for the casino guests.<sup>49</sup> They are producing a large amount of waste, which pollutes the water and local environment.

Some hotels and restaurants are built on the local stream which was used by the villagers for paddy farming and cleaning. Currently the stream is no longer used, as it is full of waste and pollution. The local farmers find it difficult to do paddy farming and have had to change the farm pattern with different crops.

The drug users can earn their money by collecting rubbish such as plastic, old clothes,

scrub- iron, water and juice bottles because the Mai Ja Yang administration is weak in waste management within the casino; they just collect the rubbish and throw away in one place instead of reusing and recycling. Therefore the rubbish increases the drug users ability to survive in Mai Ja Yang

Another problem is the increase in fire-wood usage. In Mai Ja Yang, local people have used fire wood just for cooking since ancient times. One family, which has five members, uses around one 140 cm<sup>2</sup> block per month (Firewood costs 120-130 Yuan ( \$ 17 to \$ 22 ) per block which approximates 140 cm<sup>2</sup>. But when the casino opened in Mai Ja Yang, fire wood usage increased. A lot of fire wood is used in the casino area. Restaurants and hotels in the casino use a lot of fire-wood for cooking and boiling water for the guests' bathing. One of the casino workers described that one hotel which contains 90 rooms is using 280 cm<sup>2</sup> of fire wood blocks daily.<sup>50</sup>

Because of the high consumption, fire wood costs have increased and selling fire wood is a big business in the Mai Ja Yang communities. That is why local people cut trees in forests to make fire woods and some forests have become deforested as a consequence.

## **Conclusion**

Although the KIO, is implementing local development programs as much as they can, local people are now suffering from these development programs instead of getting benefits. The KIO has damaged, not only the natural resources of the Mai Ja Yang, but also human resources such

48) Interview # 27 with a women who victim of the land confiscation in Je Len Yang village. On file with author.

49) Interview #14

50) Interview #23 with a 25 year old casino worker in Mai Ja Yang. On file with author.



as the youth. That is why the KIO should learn a lesson from the result of the unsustainable ways of their development policy and stop these kinds of policies and projects such as casinos.

Mai Ja Yang's future generations are threatened by drugs and serious diseases such as HIV, as a result of so-called development programs in the area. Local elders are concerned that the younger generation has suffered from this unsustainable and unwelcome development. In this area the people have suffered from losing their land, family members during the civil war and had to stay as refugees in the China side for along time. Nowadays, they have also lost their properties and their family members under the development programs of the KIO.

All of Kachin society has a responsibility to protect the future generations. Youth are the main part of the society. Thus, rehabilitation and empowerment of the youth must be prioritized by families, communities and the government. In addition, the KIO must focus on sustainable development projects such as industry zones, tourism and agriculture technical systems including infrastructure development and human resources development, in order to build successful communities.

Finally, it is every Kachin person's responsibility to bring peace, freedom, equality and happiness to Kachin State. The Burmese government, as a key player in the country, also has the responsibility to take serious action against crime and injustices, and it should also provide adequate support to NGOs and local youths who are working toward elimination of drugs, HIV/AIDS, and the development of younger people.



*One of the public areas confiscated by the Sut Maden Company where the local people used to keep their cows. (Photo by Pisi)*

## Recommendations

### *To the State Peace and Development Council*

- » As the military is the father of the nation, they shall take responsibility for the people's security and development. In order to do so, they should support and guide the KIO's development programs by sustainable development methods.
- » Allow all NGOs to work in development programs and health care services, especially HIV/ AIDS.
- » Be concerned with the ethnic region's development; not for exploitation of natural resources, but also take responsibility for sustainable development.



- » Create job opportunities for young people by creating state own products industry and disseminating technical knowledge and support traditional occupations of the community so that the community can survive with their ways of living.
- » Take action to support the drug free operation policy by punishing the drug traders and users.
- » Make peaceful communities and respect human rights.
- » Work effectively on anti-trafficking measures according to the State Peace and Development Council Law No. 5/ 2005 on anti- trafficking.

### *To the Local KIO Government*

- » As the KIO serves the local government, they should practice sustainable development meaning not only material development but also human development for the local people.
- » Focus on building State own products industries development, technical development and supporting agriculture.
- » Shall more invest more revenue from taxation in to the education system.
- » Allow community to participate in the decision making process regarding their land, territories and use of resources.
- » Encourage informal schools and create other informal education programs for youth, such as provide academic study programs and professional skills trainings.
- » Create youth capacity building activities including at least one youth resource center and sports center.
- » Cooperate more with local NGOs who are working the environment, community development and HIV/AIDS issues.
- » Must take action against the drug dealing, with fair laws.

### *To the Chinese Government and Chinese Companies*

- » Stop illegal business investments on the Burma border, such as casinos and sex industries.
- » Open legal border trading in the border regions.
- » Provide the KIO with sustainable development methods by making ecologically responsible tourism businesses, giving technical knowledge and constructing industries.
- » As China is one of the permanent members of the security council of the United Nations, they should not misuse their power and respect their position.

- » In respect of UDHR and UNDRIP, the Chinese government must form a proper monitoring system to avoid any human rights violations in their business investments.

### *To Local Communities*

- » The local church and families should create capacity building activities for young people and support youth resource centers, sports centers and sport competitions by cooperating with the local KIO government.
- » Local people should unite and cooperate with each other to stop drug dealing within the community.
- » The community leaders and parents should encourage young people's education and try to guide the youth to not use drugs by making the youth aware of the impacts of drugs and the prevalence of HIV.

### *To NGO& INGOs*

- » Pressure the SPDC to respect their signatory as a member of the United Nations Against Drugs in 1963.
- » Pressure the SPDC to take more action and effectively use the Anti- Trafficking Person Laws from September 2005.
- » Pressure the Chinese government and SPDC to stop human rights and environmental rights abuses by submitting documentation and research papers to the UN.
- » Pressure the Chinese government to respect human rights and their power in the UN.
- » Raise awareness to communities on how to protect their rights and to advocate against human rights violations.

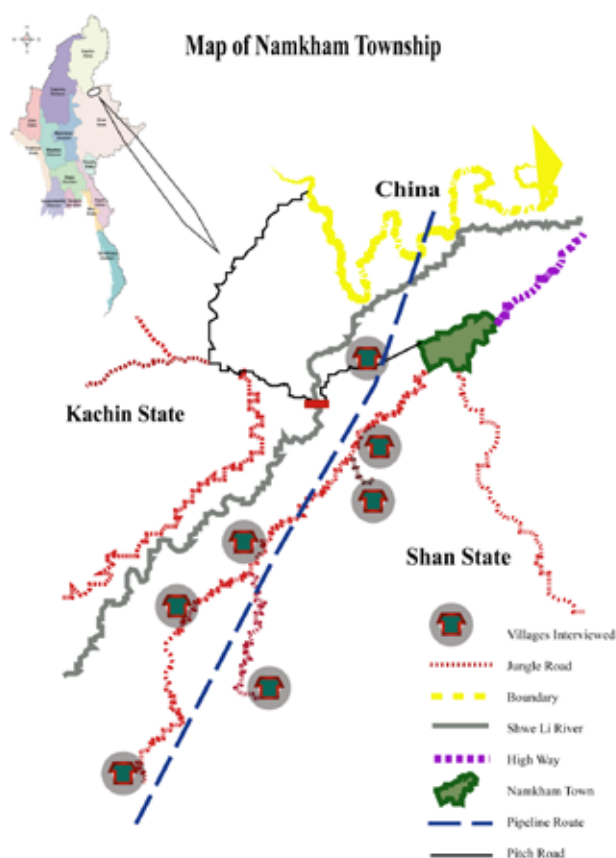
# The Negative Impacts of Burma-China Natural Gas and Oil Pipelines on Local Villagers through Land Confiscation in Western Namkham Township, Ta'ang Area, Northern Shan State

by Mai Mao Dang

## Introduction

This report concerns the China-Myanmar/Burma natural gas and oil pipelines route construction and the impact to the local Ta'ang people's farms in western Namkham Township, northern Shan state. Currently, the construction of the pipelines is an ongoing process and there are many lands being confiscated by authorities. The pipelines begin in Kyauk Phyu town in Arakan State and run throughout the center of the country to Ruili Township in Shan State and across the border to Yunnan province, southwest China. The projects are the Shwe natural gas project and the Burma-China oil transport project, collectively referred to here as the 'Burma-China pipelines.' The pipelines will transport gas from Burma and oil from the Middle East and Africa across Burma to China.<sup>1</sup>

In Namkham Township, since the local



1) EarthRights International/ publication on March 2011/ The Burma-China Pipelines: Human Right Violations, Applicable Law, and Revenue Secrecy. Page – 1 second paragraph.

authorities and Chinese construction workers did land surveying for the pipelines route, numerous local landowners have not received any information and they do not know anything about this issue. Undoubtedly, the local villagers will likely lose their farm without just compensation and they will face many problems in the next year.



*Materials for pipeline construction along the side of a road*

*'The government does what they want to do in our local people's farms without notifying us, I lose a lot of farm acres and I will face difficulty for the next year as the pipelines route will cross in my paddy farm, also I don't know how to fight against to stop this project.'*

- Paddy farmer<sup>2</sup>

Most people depend on their paddy farms for their family livelihood and they do not have alternative work when the pipelines will be located on their paddy farm and the farmers will lose much acreage. The tea plantations, local agriculture and rubber plantations will be impacted as well. The compensation will not guarantee income for them for the rest of their life and no payment will be made without showing evidence of land ownership documents. As most of the local landowners do not have these documents, they will have to struggle hard for their living. In some communities, the local authorities have begun to force the villagers to move away from their homes and farms without paying any compensation. Though the authorities gave verbal agreements to the villagers that they will provide compensation to whoever lost their farm because of the pipelines construction, some of the villagers have already been moved and received nothing from the authorities. Because these agreements were not written down, villagers worry they will not receive the compensation. Even when villagers can show land ownership documents, the local authorities do not pay the agreed compensation. In western Namkham Township, there are more than a hundred acres of farms that will be confiscated for the pipelines route construction, and

---

2) Stated by paddy farmer/interview at the hut of paddy farm on September 10, 2011/ Near the Nam Mar village/

the landowners are apprehensive that in the coming years they cannot grow any plants and food on their own farms.

According to data, the state government has specified different plans to pay compensation to those from whom land has been confiscated. The government also differentiates between different types of farms, for example paddy, tea, agriculture, residential and vacant lands are all given different amounts. However, unfortunately, the majority Ta'ang people who live on the hill-side are unable to prove land ownership with sufficient documents to get the compensation. The communities, however, understand how many acres are owned by each person, and the land has been held by families for generations. For specific details of compensation see under the sub-title of Acreages farms Confiscated and Unfair Compensation.



*This paddy farm will be demolished by construction of the pipeline*

The famers cultivate paddies two times a year, but this year, the final time they could not grow anything in their farm as the government had already marked the pipelines' route in their farms. While the authorities and Chinese construction workers had done land surveys more than four times, the local villagers did not know that the pipelines route would be located on their farm and the authorities have not shared any information with them about the pipelines route. Afterwards, the authorities demanded over fifty acres from KL villagers for creating buildings for storing the pipeline materials and housing workers; the confiscated land belonged to rice paddy farmers and agriculture workers. The local authorities have been providing security while the Chinese company workers did land surveying in the villager's farm.

This is genuine information from the local villagers whose land is being taken away by the pipelines' construction without just payment and the data collection is based on seven villages where the pipeline's route is located. Fifteen people were interviewed including paddy farmers, tea famers and rubber plantation famers, and also a police officer who had to provide security while the land surveying was conducted in the villages.

## Methodology

The report is based on one month of field research, encouraging landowners to express their feelings on the pipelines construction project and the confiscation of their land. Prior to interviewing the local villagers, I talked with the Chairman and Youth Leader in each village to get permission to hold the interviews. In some villages, I also notified the Youth Leader by phone before the meeting. Afterward, I was often anxious as I brought information with me while passed the militia camp, and I kept my interview facts in a small wood-box hidden in the ground. Often, information about the pipeline and its impact had to be explained to the villagers as they did not have any information.

## Project Background

Following the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) agreement on 27 March 2008<sup>3</sup>, the pipeline project commenced construction in September 2009<sup>4</sup>. These natural gas and oil pipelines are ongoing processes and they are 'expected to be completed by 2013.'<sup>5</sup> The pipelines will transport gas from Myanmar/Burma and oil from the Middle East and Africa through Burma, mainly to Yunnan and other western provinces in China.

The overland Shwe gas pipeline begins at the offshore pipeline natural gas terminal and will extend 793km to the border with China's Yunnan province. The oil pipeline will run parallel to the natural gas pipeline, along with road and rail projects connecting Kyauphyu in Arakan State to Ruili in Yunnan Province.

2009 June CNPC signs an MOU with Burma's Ministry of Energy to construct, operate and manage the "Myanmar-China Oil pipeline," and unloading port, terminal, and transportation facilities.<sup>6</sup> The pipelines construction provide million US dollar to the government 'Gas reserves in the Shwe Gas project A 1 and A 3 blocks are estimated at 4.5 to 7.7 trillion cubic feet. Burma will earn US\$ 29 billion from the sale of gas to China over a 30-year period.'<sup>7</sup> There are 793 kilometers of gas pipeline in Myanmar, and also a 771-kilometer-long crude oil pipeline.

The construction begins from Kyaukphyu on the Arakan coast and will pass through the heart of Myanmar, including Magway and Mandalay division. In addition, it will run through Shan State before crossing into China at the border town of Ruili.<sup>8</sup> According to the report research, the Chinese construction workers and Namkham local authorities have been working on land-surveys for pipelines route building in western Namkham Township, extremely close to the borderline. The construction will cause the confiscation of the local villagers' farms such as rice paddy, tea, rubber and local vegetables. The pipelines will go through approximately sixteen villages in Namkham Township before reaching the border. This will cause enormous negative impacts for the landowners and the local environment.

## *Ta'ang Background and People in Namkham*

Ta'ang [Palaung] people are descendents of the Mon-Khmer people who migrated from Mongolia to Burma and one of the nationalities within the multi-national of Burma. There are more than one million people inside the country and they have their own language, literature,

---

3) China secures Myanmar energy route/ [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/KD03Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KD03Df03.html)

4) China-CNPC- China-Myanmar Gas & Oil pipelines/ Time: 2010-09-14 10:00 Source:Net Author:Net View:704. <http://www.ccec.com.cn/English/Project/China/2010/0914/8530.html>

5) China secures Myanmar energy route/ [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/KD03Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KD03Df03.html)

6) Corridor of Power report/ China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines, released by Shwe Gas Movement (SGM). Page-4.

7) Security of oil, gas pipelines to China cannot be guaranteed, 06 September 2011 12:01 Ko Wild <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/5886-security-of-oil-gas-pipeline-to-china-cannot-be-guaranteed-report.html>

8) EarthRights International/ Situation Briefer No. 1 March 2011. Page (3)/ <http://www.earthrights.org/publication/burma-china-pipelines>



distinctive traditional culture, a self-sufficient economy and own territory (called self-rule under their own King [Sawbwar]). The largest number of Ta'ang people has lived in northern Shan state for hundreds of years; they also live in Thailand and China. Ta'ang people are predominantly Buddhist, and less than ten percent are Animist or Christian.

The foremost occupation of Ta'ang people is local tea production. They are famous in Burma their high quality tea grown in farms located in the surrounding mountainous area. Additionally, they grow apples, plums, avocados and pears, which are extremely valued in their community. There are also many kinds of minerals in the Ta'ang land including silver, zinc, gold and aluminum.

The Burma army seized state power in the beginning of 1962, establishing military rule. This led to many conflicts in the country and the creation of different armed groups to fight against the military regime. The Palaung National Force (PNF) was set-up on January 12, 1963, and later transformed to the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA). The PSLA waged armed struggle for local people against the military government for almost 30 years. Many Ta'ang people died when the military regime tried to weaken ties between Ta'ang people and the PSLA. Many human right abuses occurred and people fled to Thailand to become refugees. The PSLA reached a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government on April 1991 and gained control over an area called 'Palaung Special Region No 7' by the regime. This area of control included Namhsan, Man Tong, western Kyankme, western Hsiphaw, Namtu and Namkham Township. The PSLA kept control for 14 years, until further pressure from the regime forced the PSLA to surrender their arms on April 29, 2005. Since then, the PSLA have been denied any control in the Palaung region, where a state of lawlessness prevails until the present day.<sup>9</sup>



*Burmese authorities and Chinese workers survey the path of the pipeline in a rice paddy farm*

9) Stolen Live reported by Palaung Women's Organization-PWO/ under title of the Palaung liberation movement / page 10/ <http://www.palaungland.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/Report/StolenLives%20Eng.pdf>

In western Namkham Township, Northern Shan State, there are over 43 villages and the population is more than 45,000. The ethnic groups include the Chinese, Kachin, Burman, Ta'ang, Chinese, Shan and Muslim. The main profession in those communities is agriculture and specifically tea and rice crops. Numerous local people have been working on tea and paddy farms for their families' survival for decades. This work is the main family profession in the community and people could easily gain income as they could export paddy and tea into neighboring towns and countries. Currently, the pipelines' construction creates many problems in the community and the majority cannot cultivate any rice crop this year because the local authorities have already set up markers for the pipelines in their farms.

Most local Ta'ang people depend on the farming for their families' survival; usually, they have no other alternative work. The land is extremely important for them and they have relied on the farming for many years. If they cannot farm, they will face extreme economic hardship.

## Property Law in the Burmese Constitution, International Law and Local Cultural Law

The construction of the pipeline has violated many property laws signed by the Burmese government, including Burmese national law, international law (UDHR) and local villagers' law.

The Burmese government has their own law for protecting natural resources and the 2008 constitution also includes the principle to protect the country's resources. Burma's constitution was ratified in the days following Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 by an alleged 92 percent of the population, out of a total 98 percent who turned out to vote, the ruling junta asserted<sup>10</sup>.

This chart shows laws ratified by the Burmese government:

Articles	Burma constitution
(356)	The Union shall protect according to law movable and immovable properties of every citizen that are lawfully acquired.
(357)	The Union shall protect the privacy and security of home, property, correspondence and other communications of citizens under the law subject to the provisions of this Constitution. <sup>1</sup>
	UDHR – Articles
(17)	Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his properties. <sup>2</sup>
	Culture law
Cultural Law (verbal agreement)	No one shall occupy the farm belonging to others Everyone has full opportunity to control their farm according to their farm boundary, as agreed on by the community Everyone has the right to own the farm owned by forefathers

10) Democratic Voice of Burma- DVB/ Author: [AUNG HTOO](http://www.dvb.no/about-elections/major-flaws-in-the-2008-constitution/7964)/ Category: About Elections  
<http://www.dvb.no/about-elections/major-flaws-in-the-2008-constitution/7964>

	UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People
(10)	Indigenous people shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return. <sup>3</sup>

## Pipelines Situation

It is approximately 18 miles from my research area to China border. Several acres of local villagers' farms have been confiscated. The pipelines haven't started construction yet but the government authorities and Chinese workers are currently working on land-surveying and setting-up the bamboo stick in the villagers' farms to mark the pipelines routes. The land survey has destroyed many farms, especially paddy farms. As the same time, Namkham authorities acquired over 50 acres from the local villagers in KL village to store the building materials and the small camps for the construction workers.

The government authorities have been preparing for the pipeline construction for almost two months but the most local people have not received any information related to the project. They also don't know if they will get compensation for their confiscated land and homes.

*'I have never seen the government authorities and foreign workers come in the farm and make land-surveying for a project in my farm since I was young. I am sure this project will make my family face hardship as I will lose my paddy farm and I will have to do a lot of work in the future.'*<sup>11</sup>

- Paddy farmer near Nam Mar village.

The pipeline is a huge project directly affecting the villagers' farms. The local people have never seen such a large construction project before. This project will reduce the landowners' income and will impact the local exports too. The project will likely force the people to move to another place without any compensation. In the same way, pipelines route have destroyed the beautiful forest in some places.

Construction demolished rice paddies, which some families rely on for their daily income. The pipe route also destroyed the vegetable farms that the villagers relied for daily food. Some houses in the pipeline route have had to be dismantled and relocated. Subsequently, this condition directly impinges on the children's study time; the children have to stop attending school while their parents need help. This also prevents the adults from attending to their farming. In addition, the local government authorities' neglected to provide any information or compensation concerning the land confiscation.

11) Stated by paddy farmer/interview at the hut of paddy farm on September 10, 2011/ Near the Nam Mar village/

## *Project Security for Pipeline Construction*

The local authorities were responsible for pipeline security and for directing the pipeline route. Without their help, the Chinese workers would not have been able to complete the route construction. This shows that the local government authorities are directly involved in the pipeline construction.

While the land surveying took place in NM, MM and HN villages for pipe route construction, there were two groups of police that were divided by the authorities, each group taking charge of security for a week. A policeman noted,

*'We have two groups to follow them for security. Each group has done security for one week. Some police have to work closely with them and some stay on the way. I don't know who ordered and divided us into two groups for security. Some days, I was dismal to do the security but we could not be absent from our duty. Then I think we have to take care of security until this construction is finished.'*<sup>12</sup>

The land surveying took place in villages' paddy farms an estimated 7 miles from town to NM village, and the Namkham Town Local Government Commander took the burden for safety of Chinese workers during the land surveying. The township Vice Officer of Land Department Kyaw Hlaing Soe has participated in this process as well. Kyaw Hlaing Soe also assisted in pointing out where the pipelines should be located and whose land they should cross. North of NM village, there are two government authority camps, the Forest Department of the government and the Pansay militia camp, controlled by U Kyaw Myint, a well-known drug lord and a representative in the Lower House of Parliament from Namkham Township. These two groups are based close to the pipelines project and are providing security for Burmese and Chinese construction workers.

A paddy farmer stated: 'When they came in my farm, I knew that U Kyaw Hlaing Soe was the man who led the Chinese workers to set up small fences in my paddy farm and some police were working closely as well. They were only 15 people who came into my farm.'<sup>13</sup>

To date, the Burmese authorities and Chinese workers have entered at least three times to set up markers to indicate where pipelines will be located and land will be confiscated from villagers' farms.



*A bamboo stick marks the future path of the pipeline, which will require this house to be demolished*

12) Police Officer who provided security/ interviewed on the way/ near the HN village

13) A rice paddy farmer stated, interview beside the field paddy/ at NM village

The pipelines construction has not only affected the villagers' farming but also their lifestyle and daily routine. When the local authorities and construction workers go to the village, they stay in the villagers' homes without the villagers' permission. The villagers are forced to provide them with free food and housing during the land surveying process. Because the villagers are concerned for the safety of their homes, they are not able to go to work because they are afraid to leave the police and workers alone in their homes. As the authorities and construction workers move along the pipeline, they occupy different houses. The villagers live with constant fear of what the authorities and construction workers may do.

The local authorities and construction workers also often steal or pay a low-price for food and snacks at small, locally owned shops in the villages. The shop owners cannot protest and lose money from this theft.

## Impacts of Pipeline Construction

The project construction has led to many negatives impacts on the local villagers' land, which they rely on for their livelihood. The landowners could not do anything as the local authorities and Chinese workers have already set up the small fences on their farms. They cannot use the confiscated area and some families' paddy farms production has already become less than last year. Farm owners have lost approximately 35% of their farm because of the pipelines construction. As the same time, the local paddy farmers main incomes have been reduced 40% because of the confiscation of their farmland. Tea farmers have lost approximately 30% of their income because of land confiscation. Seven of the villagers' tea plantations have been confiscated, meaning they cannot pick tea for their livelihood in the future. As a consequence, villagers are suffering from food shortage because they can no longer afford enough food.

The following is the perspective of a tea farmer:

*"I estimate that they confiscated one and a half acres of my tea farm. They have told me nothing. They set up fences in my farm where the pipe will be located last month and I see I will not receive any payment from them nor did they notify the village chairman. The chairman knows nothing as well and I cannot do anything where they set-up the stick. I lost some tea plantation and I know my family income will become decreasing in the next year. Even if they paid the money, I won't agree on this because I know and the compensation cannot apply for my next generation".<sup>14</sup>*

In northern Shan state, the Ta'ang people generally do not have any legal land documents, but land ownership and borders are recognized by the community. Almost all their farms have been passed down through the generations and maintained by the families until the present day. Among approximately 60 households in each village, only around 10 have legal land documents.

The Ta'ang people's traditions and culture have been exploited through the occupation of their farms. A tea farmer stated 'I think this is hugely destroying our culture. I have owned this farm

---

14) A tea farmer – MS village/ interviewed at his house in the village



since my father gave to my family and my family income is mostly based on this farm. I cannot live without this farm and whenever I think about this situation I am always angry but I know I can't do anything.<sup>15</sup>



*Rubber plants will be destroyed by construction*

*A Youth leader said, "In this village, most of us don't have land documents because our farms were given to us by our grandfathers. We know who owns this farm and other farms in this community. Sometimes we sold without any proof among us as we have a ravine between each farm. Currently I know this farm has been owned by at least eight generations of my family."<sup>16</sup>*

## Farm Confiscation and Unfair Compensation

Though the authorities promised compensation for the confiscated land, the villagers have not yet received any compensation even though some families have already been relocated. One family alone had over sixteen acres of farmland confiscated by the pipelines' construction, including from Ruili River side [Burma-China borderline] and through to the research area. As it is such a large project, it has had a large negative influence on local villagers' farms, especially paddy farms, according to the research information.

A paddy farmer stated: 'Mostly paddy farms have been confiscated, they [local authorities] have already set up bamboo sticks with a red colour in my farm, a lot red bamboo sticks, and I think even if they pay for farms seized it will not be fair compensation for us and also other

15) A tea farmer stated/ interviewed at tea plantation/ MS villagers

16) A youth leader of village – SK village/ interviewed at the rubber plantation on



farmland owners.’<sup>17</sup>

The state government has specified different plans in order to pay compensation to those whose land has been confiscated. The government authorities have also said they will give different compensation to different villages. The compensation will follow under the government plans such as:

Different compensation on different kind of farms

No:	Description	Acreages	Cost in Kyat	Cost in USA \$
1.	Paddy farm	1 acre	6 million	9230.76
2.	Tea farm	1 acre	4.5 million	6923.07
3.	Agriculture	1 acre	3 million	4615.38
4.	Vacant land	1 acre	2 million	3076.92
5.	House	1	8 million	12307.69

However, compensation will only be given if landowners can provide documents to prove that they own the land.

A youth leader in SK village stated, ‘When they came and looked at my farm the Namkham Vice Officer of Land Department U Kyaw Hlaing Soe told me that they will give different compensation to different farms, but they will not pay if the landowners could not show land proof and he said that the state can seize the land if owners don’t have the evidence.’<sup>18</sup>



*Markings on a stone indicate the path of the pipeline*

Behind SK village, the pipelines location has been changed from one place to another. Many tea farms have been confiscated due to the pipelines, but then the pipe location relocates to another area again.

17) A paddy farmer at MM village/ Interviewed at the paddy field

18) A Youth leader of MS village/ interviewed on way

*'The first time they came and measured in the west of my farm, now they changed already because I have heard that they said they could be unable to pay for compensation and they move into the south of my farm.'*<sup>19</sup>

- Shopkeeper

The influence of the pipelines is making the locals very concerned and many farmers cannot work as much as usual because they fear their land will be confiscated. A rubber plantation owner stated:

*'I was very disappointed when I heard that the government would confiscate my land and I really don't know why they confiscated our local people's farms, for what? It makes me think a lot for my family's daily lives and I heard they will pay money to those who lost their land but I don't want it. The payment cannot provide my family life.'*<sup>20</sup>

A paddy farmer repeated this point:

*'I don't want to say anything, I feel sad because whenever I look at my farm I am not satisfied...I don't need money. I know the money cannot be used for a long time and my farm can provide for my family for a long time, and also my son –the next generation.'*

Many villagers' lives are extremely dependent on the farms and forest surrounding their community for family income. The way that the government authorities confiscated their land was very simple. They just set-up a small bamboo stick with red colour on the lands that were going to be confiscated and they did not even notify the local people that they were going to confiscate the farmlands and plantations for the pipelines' construction. By local authority force, some houses have already moved to other communities without receiving any payment for what they lost from this construction.

*'I didn't receive any compensation for my lost land and I have already left my old place. It is very a difficult struggle for my family to survive as I had to start new work.'*<sup>21</sup>

- Tea farmer

On 12 June, 2011, in the Ta'ang area of the Namathu Township, ZK village, a pipeline worker forced four villagers' houses to be moved for construction during the land surveying. They told the villagers they will pay compensation. A villager stated,

---

19) A shopkeeper said/ SK villager/ interviewed at the shop

20) A rubber plantation/ SK village/ hold interviewed at the farm

21) Said a tea farmer at the MP village, interviewed at the tea farm

*'They promised that they will pay compensation but we villagers received nothing yet. Not only this village but also those in other villages were ordered to move. We together [who lost houses] reported to the local authorities but no one replied to us.'*<sup>22</sup>

The pipelines will be located through nearly 20 villages in Namtu Township; each village has an average of 100 households. As a result, approximately 2,000 Ta'ang households in Pyin Oo Lwin, Kyaukme, Hsiphaw, Namtu and Namkham Township have been forcibly relocated and have experienced land confiscation by the Burmese military in the area of construction. Furthermore, none of them have received any information about the project. Many have lost their land and property and know nothing about the compensation.<sup>23</sup>



*Confiscated tea farm*

## Impact on Livelihood

Due to the pipeline construction, many local villagers had their land confiscated which resulted in many negative effects.

*'It's not true [that] without getting permission from the villagers, the government must not implement any projects in the local farm. The government did not ask permission to implement the project. The villagers love their farm more than money because money cannot support their life.'*

---

22) TSYO Documentation and research dept, on Sunday 31 July 2011.

[http://www.palaungland.org/bur/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=155:2011-07-31-03-01-18&catid=34:2010-08-21-17-28-44&Itemid=58](http://www.palaungland.org/bur/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=155:2011-07-31-03-01-18&catid=34:2010-08-21-17-28-44&Itemid=58)

23) Press release by Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization -TSYO

<http://www.sec.gov/comments/s7-42-10/s74210-92.pdf/>

*Also this project will affect throughout their family live and they could not available to work in the coming year, they lost.’<sup>24</sup>*

- HN tea farmer.

Farmland owners have been neglected by the government authorities and were always threatened as well. The Vice Officer of the Land Department told the villagers that no compensation will be given unless they have the legal documents proving ownership. He said without the legal documents, the land is automatically owned by the government.

*“Namkham Vice officer of Land Department Kyaw Hlaing Soe and his group announced, ‘If the villagers could not show the land proof, we will not consider [compensation] for those people,’”<sup>25</sup>*

- Paddy farmer

The government has only focused on what project they want to implement within the local people farms. They are not working under the state principle and they are ignoring the state law and the local people. Furthermore, the state government is neglecting international laws such as the right to own property under international human rights law Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

*‘I know after building this pipeline I could not grow any plants close to pipeline area, I will lose my farms where I usually cultivate vegetables for my family food and income. In reality, I do not want compensation and I need my farm. If I can depend on my farm like before, I am sure that I do not need to consider a lot for my family income and food.’<sup>26</sup>*

- Paddy farmer in KL village

The pipeline construction project has destroyed the local farms, including tea, paddy, fruit, vegetable and crop farms, as farmers are unable to plant anything near the pipeline route. These conditions will continue to affect them in the future. In fact, some families become instantly insecure as they work from hand to mouth every day, and some are working by share cropping on farms from other people.

*‘I do not have any farm, the farm I use to work is loaned from another family and I have to pay farm tax every year but I am happy to pay for it, and my family life is mostly dependent on this farm. The pipeline will be located on my vegetable cultivation and currently I have to clean and*

---

24) stated by a tea farmer at the HN village/ interviewed at the shop

25) Said a paddy farmer at the KL village/ interviewed at the hut field

26) Stated by villager

*take any vegetables from farm. At this time I don't know how to get another farm and I can't continue to work the same as before.'*<sup>27</sup>

- Rubber plantation farmer

From the research data, in MP, MS and SK villages, most Ta'ang people have been primarily dependent on tea plantation and paddy farming for family livelihood for a long time. Currently, many red sticks have been set up on their farm to mark where the pipe will be located and which areas will be confiscated for the pipelines' route construction. Villagers' farms will not only lose land in the pipeline area but will also lose most of the land around the pipeline.

Recently, the farmers have been challenged by this construction and they are very anxious regarding to this situation, not just for the present but also for the future.

*'This plan makes our villagers think a lot. I have heard in the news that the pipeline exploded in Mon state and killed some villagers; that's why I worry for our villagers. And then, I also don't know when this pipeline will be exploding in the future; it can damage the forest and kill the people when exploding. In my opinion, I really want to stop this project and I don't need [compensation] money.'*<sup>28</sup>

- MS youth leader

At the moment, some local villagers have less experience about what kind of negative impacts that they are going to face in the future, and they are really happy and waiting to work when the pipeline construction is implemented. Most of them do not understand that the jobs will not bring income for the long term.

In addition, a few Chinese construction workers have entered into the communities where the pipeline will be built. This has lead to an extremely quick increase in goods and food prices by shopkeepers as they understand that they can get high prices from the Chinese people and the shopkeepers believe that the Chinese workers can buy whatever they want. These conditions make it really difficult for local daily workers to buy food for their family and they have to struggle harder than before.

*'We don't have any ownership of our land. We don't have full opportunity to control our farms and whenever the state government has to do something in our farm, they come and implement whatever they want without notifying to us.'*<sup>29</sup>

- Paddy farmer

---

27) Spoken by a rubber farmer

28) A MS youth leader commented/ interviewed at home

29) Noted by a paddy farmer MP village/ interviewed at the paddy farm

It has been over three years since the completion of the May 2008 Constitution Referendum but the constitution has not guaranteed the rights for people. The state government has done nothing to stop the many negative impacts on civilians.

*'The goods prices will quickly increase during the project construction in their community. It's not easy for the people who work from hand to mouth and who usually do not have work. It can create conflict between the shopkeeper and customers while the project proceeds.'*<sup>30</sup>

- Tea farmer from nearby SK village

### *No Notification to the Local Landowners*

The government has implemented the project and created many negative impacts without notifying the local people. There was no agreement made between the government and the villagers and the villagers were blocked from speaking out on their perspectives related to the project's impacts on their lives. Through information gained in interviews, during the first land surveying, numerous local landowners received no information from the local government authorities on the land surveying in the villagers' farms. In addition, the local authorities did not inform them about what the project is and the farmers did not have opportunity to know what construction would happen.

'At first, I did not know why they came into my farm. Some Chinese workers held a map and after that they built small sticks. I knew the pipeline would be located in [my] farm when they came again and again and also to my neighbor's house and I think I will lose a lot of my farm, over two acres.' said a tea farmer.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

Pipeline construction has led to many negative impacts to the villagers' farms, which the villagers depend on for family livelihood. The state government has been abusing many property laws including the international law UDHR article 17 and the Constitution of the Union of Public of the Union of Myanmar in article 356, 357. It is also failing to acknowledge the Ta'ang people's traditions and culture as the Ta'ang people pass ownership of land through families and generally do not have ownership documents.

The pipeline project destroyed the local villagers' farms including paddies, tea farms, rubber plants and vegetable cultivation; owners get no payment for their land or inadequate compensation and some families have lost their livelihood. The compensation will be unable to provide for the long term and the project will directly decrease the villagers' family income. In some communities, the authorities promised full compensation to the people whose land was confiscated already and yet no people have yet received compensation.

---

30) Said by HN villager/ interviewed at the shop

31) Said by a tea farmer/ interviewed at the farm, nearly the SK village



Namkham Township Vice-Officer of Land Department U Kyaw Hlain Soe led the police group and Chinese construction workers on the land survey through the land confiscated from the villagers. This shows that without the government authorities' help, the project would be unable to be completed. In addition to the land confiscated for the pipelines, the local authorities required fifty acres from the villagers to build the workers' camps and to store the pipelines materials. Although the local villagers still do not agree, they often hold meeting to get the decision from everyone in the village for denied what the local authorities demand, mostly those owning farm areas, totaling 50 acres.

"[After] almost one year, the new Burma President Mr Thein Seing, listened to the mass voice [for the first time] in over 6 decade [by] announc[ing] the suspension of the Chinese-backed Myaitsone dam project on the Irrawaddy River. He also must stop the Gas and Oil pipelines which cross the center country from western Arakan state to eastern Shan state and divide the country into two parts,"<sup>32</sup> said a data researcher.

## Recommendations

### *To the Burmese Government*

- » Follow the obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and State Constitution.
- » Give fair compensation to the farmland owners who have been relocated and had their farms confiscated.
- » Stop land confiscation and other human rights abuse in Ta'ang regions.
- » Respect the Ta'ang traditional and cultural customs
- » Stop treating the farmland owners who are unable to provide the land ownership in order to receive the compensation.

### *To the International Community*

- » Pressure the Burmese government to stop confiscating the local peoples' farms in Ta'ang regions and the whole of Burma.
- » Pressure the Burmese government to follow the international standards, especially the UDHR and local minorities traditional law.
- » Pressure the Burmese government to practice the authentic democracy in the country.
- » Pressure the neighboring countries to stop buying products from Burma.

---

32) A data collector's perspective

### *To the Relevant Companies*

- » Stop implementing any projects that directly affects the minority farm, especially destroying farmers' work.
- » Respect the minority traditional law while implementing the project
- » Acquire agreement from local farmers prior to commencing the project.
- » Ensure that your company has the same full responsibility take care of rural community people when implementing projects.

### *To the Local Ta'ang Community*

- » Demand the fair compensation related acre farms have been confiscated.
- » Every farmland owners must protect the farm [farm from forefather era] for yours and future generation.



## Conflict & Displacement

Since its independence in 1948, the Burmese government has been involved in a series of violent military campaigns against its ethnic minorities. Foreign investment and development projects continue to fuel these campaigns, resulting in massive numbers of people fleeing from the conflict zones. Whether they found their way to refugee camps in Thailand or remain on the run in Burma's dense jungles, all face severe hardship.

# Villagers in Ho Kai Villages, Southern Shan State Continue to Suffer the Effects of Having their Villages Burned Down by Armed Forces

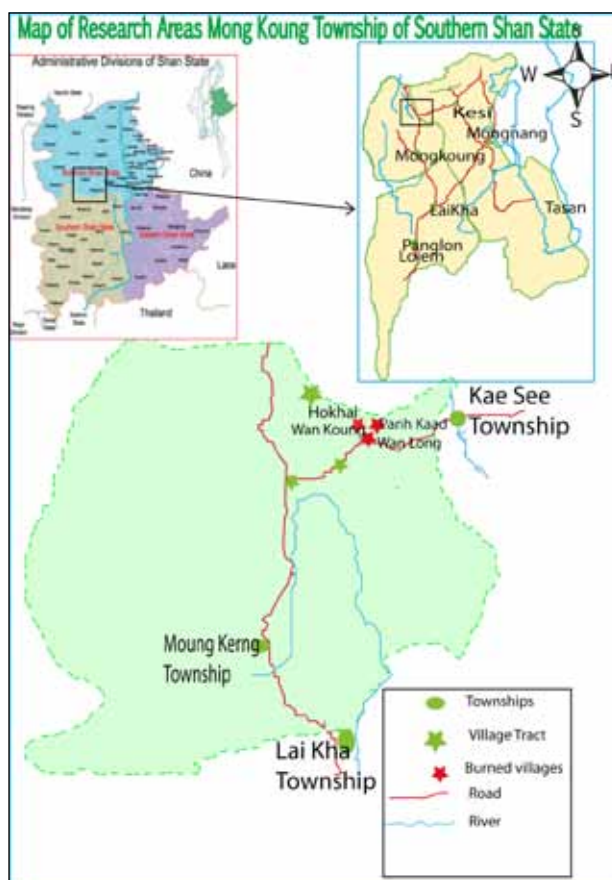
by Mune Nong

## Introduction

Burmese army troops, the worst abuses took place when the Burmese came to their villages during military offensive operations.

The villagers' life security has had many problems as a result of the fighting between the Burmese military and SSA armed group, fighting that still continues around these areas. The people are living in an unstable situation and human right abuses often occur. Currently, there is conflict between the SSA and the SPDC in Kea See Township, only 13 miles from the area of my research.

The conflict started in May 2011 and continues up till now. The people have been forced to relocate; some became migrants in Thailand and some had to escape to the jungle to save their lives and to protect themselves from human rights abuses. Kea See Township is located on the east of Ho Kai Village, and it makes the people in Ho Kai villages frightened for their security



at all times. This shows us that for most of the people who live in hot-conflict areas, the 2010 election and so-called transition to democracy haven't brought any peace into the region. Innocent people continue to be the victims of human rights abuses committed by various army troops.

The data in this report was collected through interviews with victims from the villages which were burned down by the Burma military in 2009. The three villages, Wan Long, Wan KOUNG and Pan Kadd, are part of Ho Kai village, in Maung KOUNG Township, Southern Shan State of Burma.

The population of the three villages at the time of research was over 500 and consisted of 157 households. The main occupation of the people in the villages was farming and orchid cultivation. These villagers faced many human rights abuses such as portering and confiscation of property before eventually having their villages seeing burned down by the SPDC, Infantry Battalions (IB/9) Second General Tun Tun Oo, and with some of members ceasefire group SSAS, in 29/July/2009 that burned down 125 houses.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this report is to ensure that the voices of the residents of the three villages are heard by the international community, so they will become aware of the human rights violations that are still occurring in some areas in Southern Shan State. In this report there will be five sections. The first section provides background information about the SSA and the villages that were burned down. The second section will look at how the villagers are still suffering from human rights abuses at the hands of the SPDC. The third section will look at the consequences of the villages being burned down and how it has impacted the children's access to education and the livelihoods of the villagers. The fourth section is a summary of the environmental problems that affect these areas, and the fifth section is the conclusion of the report.<sup>2</sup>

## Methodology

This report is based on research from three small villages within Ho Kao village, Maung KOUNG Township in Southern Shan State, east of Burma. Research was conducted from 16 September to 22 September 2011. I interviewed fourteen villagers, heads of villages, the victims of portering, and other victims who had lost their property and had their houses burned down by either the Burmese military or by members of the Ceasefire Group Shan State Army South (SSAS). According to those interviewed, most of the villagers lost an average of 5 million Kyats per household because of destroyed property. Some information in this report was obtained from secondary sources including articles, other reports and websites. This report was the first time for me to do



*Picture of signpost of three villages burnt down (picture taken from Shan Human Right Foundation website)*

1) Interviewed by 9, 45 years old of monk (22-9-2011)

2) Interviewed by 1, 60years old, head of village (22-9-2011)

such writing and I gained lots of experiences from writing this report. The greatest challenges from this report were the difficulties with transportation and communication during in the field.

## Livelihood of the villagers

Normally, for the people living in rural Burma, their primary occupation is farming; from early morning until evening every day the people would spend their life working on their fields. The people have to plant different crops in their farms, depending on the weather and have to adapt their crops for every season.

Most of the people in rural areas use sustainable methods of subsistence farming and they do not have to buy their food from the market, as they already have it all in their farm. The people in the rural areas are generous, innocent and have never moved from the place where they have lived for all their lives and are happy with their subsistence existence relying on nature.



*Paddy farms, the main livelihood of the villagers (picture taken by Crow River)*

*"The occupations for our villagers were farming many things such as peanuts, soy bins, garlic, cons and oranges. Before, our villagers had lived in this village with peaceful way and [had a] happy life."*<sup>3</sup>

- 60 year-old village headman.

Most of the farmers are without formal education but they have the local knowledge about how to

The farmers know how to manage their farm for different seasons. They have learnt this knowledge from many years of working the land. This knowledge of farming is a passed down from generation to generation. Because of their dependence on the land, the natural environment

---

3) Interviewed by 1, 60years old, head of village(22-9-2011)



is very important for the lives of the farmers who live surround by the mountains.

They have little free time, because farming is what supports their lives and requires many hours of work. Nowadays, the people who live in the rural areas are learning that a good education is very important for their children's future, even if the parents are uneducated. Families work hard on their farms to save the money to support their children's education.

## Background to Burma and the political conflict in ethnic areas

Burma has many diverse ethnic groups living within its boundaries. Despite having lots of precious natural resources, including oil, natural gas, timber, and gem stones, Burma has been ranked 149th of 187 countries in the world by the United Nations in its economic development<sup>4</sup>. Almost 50 years of military rule has caused great hardship for the people of Burma, and political instability in the country has had an adverse impact on the development of its population.

The outgoing military regime endorsed the budget on January 27, just a few days before parliament met for the first time on January 31. The Government Gazette released by the incumbent military junta says that 1.8 trillion kyat (about \$2 billion at free market rates of exchange), or **23.6 per cent** of the budget this year will go to defense. The health sector, meanwhile, will get 99.5 billion kyat (\$110 million), or **1.3 per cent**. Education will obtain a **4.3 per cent** allotment.<sup>5</sup>

The ethnic armed groups began an armed resistance fighting against the Burmese military regime and a civil war started. Fighting in the ethnic regions, and especially in eastern parts of Burma, has resulted in a deadlocked situation. The war has also created hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs). Ethnic minorities have been facing many human rights abuses such as unlawful killings, torture, rape, forced portering and destruction of properties committed by Burmese army.

Among the armed ethnic resistance groups, the Shan army is ranked as one the most powerful resistance groups. Shan State is located in the eastern part of Burma along the border with Thailand. There are several ethnic minority groups living in Shan State, such as Shan, Pa'O, Ta'ang, Kachin, Karen, Lisu, Lahu, and Wa, as well as many other smaller tribes, which all have their own traditions, languages, and religions.

The population of Shan State is approximately five million, and their main livelihood consists of agriculture. The conflict between the SPDC and the Shan resistance group named the Shan State Army (SSA) has been intense for decades. Due to the conflict, innocent civilians in Shan State have been facing serious human rights abuses.

My research area controlled by the SPDC and some members of the ceasefire groups Shan State Army South (SSAS) and Shan State Army North (SSAN). While the SSAS and SSAN were once part of the same armed group, the SSA, the groups split when in 1989 the SSAS signed

4) <http://www.chinlandguardian.com/news-2009/1626-burma-slipped-further-down-on-un-development-chart-as-new-govt-tries-to-reform-the-economy.html>

5) <http://democracyforburma.wordpress.com/2011/03/06/statementsuu-kyi%E2%80%99s-nld-slams-burma-junta%E2%80%99s-budget/> (on 29-11-2011)

a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government.<sup>6</sup> SSAN never signed a ceasefire agreement, however, and continued fighting with the SPDC government, leading to a conflict between the SSAS and the SSAN.

After the armed groups split, some leading member of the SSAS cooperated with the SPDC and set up projects such as gold mining, gem mining and teakwood logging in some parts of Shan State to be able to finance themselves. Some leading members of SSAS began collecting taxes illegally from villagers, which led to complaints from villagers to the SSAN and finally to a conflict between the SSAS and the SSAN in 2009. The leader of the SSAS, Sai Maung Zin, who had cooperated with the SPDC, was killed by the SSAN for his cooperation with the SPDC and exploitation of natural resources. The reason why some members of the SSAS later cooperated with the SPDC and burned down the three villages was in revenge for the murder of their former leader Sai Maung Zin. The SPDC, on the other hand, wanted to punish the villages as they believed that villagers in these areas were supporting the SSAN and even providing them with supplies.

Burma is still in a state of civil war between various ethnic groups and the SPDC in various regions of the country. Civil war in Burma has a long history and began over fifty years ago. As a consequence of the civil war, there have been numerous human rights abuses. For people who live in the areas where fighting still continues, suffering from human right abuses continues as well. The human rights abuses covered by this research were carried out by the SPDC (old government name) and to this day, people are still suffering from them.

The country's first Parliament in 20 years convened in January 2011 and former junta Prime Minister Thein Sein was elected as president. The military junta officially disbanded the SPDC in March 2011 promising a transition to democracy, with the new government called the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). However, the Parliament is civilian largely in name only. The military won about 60% of the seats in the October 2010 elections, and another 25% were reserved for members of the military. In addition, the cabinet is largely comprised of former members of the junta. The National League for Democracy dismissed the transition to a civilian government, calling it 'a futile gesture that will introduce no real change in power'.<sup>7</sup>

## Human Right Abuses by the SPDC in the Three Villages

In this section, I will discuss four situations which typify the human rights abuses suffered in the rural areas of the Southern Shan State. In the first section, I will focus on forced portering. In the second section, I will focus on the confiscation of villagers' property. In the third section, torture and unlawful killing will be discussed. Lastly, I will discuss the looting and burning of the villages by the SPDC army-troops which took place in the small villages in Maung Koun Township. I hope to show how the human right abuses have affected the villagers in both the short and long term.

According to the 2008 Myanmar Constitution:

6) <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/12-Crisis-in-Shan-State.pdf> (read it 30-10-2011)

7) Myanmar: History, Geography, Government, and Culture — Infoplease.com (15-10-2011) <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107808.html?pageno=3#ixzz1brisemln>

Article 9 = nothing shall, except in accord with existing laws, be detrimental to the lives and personal freedom of any citizen

Article 13 = The state shall, by law, protect the premises and security of the home, property, correspondence and other communications of citizens subject to provisions of this constitution.<sup>8</sup>

### *Forced Labor (Portering)*

There are many problems which occur when Infantry Battalions (IBs) come into the villages or rural areas. The local people suffer from abuses; the most common one is forced portering: people, cars, trucks, motorbikes and pull carts being forcibly used to transport supplies for troops in the front line areas. Forced portering is a common and ongoing occurrence and feared by the people in affected areas. The people have to carry very heavy equipment for the soldier. One man said, "I had to carry very heavy load that I had never done before."<sup>9</sup>

The military usually orders at least ten villagers to porter every time they come. The people who are forced to go with the IBs do not know when the soldiers will allow them to go back to their homes. Sometimes it can take more than a month to carry very heavy equipment and sufficient food is not provided during the working period. They must often walk long distances carrying heavy loads and if the porters walk slowly, they are kicked, threatened and beaten.

The men in the rural areas fear this task so much that when they hear the IB soldiers are coming to the village, they will run into the jungle to hide from the soldiers for a while. The villagers have had experience working as forced porters for the IB soldiers and they know the terrible things that can happen to them during a journey with the soldiers.

*"I had suffered very much from the military soldiers and I was very afraid of the Burmese soldiers."*<sup>10</sup>

During the rainy season, porters carrying loads without any rain clothes and they often got sick. Even if the porters get sick, they still had to carry the equipment with no energy, because they do not get enough food for extended periods. When the porters were sick, the IB soldiers don't provide any medication or even allow them to rest.

*"So my friend who got sick couldn't work anymore and he was very weak to carry things. I begged for medicine for him but they shouted at me and they said they didn't have any medicine. They didn't give me."*<sup>11</sup>

In the winter season, forced porters again suffered intensely. Because Shan State is surrounded by big mountains with deep forests and is covered by thick fog, it is very cold in the morning.

---

8) . Fundamental Principles and Detailed Basic Principles adopted by the National Convention in drafting the State Constitution (2008)

9) Interviewed by 4,25 years old, villager (21-9-2011)

10) Interviewed by 4,25 years old, villager (21-9-2011)

11) Interviewed by 4,25 years old, villager (20-9-2011)

From November through January, the weather is very cold and there can be snow. Forced porters often have to carry heavy equipment without any warm clothes. The Burmese military never treats the porters as humans; they just care how far these people can carry their supplies.

The villagers have to prepare all the foods, medicines and rain-clothes every time when they had forced by the SPDC portering. A serious problem for the villagers forced to porter is losing their time needed to work for their own livelihood, not allowing them to plant and take care of their crops. Portering also causes a common problem for the family whose husbands went to porter. The wives must work in fields while taking care of their children and not knowing when their husbands will return. If the husbands porter for more than a month, families can have money problems, as most of the people who live in the villages depend on farming for their livelihood and they have difficulty farming with the husband away.

In some areas which are a bit more developed, where cars and trucks can be found, the vehicles are taken by the army-troops, to transport their supplies. They will order the head of the villages to take vehicles from the villagers to transport troops and supplies to the front line areas. The villagers do not have the right to refuse their orders. If the villagers do not follow by their orders, the soldiers will arrest the head of villages first and punish them by putting them in the jail and torturing them. One of the head of villages said, "They will call porters to carry provisions for them and take trucks and motorbikes from us to transport for their supplies without knowing the time when they will allow us to come back."<sup>12</sup>

The villagers had to provide the petrol and food for the forced transportation of the soldiers every time. When the bikes or cars break down after they are used, they are never repaired and compensation is never given. Forced portering is the most common fear of the villagers that suffer by the hand of the SPDC military.

*"In May 2009, I was on my farm and I saw many SPDC soldiers coming and I prepared to hide in the bush behind of my farm. But it was too late for me; they saw me and called for me; their group in front of my farm. When I heard their voice shouting at me, I was very afraid and the whole of my body was shaking. When I arrived in front of their group, one guy kicked me to the ground and said that I didn't come immediately, when they called me. I said that I didn't have lunch yet and asked them to let me went to eat for a while, but some of them laughed ts me and didn't allow me to have any food. When we I arrived in my village, they went to the head of village and demanded more porters. So, 6 of us had to go with them for carry their heavy supplies. We went with them without had the hope of when they would allow us to come back home. We had to go with them for over 20 days and some days we didn't get enough food for us."*<sup>13</sup>

This was the victim who had been forced portering in 2009. The five other porters moved away frm the village because they were very scared that the SPDC soldiers would come and force them to porter again.

---

12) Interviewed by 1, 60years old, head of village (22-9-2011)

13) Interviewed by 4,25 years old, villager (21-9-2011)

## *Confiscation of Villagers' Property*

The word of peace for the villagers is meaningless, since the army-troops started coming in their villages, abusing their rights and confiscating their property. SPDC soldiers will order the head of the villages to make the villagers give their food to the soldiers during their stay in the villages. The soldiers take from the villager's livestock, money, and any other property that they can. For example one of villagers said, "They also stole whatever they wanted such as chickens, pigs, meat, oil, rice, cigarettes, alcohol and other vegetables or things for using."<sup>14</sup>

The Burmese soldiers often take whatever property they want from the villagers without asking any permission. The villagers obviously don't want to give their property to them but have no choice. The properties that the Burmese soldiers take from the villages are the things that the villagers rely on for survival. Livestock provides an income for the villagers and helps them to provide education for their children. This is a serious consequence of the army-troops coming to the small villages, but the soldiers ignore how the villages have to work hard to save their property. So when the SPDC soldiers steal property, the villagers don't have animals on their farms, causing many challenges for their family income. Sometimes when the soldiers demand money, some villagers do not have any money; they have to go to borrow from their neighboring houses and give it to the Burmese soldiers. This can also create the problem for the villages to have debt within in the community.

*"I didn't think they would burn the villages. Before, wherever they were coming, we would give them whatever they wanted, such as animals, foods, money and other supplies even though we didn't want to give them anything. So I had to collect the money from our villagers and give it to them. When I went to collect the money, many people complained that they didn't have the money. Some had to borrow from their neighboring houses and gave it to me, and I felt so sorry for them and so sad about it. It was the serious problem that they forced to take the money from us. However, the people in our villages had to give money to them whenever they asked from us; even though we needed to work hard to save that money throughout our life. When the soldiers forced to took our animals such as cows and buffalos, the consequence was effect for our family lest income without animals sources in our farms."*<sup>15</sup>

- Head of village

The problem is compounded by the fact that other armed groups, such as SSAS and SSAN armed groups, come into the villages. When they come, the people have to provide supplies and food for them too. The relationship, communication, and rights abuses between villagers and SSA armed groups are different from the SPDC soldiers, but the villagers still have to support them with some their property. The villagers have to cook the special foods for them and give what is requested when they come.

---

14) Interviewed by 1, 60years old, head of village (22-9-2011)

15) Interviewed by 14, 56 years old, head of village (21-9-2011)



*The village monastery, one of the only buildings in the three villages not burnt down. (Picture from the Shan Human Rights Foundation website)*

The SSAS members who come to the villages do not really do any good things for the villagers any more. Sometimes they cooperate with the SPDC for their own profits and collect illegal taxes from the villagers. The SSAN, who don't cooperate with the SPDC, do some things to support the villagers. For example, they support children's education with computer training and organize the Shan New Year's Celebrations to remind the youth in the villages of their cultural heritage. SSAN and the villagers must conduct these activities secretly. The SSAN does not want the SPDC to know that they

have connection with the villagers in these areas because if the SPDC knew about it, they would torture and kill the villagers. The SSAN does not want human rights abuses to be brought about by the accusations of SPDC soldiers.

The villagers are very worried about their farms, animals and other property that is essential for their lives in these rural areas. The villagers feel that they do not have full rights to own their property. The SPDC soldiers take whatever they want, whenever they want.

*"For example, most of the people in this village do not have enough money to replant their farms or buy the seeds for their farms. When the SPDC burned down the three villages, it was the time when villagers already finished planting; the villagers were forced to leave their villages for almost 2 months. We did not have right to hope that it would be our property, because the soldier could take whenever they want."*

### *Torture and Unlawful Killing in the Villages*

Torture and unlawful kill by the SPDC is commonly feared among the villagers when the army troops come into the villages and arrested the men. The soldiers arrested the men for many reasons, such as gaining information for the SSAN armed group or refusing to porter their provisions. Most of the men in the villages will escape to other places when the army troops come into the villages.

In 2009, when the villages were burned by the SPDC and some SSAS members, one of the villagers was killed by a SPDC soldier. The man who was killed was afraid of the SPDC soldiers as he had previously been tortured by the SPDC soldiers for many years. When their villages had been burned, the man, along with other villagers, hid in the forest near their farms for 3-4 days. After the villages had burned, he decided to look at the situation in the village, because he thought the SPDC soldier could not see him if he just looked from the outside of village. The day that he went out from the forest, he did not return and no one knew what had happened to him.



By the evening, some villagers saw he had been arrested by the SPDC soldiers. The villagers and his family were worried for him, because they knew that the man was very scared of the SPDC.

“The people in the villages knew that the soldiers arrested him but they didn’t know that he was killed, including me. After the soldier left from our village, we tried to find him but we couldn’t see [him] anywhere. But one day in the morning, his friend worked on the road where he was killed and he saw a piece of his shirt and went to the village for called the people came and found him. When they saw a hole near the road, they checked it and found his body cut into three parts and burned in a fire.”<sup>16</sup>

This happened in 2009. Afterwards I went to interview his wife. The reason that the SPDC soldier killed the man was because they thought that the man was making contact with the armed group SSAN. The SPDC soldier believed that he was sending information to the SSAN about the movement of SPDC. The SPDC soldiers accused and killed the man without any evidence or proof. He had 6 children with his wife, who now has to take care of the children by herself. These unlawful occurrences often happen in rural areas and the people still suffer rights abuses under Burmese soldier control areas in the Southern Shan State.

### *Looting and Burning Down the Villages*

*“The villagers had to walk the whole night to go to another village called Dong Law village, far from our village by 23 miles. The villagers went to stay at the monasteries of Dong Lao village; some had many children and there was suffering for them in that situation.”*

After the SPDC burned down the three villages, they forced the villagers to leave the villages for other areas. Some people went to other townships where their relatives lived and went to stay while their houses were burning. The villagers who didn’t have any relatives in other villages went to stay at the monastery outside of the villages. However, the SPDC didn’t allow the villagers to stay at the monastery and ordered to the villagers to move to other areas. The soldiers said they would burn down the monastery too if the villagers didn’t move to other places. The villagers were very afraid that the SPDC would burn their monastery so they had to walk for the whole night to reach other villages. Human right abuses continue to take place in the Southern Shan State, mostly in the rural areas.

*“The people who live in the rural areas have to face difficulties because of fighting between the SPDC and SSAS.”<sup>17</sup>*

The three villages within Maung Kourng Township, Southern Shan State of Burma suffer a lot of human rights abuses by SPDC and SSAS. The villagers were accused of supporting the SSAN. Without evidence, the SPDC and the SSAS detained and tortured the villagers and stole the villagers’ property before they burned the villages. They burned down 125 households in three

---

16) Interviewed by 1, 60years old, head of village and wife’ of the person who had kill in 2009

17) Name excluded for security.

villages within one day, placing straw and paraffin in the houses.

*"At 5:30 on the morning of 29 July, our family hadn't woken up yet. When I woke up and looked, I saw over 10 soldiers were taking hay and oil to set up to set fire to my house. Then I woke all my family members up and we packed the things that we could take with us and left through the back door of the house and went to hide in the bamboo farm behind the house."<sup>18</sup>*

The pictures of the houses and the property burned by SPDC and SSAS soldiers. The villagers had to live without shelter during in raining season. (pictures had taken by Shan Human right Foundation website)

While the villages were being burned, the villagers were not allowed to enter the villages. So the villagers had to stay in the monastery outside of the villages. They had nothing to eat for about three days. Some of the villager went to relatives' houses at other villages. Four days after the burning, the villagers were forced to leave the monasteries by SPDC who said that if the villagers didn't leave the monasteries, they would also burn the monasteries. It rained a lot at this time and there were no buses so they had to walk the whole night to get to another monastery about 23 miles away.



*After the fire, this school had to close and the children now cannot study. (picture by the Shan Human Right Foundation website)*

They stayed about a month at the monastery of Doung Law village but then were forced return to the village by the SPDC and not to spread out the news of burning. They had to build shelter using remnants of burned materials. SPDC enforced that the villagers could not leave the village. Aid from outside was not allowed to enter the village. At the end of December 2009, about six months after the villagers were burnt to the ground, the Nay-Pyi-Daw government order the houses to be rebuilt.

*"Nay-Pyi-Daw ordered to replace houses which were burnt [by professional builders] but in the reality, the local authorities just hired daily construction workers to build. The villagers got only low-quality houses. The construction workers who came to the village left the village within a week due to very bad conditions such as lack of food and the isolation of the villages."<sup>19</sup>*

The villagers are still living in these poorly constructed houses; the villagers suffer due to the bad housing quality. Because of the desperate poverty from having all their property burnt, the villagers still do not have money to rebuild houses of the same quality as those they had before.

18) Interviewed by 1, 60years old (22-9-2011)

19) Interviewed by 14, 56 years old, head of village, Interviewed by 1, 60years old, head of village and Interviewed by 4, 25 years old, villager (19-9-2011 with group interview)

## Livelihood Impacts

All of the villages rely on agriculture. After the fire, which destroyed their homes and their crops, their livelihoods were destroyed. Because of the fire, all of their properties were gone and they had no capital to buy tools, seeds and other necessities for the plantations. The villagers were farmers and normally would save at least three barns of rice patty per family. The patty was also the main source for their income

*“After this burning, the worst effects and suffering for the villagers are in livelihood and economy. For example, most of the villagers’ patty was burned and villagers do not have enough money for replant their farms or buy the seeds for their farms”<sup>20</sup>.*

Another serious issue following the fire was GMOs become introduced in the three villages. Prior to the fire, the villagers grew their crops sustainably, using organic methods. A lack of education and low income lead the villagers to use cheap genetically modified seeds for high production. The GM seeds that came from China are now the most popular for the villagers.

The villagers do not have the money to buy the GM seeds and fertilizer; they must borrow and after their crops grow, they go to sell at the big broker’s sale center into the cities. Only then do they go to the shop to repay their debt.

The villagers think that using GMs seeds can make money first for their families; they do not know that bad soil impact will result from the use of chemical fertilizer. By using GM methods, the nature habitats where they grow food will be damaged and their native seeds will disappear.

## Education Impacts

Even though the village school did not burn, the school was closed for over three months. After the fire, parents of the children could not save for their children’s education. Because there is only one post-primary school in this area of three villages, after finishing seventh standard, the students have to go to the towns near the villages to continue their education. Prior to the fire, many children had the opportunity to continue their education into other towns because of their parents could support the costs of their post-primary study.

After the villages were burnt, parents couldn’t afford to pay for their children’s further education. Every parent had to face the same situation; they couldn’t support their children to continue the high school in the cities because of all of their property was lost in the fire.

*“Before, when our house hadn’t burned, I always had a dream that I would support my son until he finished the high school. But then 2009 happened and all the expectations that I had dreamed of were all gone.”<sup>21</sup>*

---

20) Interviewed by 1, 60years old (22-9-2011)

21) Interviewed by 8, the one child’ father, 40 years old (17-9-2011)

*"I had a dream that after I finished high school, I would be a volunteer teacher in our village because there aren't enough teachers for the children. I left school last year because I had to help my parents to work on the farm every day. I was very sad that I didn't have the same opportunity as my friends had."<sup>22</sup>*

## Conclusion

The people in three villages are still suffering the effects of the human rights abuses carried against them by the SPDC and SSAS. After years of forced portering and property confiscated, the burning of the villages in 2009 has caused the greatest and most serious harm against the villagers, especially in terms of livelihood and the children's education. However, the SPDC does not take any responsibility for their actions against the villagers. Because those areas are controlled by the SPDC and other armed group, the fighting often happens between them. Most NGOs do not travel to these areas to gather information they know of the danger and fear for their security. Even though the people in these areas have been oppressed for a long time, they do not receive any help. They have to stay under the oppression of the SPDC all the time.

I hope that this report will lead to action by international organizations to prevent these types of human rights abuses and help protect the people of Burma from the oppression of the Burmese army.

## Recommendations

### *To the SPDC*

- » Stop human right abuses such as looting and burning of villages, forced portering, forced confiscation of property, torture, and unlawful kill
- » Respect the Human Declaration of Human Rights and sign the International covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
- » Take action against soldiers for their abuses in Maung Kounng Township
- » Give villagers compensation for abuses

### *To Human Rights NGOs*

- » Do more research and data collection on the human right abuses occurring in Southern Shan State and throughout Burma to submit information to the international community and show SPDC abuses
- » Pressure the SPDC to maintain the UDHR

---

<sup>22</sup>) Interview by 9, the child who left the school (17-9-2011)

*To the International and Local Media*

- » Direct more attention on human rights abuses occurring in Burma and present this information to the international community

*To the SSAS/SSAN*

- » Negotiate between each other and cooperate to find solutions for preventing abuses against the villagers by the SPDC in villages in Maung KOUNG Township and throughout Burma
- » Unite with each other and take the responsibility for protecting the villagers from human right abuses by the SPDC
- » Respect the UDHR and encourage the villagers

*To the Villages within Maung KOUNG Township*

- » Provide information to the media
- » Document and record human rights abuses carried out by the SPDC as well as SSAS/SSAN

# The Impacts of Emigration of Karenni Youth in Deemowso Township

by Khon Poe Hlone

## Introduction

Migrating to other places is one of the most popular issues among the youth in Deemowso Township in Karenni state, Burma. Even in the mind of a college student, going and working abroad is one of their highest goals after graduating from college. As a Burmese proverb says, “job is the life of the people”, so youth in Deemowso Township need jobs to be able to support their living, which is the main problem they are struggling with everyday. Currently it is really difficult for youth to find a job with adequate income. For a young person in Deemowso Township, it is almost impossible to find a job no matter what education level they have gained.

Migrating to other places to work is the only way that they can improve their lives. In fact, no young person from Deemowso Township wants to leave their community, but they must leave to work in order to earn more money and achieve a better living standard. Thus, business agencies hold a key role in young people becoming so keen to work abroad. The young people usually choose to go abroad and work, because of the attraction of business agencies. They believe what the agents say very easily. They have suffer a lot because they don't really understand the country where they are supposed to work, especially, the current situation of the country, the cost or the possibility of gaining a profit or not.

The main aim of going and working abroad is to make money in order to support and solve their families' livelihood problems. The livelihood problems such as inadequate food, clothing, and shelter need to be solved. They want their families to live securely. What they want to do for their families, is a very noble aim. But, behind the scenes of migration, youth encounter unexpected





things before working abroad and during their work. They are being exploited by businessmen, government officers and other countries' citizens. Furthermore, their families have to face consequential problems and get stuck in debt. The youth and their families all have to deal with overcoming these problems.

This report will highlight and prove that livelihood problems are the main causes for youth in Deemowso Township to leave the community. The causes of livelihood problems include civil war, insufficient income and lack of job opportunities. Since there is fighting between the SPDC and ethnic armed groups, there are no development projects in the community and local people can only work in the limited areas where there is no fighting. Because of the lack of job opportunities and insufficient income in the community, the youth cannot make enough money for both themselves and their families. So, they borrow money from someone and leave the community to look for a better job. The goal of emigrating is to make money in order to solve their livelihood problems.

Behind the scene of emigration, youth have to face a lot of impacts which they did not expect. Thus, this report will also express the negative impacts of emigration of Karenni migrant youth and their families. Karenni migrant youth workers are exploited by businessmen, their own government officers, other countries' company managers and citizens both before and after arriving abroad. Their families have to pay back their debts, sell all of their property and work harder than before. This is because some young people are lied to and most are not earning the amount they were promised before going overseas.



*A view of Deemowso Township (photo by Khon Poe Hlone)*

In order to prevent emigration and solve the livelihood problems, both the local government and ethnic armed groups should end the conflict, restore peace and stability and create a better life for local people. The government should create job opportunities with an adequate salary or income. The government should create a sustainable supply market for farmers. Without people to buy their products at decent prices, farmers cannot support their families stably. If the livelihood problem is solved, the people in Deemowso Township can live more conveniently. People who live

in the community could live together with peace and unity. They could create a better and higher living standard within the township.

All of the information in this report is based on interviews with five Karenni migrant workers in Thailand, six Karenni youth who had been working in Malaysia and Singapore, and ten local people in Deemowso Township including local youth, local leaders, religious leaders and cease-fire group leaders. The information in this report also comes from books, internet research and my own experiences as a youth growing up in Deemowso Township.

## Background Information

Karenni state is the smallest, least accessible and poorest state in the Union of Burma. It is situated in eastern Burma. There are two bordering states and one bordering country; Shan State to the North; Karen State to the West and Thailand to the East. There are seven townships within Karenni state which include Loikaw, Deemoso, Pruso, Balaekah, Parsong, Maeset and Shardaw townships. Among those seven townships, Deemoso is the township in which I did research about the impacts of the emigration of Karenni youth.

The population of Deemowso Township is approximately 70,000<sup>1</sup> people. Kayan, Kayah and Kayaw are the main ethnicities living in there. In addition, a few other ethnic groups such as the Karen, Kaycho, Kaybar, Manu, Manaw, Burmese and Shan are also dwelling together and dependent on each other. Karenni people descended from Mongolia in about BC 2015, moving south towards Karenni State where they finally settled in the Deemowso area around 739 BC<sup>2</sup>. Karenni means red Karen, which is what people used to call them in the past. Nowadays a lot of people call the Karenni “Kayah”.

Deemowso Township can be divided into two parts; one is a mountainous area and another part is a flatland area. People in Deemowso live in both the mountainous area and flatland area. Farming is their main job and other jobs include hunting, logging, fishing, raising livestock, and working for the government. Karenni people who live in the mountainous area rely on rotation farming or shift cultivation farming, and people who live in the flatland rely on paddy farming as well as commercial agriculture.

Nowadays, most people in Deemowso Township cannot earn their living sufficiently by farming. Livelihood problems become the first priority to solve in a family. In addition, it is not easy to get a job in order to make extra money. Their daily survival is their daily achievement. Because of the livelihood problems in a family, most youth resort to migrating to other places to look for a better job where they can earn an adequate income.

They are leaving in different ways. Some are leaving to other countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Some are leaving to other states within the country like Shan, Yangon and Kachin states. They leave because it is not easy to find a job with sufficient income within the state. In addition, by working abroad, the youth want to get general knowledge and experience. According to a twenty one year old Karenni migrant worker in Thailand:

---

1) According to a government emigration staff, in Deemowso Township

2) <http://www.karennihomeland.com/ArticleArticle.php?ContentID=58>

“Actually, I want to go and work in the countries like Korea, Japan and Singapore. I will earn a lot if I am able to go there. Maybe my parents have to sell all of their properties they have to send me there, because it costs a lot. I can’t afford that. Finally, I arrived in Thailand. It cost not so much and I already have an aunt here. So I dared to come here<sup>3</sup>.”

Mostly, Karenni youth go to Thailand and Malaysia, while a few go to Singapore to work. Thailand is the cheapest place to go. Most Karenni youth can go there illegally, because Karenni state borders Mae Hong Song Province in Thailand. Malaysia is the second country where Karenni youth go and work. It costs around 1,500,000 kyat (\$1500)<sup>4</sup> to go and work there. Singapore is the third country where Karenni youth go and it costs around 4,000,000 kyat (\$4000)<sup>5</sup> to be able to work there. Karenni youth usually choose the cheapest place to go and work, because they are poor and can not afford to pay a lot of money.

## The Causes of Youth Emigration

Livelihood problems are the main reason that youth have to leave their community monthly. These livelihood problems are caused by civil war and the unstable political situation, insufficient income and lack of job opportunities.

### *Civil War and its Impact on Livelihood*

After Burma gained independence from the British on January, 4, 1948, the political situation became confused between the U Nu government and the ethnic groups requesting self-determination or territory. Later in 1949, many ethnic armed groups formed in order to fight against the government. The more armed groups that appeared, the more human rights violations were committed by the government against their citizens. After the military coup led by U Nay Win in 1962, the situation became worse. The military expanded troops everywhere; especially where the ethnic armed groups were<sup>6</sup>.

There is still a lot of fighting between the current regime and the ethnic armed groups in Deemoso Township. Deemoso is marked as a black area. “Black area” means free fire zone or the area controlled by ethnic armed groups as well as the regime. According to the article 3, 5, 9, 13, 17, 19 and 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the military government always violates rights to Karenni people<sup>7</sup>. Since Karenni State has been under the control of the military government, local people don’t have freedom of movement. The regime issues curfew very often. Under the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council), youth are forced to work to build roads and military camps without payment. From my observation as a local youth in Deemoso Township, people from Deemoso regularly have to cut and transport bamboo to 102 and 427 regimes and have to build and maintain their camps. In addition, Burmese soldiers force them

3) Interview # 1 with a 21 years old Karenni migrant worker in Chaing Mai, Thailand. On file with author.

4) Interview # 12 with a youth from Thoumine village who had been working in Malaysia. On file with author.

5) Interview # 5 with a youth from Thoumine village and who is now working in Thailand. On file with author.

6) Interview # 13 with a leader of Karenni Ethnic Youth in Deemoso. On file with author.

7) <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/resources/plain.asp>

to guard the electric towers from the danger of KNPP attempts to destroy them. Local people have to give taxes to the SPDC yearly without being given any explanation. Moreover, the SPDC relocate people in the rural areas. People have to move from place to place and many face starvation. The current government does not provide the basic needs of local people. There is no social security for local people. Such kinds of violations force young people to leave school early and work with their family. They want safety and money to feed their families.

### *Insufficient Income*

Most people in Deemowso Township mainly earn their living by working on farms. They cannot earn their living sufficiently with that job anymore. There are a lot of difficulties with farming. People struggle to sustain themselves mainly because of population increase, chemical fertilizer, climate change, insect pests and school fees.

### *Population Increase*

In the past, most Karenni people in Deemowso could earn their living sufficiently by working on farms. Nowadays, there are a lot of people who cannot earn their livelihood in the same way. The increasing population is one of the reasons that they can not earn their living sufficiently. When the population increases in a family, they cannot rely on the land that they have. For example, a family which has three members and one acre of paddy field can earn their living sufficiently by that land. However, when the number of family members increases to six people, they can not earn their living that way, because the land can produce enough for a limited number of people.

### *Chemical Fertilizer*

In addition, the land is not as productive as before because the farmers are using chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides extensively. In the past, they had to plant only once a year and it would feed all the people in a family. But in the current situation, even though they plant two rounds in a year, it is not enough for the whole family. So they try to apply chemical fertilizers and spray chemical pesticides in order to increase the production of crops. But the soil is burdened because of the overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides so the fertility of the land has declined and can no longer produce the same amount as before.

### *Climate Change*

Climate change is another problem for farmers. For farmers, the weather is the most important thing. Being a farmer is not an easy job. It is like drawing a lottery. After the drought happened in 1997 in Karenni state, the climate is always changing. Farmers can not earn their living as usual, because they cannot plant crops in time. Because of climate change, the plants are not growing as well as before, so the farmers face a lot of problems. One example of how important climate is to farmers is seen when there is below average rainfall in the rainy season. The farmers are dependent on water from the dam to irrigate their rice paddies during the summertime when no

rain falls. If the amount of rainfall is decreasing, there is less water to recharge the water supply in the dam. This makes it impossible to plant paddy in summer, because they don't have enough water in the dam to supply for thousands of acres of paddy fields. When they face this problem, they have to borrow money from rich people to buy rice, vegetables and other basic needs for their household. This year in 2010, there was no rain in the early portion of the rainy season in Deemowso Township, so the nursery they sowed died and every farmer could not transplant their rice seedlings in time, because there was no water in their paddy fields. The farmers all fear for their survival if the situation goes on like that.<sup>8</sup>

### *Insect Pests*

Insect pests are one of the hindrances for Karenni people in Deemowso, because most of them are farmers. When the crops they planted are destroyed by insects, they have to replant them again and again. So it takes more time and costs more money to hire laborers. In addition, the crops do not grow well, because they can not plant them in time. So they cannot harvest them in order to make enough money for their families. A farmer in Nang Leh village from Deemowso Township expressed his disappointment:

*"This year, I just got 12 sacks of paddy rice, because insect pests destroyed some paddyplants before it was to be harvested. I have 6 members in my family so it will last only two months for us. I don't know how I should manage to dealwith that<sup>9</sup>."*

### *School Fees*

Sending their children to school is another reason that their lives are difficult. Most parents in Deemowso Township are simple grass roots people. There are also some middle class people. They all try to send their children to school, but they cannot send them to finish high school because of the school fees, tutor fees and stationary fees. According to a head master of a primary school in Deemowso Township, for the whole year of studying, it costs around 30,000 kyat (\$30) for a primary student, 50,000 kyat (\$50) for a secondary student and at least 150,000 kyat (\$150) for a high school student. The income of a family in Deemowso Township is no more than 650,000 (\$650) in a year so most of them cannot afford to send their children to school up through high school.<sup>10</sup> Although attending the school does not cost a lot for the rich people, it is a lot for grass roots and middle class people. They have to prioritize and sacrifice for their livelihood problems.

### *Lack of Job Opportunities*

Since the unstable political situation began occurring in Karenni state, there are no development projects created by the military government. As it is an ethnic state, the government totally

---

8) Interview # 14 with a farmer from Naung Leh village. On file with author.

9) Interview # 15 with a farmer from Naung Leh village. On file with author.

10) According to a 53 years old , a head master of a primary in Deemowso Township.

ignores the basic needs of the people such as education, health, economic development and transportation. Unemployment is one of the most important things the current government needs to solve. Most youth leave school early and work on farms as hired workers. There are only some youth who can carry on their further study till they graduate from universities. In fact, schooling is for the purpose of getting a job and creating a better living standard among the community, but the problem is that it is hard to get a job after they graduate. Besides doing agriculture, there are no available vocational jobs for people in Deemowso Township. The government does not create job opportunities for local people; not for young people who graduated from university nor those who are not educated. It does not give them guarantee to get a job even if they received more than one degree.

Most young people have to work on farms and earn 1500 kyat to 2000 kyat (\$1.50) per a day.<sup>11</sup> But they don't have work everyday, so it affects their livelihood. Moreover, the wage they earn is small and the goods they have to buy are expensive. Within the state, the other jobs they can get include seller, porter, odd worker, tree cutter and driver. Some youth can get jobs in the government offices or as school teachers. It is not easy to get a job in the government departments; they have to give a large bribe to get that position. Youth earn approximately 300,000 kyat for the whole year if they have regular jobs. That is equal to 300 US dollars. Except for working on farms, there are no guaranteed jobs for the youth in Deemowso Township.

## The Impacts of Youth Emigration

There are many impacts to Karenni migrant workers in foreign countries. They are exploited by business agents and government officers before going abroad. In addition, they have to face different kinds of problems when working abroad, such as a dangerous journey, difficulty finding work, lack of papers, bad working conditions, health problems, security and impacts on female migrant workers.

### *Exploitation by Business Agents and Government Officers*

Working abroad can earn more money than working in any part of the Karenni state. Youth are the main people targeted to go out and make money for their families. So their parents ask them to go abroad and they also ask their parents to let them go and work abroad by themselves. To be able to work abroad, they have to sell their land and borrow money from rich people, because it costs a lot to go and work abroad. It is a risk for them, because if something does not happen as they expected, they will face a harder life in the future times.

Business agencies play a key role in sending Burmese workers to other countries. To be able to work abroad, youth from Karenni state have to contact agents or business agencies. Most agents are profit-minded. They have no sympathy for those who are struggling everyday for their livelihood. Instead of making a profit for both youth who go to work abroad and themselves, most agents just only look out for their own interest and profits.

Most agents use sweet words to attract the minds of youth. Moreover, they show photos,

---

11) According to daily workers in Deemowso Township



posters and videos about different kinds of jobs where youth can work in abroad. According to a youth from Lawsi village, Deemowso Township:

*"He, the agent, came to my village. He talked to me about I can get a good job with a lot of income if I go and work in Malaysia. Because of his good explanation, I was keen to go there. So I told my parents to allow me go and work there. But my parents don't believe that I can get a job and make a lot of money. So another day, he came again with photos, posters and videos. He showed them to my parents. So my parents believe, because they saw the place where I have to work, stay and the type of jobs I can choose. Finally, they agreed to let me go and they borrowed money from someone for me<sup>12</sup>."*

As going abroad is very popular in Deemowso Township, a lot of business agencies come and persuade youth. The youth easily believe what the agents are saying and asking for. They are honest enough to be persuaded by agents. The agents capitalize on that weakness and take advantage of them. They ask for a higher cost more than it should be. But the countrymen don't know that. They just believe and do as the agents tell them. A youth who had been working in Malaysia explained how he was deceived:

When I went there, I had to pay 1,500,000 kyat. I really thought it might cost like that. But when I talked my friends who had been working for years, he said, it should cost only half. You were exploited by the agent. I could do nothing except saying it is one of the lessons for me<sup>13</sup>.

There are many types of agents in Deemowso Township. To make the local youth believe them, they lie to persuade the local people to go abroad to work. Sometimes they should not be trusted even though they are monks, pastors and other well known persons. A 48 year-old lady from Deemowso Township explained how she was lied to:

*"An agent named Mowswumbow, a Chin ethnic man came to my house. He is a pastor so he told about Jesus Christ and prayed for my family. After that, he saw a lot of my sons and started talking about to send one of my five sons to Thailand. One of my sons, Paebyar said he will go and work to support his and sisters. He sympathizes for us, because he is seeing that we have to struggle everyday. We decided to send him. We gave 900,000 kyat (\$ 900) to the pastor who will send my son. We believed him, because he is a pastor so he would not lie to us. Finally, it did not work with him; he did not keep his promise to send my son. We asked back our money from him many times, but he gave many reasons. In the last time when we asked him, he gave back only 300,000 kyat (\$300). We have to be satisfied, because he explained the rest money already cost when he traveled and communicated for my son<sup>14</sup>."*

Most business agencies don't take responsibility for what they are offering. They are promising

---

12) Interview # 7, with a youth from Lawsi village in Deemowso Township. On file with author.

13) Interview # 10 with a youth from NaungPaLeh village, who had been working in Malaysia. On file with author.

14) Interview # 9 with a mother from Taepoekaloe village. On file with author.

impossible things. They always try to escape from the problems they created for the youth. A youth who just came back from Malaysia a few months ago said:

*"Before I went there, the agency called Danajwae said to me that I would earn more than 750 Ringgits per month. If I don't earn that amount, they said just call our agency and they will tell the company I am working to pay that amount. When I was working there I did not earn like they said. I just earned 450 ringgits. So I phoned them to tell them about the salary I got. They replied, you were calling the wrong phone number. I tried to call many times, but they did not reply<sup>15</sup>."*

There are only some youth who can send money to their families. They cannot send back a lot. There are those who cannot support their families even though they have been working in Malaysia for months. The salary they get is taken by the agents. If they chose the way which cost less, they have to pay back the agent from their salary, sometimes for as long as eight months. After that, they can save their income and send money back to their families. A 26 years old youth from Deemowso Township who had been working in Malaysia from 2007 to 2009 stated:

At the start, the agent said I need to pay half of the cost and he will pay for the other half. But I need to repay it back when I am working there. I agreed to do like that. He said he will only take all of my salary I earn for 6 months. But in the real situation, he took it for 8 months. I asked why. He said the rate of money exchange is low. I could do nothing, because he has the contact with my company I am working and the company did not give my salary till he allowed<sup>16</sup>.

In addition to the business agents, there are a lot of government officers who take advantage of Karenni youth who want to go and work abroad. The officers of the Township' emigration department, passport department, tax department and other government departments always ask more money than it should cost. For example, when Karenni workers prepare to go abroad, they need the signatures and permission of different government departments, but they have to pay a bribe. Without giving officers extra money, they do not issue the documents for them easily. Officers sometimes scold them in front of a lot of people. For poor people, they risk their lives to get a better living standard by going and working abroad, because they sell the property they have or borrow from someone with a lot of interest. But government officers have no sympathy for them. Instead of helping poor people, they take advantage from them. It is a shameless performance for the country. Government officers are also part of the reason for making Karenni people stuck in poverty.

Overall, despite the fact that their objectives in going abroad are good and their expectations are high, most youth in Deemowso Township don't meet their objectives and expectations before going abroad, once they are working abroad. They encounter unexpected problems before going and during work abroad. They sell the lands they have and borrow money with a high interest rate in order to work abroad. Unluckily, they are exploited by businessmen as well as their own government officers. Finally, some youth don't have a chance to go even though they already gave money to agents, which means that they have to work harder than before to pay back their debts.

---

15) Interview # 11 with a Karenni youth from LayMine village, Deemowso Township. On file with author.

16) Interview # 10

Although some youth have a chance to work abroad, they have to work the job the company asks them to do and work overtime, but they do not earn adequate money for their work. For most Karenni youth their living standard does not change by working abroad.

### *Impacts on Migrant Workers Overseas*

For a young Karenni person, life in other countries is not easy. For one example, Kory, a migrant worker in Malaysia has to live in a small room with crowded with other workers. He has to get up early; he has to clean, buy food and cook by himself. Before he came to Malaysia, he chose to work in a hotel, but actually he did not get to work that job and he has to work the job that the agent tells him to do. He has to work at least 12 hours per day. He has to work overtime for the company without getting payment. He is forced to work over time not only on weekdays but also on weekends. He can not travel freely; the agent of the company keeps his passport. Communication with other people in the industry is difficult for him, because of the language difference. There is no health insurance for him if he faces any accident in his job. It is not easy to change to work in another industry. There is no place where he can get help when he is in trouble. However, he has to ignore these problems, because he needs money to support his family<sup>17</sup>.

For a Karenni migrant worker, they have to face a lot of difficulties to be able to work in other countries and when they are working in other countries. The difficulties include, a dangerous journey, difficulty in finding work, lack of papers, poor working conditions, poor health and security and other negative impacts on female workers.

### *Dangerous Journey*

Youth are leaving Karenni State, daily, to seek better jobs in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand as well as neighboring states like Shan State, Kachin State and Rangun division. Mostly, Karenni youth migrate to Thailand, because it is very close to Karenni state and it is easier to go there. They migrate to Thailand illegally, so it costs less money to be able to work there. Malaysia is the second country Karenni youth go to most. It is cheaper than other countries like Singapore or Dubai. Most young people always choose the cheaper places when they migrate to other countries.

There are two ways that Karenni youth can come to Thailand illegally; either through Mae Hong Song or Mae Sariang. It is not easy to come to Thailand. They can be arrested, tortured, raped or imprisoned by the Thai police. But they risk their lives to arrive to Thailand. They migrate to Thailand with agents. They have to give agents at least 8,000 baht (about 267 USD).



*A Karenni worker who works in juice factory, Malaysia (photo by Kory)*

17) Interview # 6 with a Karenni youth who is now working in Malaysia. On file with author.

Everything is in the agents' hands as they are coming to Thailand illegally. A Karenni worker who is working in Chaing Mai explained his experience when he came to Thailand:

*"Nyarmo and I came here together by an agent. We had to give him 8,000 baht from each of us. We arrived here safely. He knows how to avoid the Thai police gates so we faced no problems on the road. He is a good agent<sup>18</sup>."*

### *Difficulty in Finding Work*

Even once the migrants have arrived in Thailand, it is hard for them to find a job, especially for those who don't have contacts before they came to Thailand. They have to work as odd job workers. They don't have permanent jobs. For people who have relatives there, it is easier to get a good job. A migrant worker in Chiang Mai explained how hard it was for him to get a permanent job in Thailand:

*"When I arrived here, I didn't have a permanent job. I had to go everywhere where I can work to make money. Sometimes I had to be a mason, a painter, a grass cutter, a porter or a planter<sup>19</sup>."*

### *Lack of Papers*

For people who live illegally and don't hold any documents such as a work permit issued by the Thai government, they can't earn the same wage as other workers who have documents as or Thai citizens, as explained by a migrant worker who is working in Chiang Mai:

I am working in the construction area. I earn at least 150 baht per a day. I don't have a work permit, so I earn less than other people. It is also hard for me to change and get a new job, because most of the employers don't want to appoint a worker who does have a work permit<sup>20</sup>.

They also don't have any insurance from their employers without a work permit. According to the Thai government, there are more than 3 million migrant workers nationwide. Around 80 percent of the 3 million are Burmese migrant workers<sup>21</sup>. Most of them don't have any documents. When the Thai government issues work permits, though some of Karenni workers apply, they don't always get them. They can not apply for them by themselves. They have to pay money to their bosses so that their bosses can apply for them, because they need an assurance person or their bosses' signatures. But some bosses are exploiting their workers over this issue, as described by a 21 years old Karenni worker, in Chaing Mai, Thailand:

*"I am working here nearly a year, but I didn't get work permit yet. I gave money to my boss two*

---

18) Interview # 5

19) Interview # 5

20) Interview # 4 with a Karenni construction migrant worker in Chaing Mai, Thailand. On file with author.

21) <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/thailand/091009/analysis-thailand-fear-illegal-immigrants-parallels-america> and <http://khitpyaing.org/index.php?route=detail&id=374>

times. For the first time, I gave him 4000 baht and 6000 baht for the second time. I don't know why I didn't get it yet. I think, instead of doing work permit for me, he is misusing my money. I don't dare to ask him about it<sup>22</sup>."

The people who have a work permit are more secure than people who don't have documents. They can travel freely in the limited areas defined for them. They can live more securely. They can access healthcare provided by that area cheaply. However, there are still some problems for them and that work permit cannot fix.

A female migrant worker who has been working in Chiang Mai, Thailand for more than three years described her situation with a work permit:

"When I have work permit, I feel like it is more secure for me. I don't need to be afraid of Thai police and I don't even need to give them money when I meet with them on the road, because I can show them my work permit. I can have a medical check in the clinic in my area without costing a lot of money. It is one of the benefits of having a work permit. But I can only travel in the area where I can use my work permit. I am still afraid when I go to the city. I can not drive amotorcycle and there is no insurance for me if the accident occurred. Two months ago, one of my friends died in a motorcycle accident. But she did not get compensation although her relatives tried to ask for that<sup>23</sup>."

### *Working Conditions*

For Karenni youth, working in other countries is not easy. They have to do work that Malaysian and Thailand citizens don't want to do. They have to do every kind of work; dangerous, dirty and demeaning jobs. They don't have enough free time; moreover they are forced to work overtime without payment. If they are not working overtime for the industries, the managers pay their salaries late by ten days. They are treated badly in the job as well as by the boss, as expressed by a Karenni worker in Malaysia:

"I was working in the enamel production industry. I had to work 12 hours a day with 30 ringgits pay. We can only take a rest one day a week by turns, because the company runs 24 hours. We Karenni workers asked the company to allow us to rest on Sundays or the payment must be more if we worked on Sundays, but they denied our request. After two months, I ran to other factories without bringing my passport with me. The agent kept it, so, I became an illegal worker in Malaysia. The next job was worse than the first job. I had to work 14 hours a day. They gave us 30 minutes for lunch. Without holding any documents, local people treat us very badly and they pay

---

22) Interview # 1

23) Interview # 2 with a karenni house maid migrant worker in Chaing Mai, Thailand. On file with author.



*our wages seven days late, because they are afraid of us that we would run away. They force us to work overtime. If we don't work overtime, the boss pays us later than 10 days<sup>24</sup>."*



*MaeHae, where migrant workers live in Thailand (photo by Khon Poe Hlone)*

## *Health*

It is a problem when migrant workers get sick. For those who hold passports, they have to pay all the cost by themselves. Even if they have a contract with the company, the company does not take all the responsibility. A Karenni worker explained the problems he had to face when he was sick in Malaysia:

*"I was sick when I was working in Malaysia. It was malaria. I was in the hospital for a week and it cost 200 ringgits. I had to pay half and the company paid the other half for me. Then I was sick again, but this time I had to go back to Myanmar, because Malaysian government doesn't allow migrant workers who have malaria and they are afraid of malaria spreading<sup>25</sup>."*

For people who work illegally, they cannot go the hospital and have no access to healthcare, because they don't have any documents. They don't have health guarantee when working abroad, as stated by Kory in Malaysia:

---

24) Interview # 6

25) Interview # 11



*"I don't hold any passport right now, the agent kept it since I ran from him. I have no access to health. I don't dare to go to clinic, because they will figure out that I am living illegally. It can cause me problems<sup>26</sup>."*

## *Security*

As a migrant worker, dealing with the police is the most dangerous situation for them to face. Both Thai and Malaysian police always ask for money when they arrest them. Some Karenni workers are imprisoned and tortured. Some are sent back to their home county when they cannot pay money to the police.

As a Karenni migrant worker who fled to work in another industry explained, life is very hard for him when traveling to work without holding any documents:

*"Sometimes, police check us on the way to work and ask for money. If we have no money, they take our hand phone. If they don't get anything from us, then we must go to jail. If we are arrested and sent to jail, we will be punished by hitting our heels with a cane<sup>27</sup>."*

Being arrested is not unusual for Karenni migrant workers in Thailand. According to a Karenni female migrant worker in Chiang Mai:

*"I have been arrested twice. The police asked for my money, but I could not pay the amount that they asked for. So I was sent to lock-up. Finally, my cousin came and brought me back<sup>28</sup>."*

Karenni migrant workers who live illegally have to be very careful wherever they go and even on their way to work. They don't have freedom of movement in their daily lives. They always have to pay police money when they are arrested on the way to the job or home. A Karenni migrant worker who just arrived to work in Chiang Mai for a couple months explained how they have to deal with the security:

*"I am working in the construction site. Thai police are always watching us in the way we come from home to our job. If they want money, they come and check us. When they figure out we are migrant workers, they ask for money. Sometimes, they come to our work site, especially at lunch time. We have to run away from them, sometimes we are arrested by them. In the night time, we don't dare to sleep in the small houses built by our boss. We have to go and sleep in another place and come back in the morning, because we are afraid of them<sup>29</sup>."*

---

26) Interview # 6

27) Interview # 6

28) Interview # 2

29) Interview # 3

## *Female Migrant Workers*

For Karenni girls, it is not suitable to go and work abroad. Most of Karenni workers don't have a chance to hold and keep their passport by themselves. The manager from the industry keeps it for them, so they have to do what the manager says. Moreover, both girls and boys from different countries have to stay in the small and narrow room provided by the company. It is not secure for a girl to live in such kind of a small room. As long as they are living and staying in a small and narrow room, most youth's moralities become shattered. Most Karenni girls go abroad and get boyfriends a few weeks later. Their boyfriends are Burmese, Karen or other country's citizens. If they have a boyfriend and live together with him, they may get pregnant and then they have to come back home, because the company will not allow them to work anymore. In addition, mostly their boyfriends do not take responsibility for them, so they are censured and made to feel inferior when they return to the community. A Burmese worker who had been working in a steel factory in Malaysia for two years said:

*"My husband is working in Malaysia so I wanted to follow him. He said, if possible, you should not come here, because it is not a secure place for a female to live. If you don't have chance to hold your passport and if the company keeps it and then you have to go, stay, and work as they said. As a result most girls' moralities become shattered. So my husband said, female workers should not go there if they get work permit or work invitation letter from industries<sup>30</sup>."*

Overall, even though working in other countries is dangerous for Karenni youth, they still prefer to work there than Karenni state. They can still make more money than in Karenni state and can earn sufficient living abroad. Having a job everyday is another fact that they enjoy working abroad and it can make their lives meaningful. They all want to go back when Karenni state is peaceful and they have jobs to earn their living. No one wants to leave their community, but they have to leave, because they need to make money for themselves and beloved families. They have to face a harsh life in other countries, they have to work hard jobs, they have to stay in slum areas, they have to flee from police, and they have to stand it when their bosses scold or beat them, but they ignore it for the money.

## **Impacts to Migrant Workers' Families and Communities**

Parents are the key persons for their children when their children go and work abroad. Young people have to ask their parents to go and work abroad. They are so keen to work abroad to be able to solve their families' livelihood crisis. So their parents have to send them. According to a Karenni migrant worker in Malaysia:

*"In fact, I don't want to leave my community, but I must. I would like to help my Karenni people by educating them so that we can develop the Karenni community. Unfortunately, my parents asked me to go to Malaysia to make money, because my family has too many debts and they*

---

30) [http://www.news-eleven.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3557:2010-06-26-04-24-49&catid=42:2009-11-10-07-36-59&Itemid=112](http://www.news-eleven.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3557:2010-06-26-04-24-49&catid=42:2009-11-10-07-36-59&Itemid=112)

*could not afford to pay it back. I first thought to work and make money in Burma, but working in Burma doesn't earn a big wage and wouldn't recover the debts we have. So I decided to migrate to Malaysia<sup>31</sup>. “*

To send their children to work overseas, most parents sell their land, animals and their property and borrow a lot of money with a high rate of interest. But some of them are lied to or exploited to by the agents even before going abroad. In these cases, their children do not have chance to work overseas and do not get back the money they already gave to the agents. This results in the families having to work harder than before, because they have to pay back their loan plus interest that they borrowed for their children. One of interviewees in Deemowso Township explained:

*“I gave 300,000 kyat to an agent named Beyarhtoo, because my son wanted to go and work in Malaysia. He said by going with his agency, it cost less than other agents. So I tried to make money for the cost and gave it to him. Finally he was fleeing with a lot of money. Like my son, he also lied to many youth from Laymine village, DawSiEi village, Daetawin village and Lawsai village and took away all of the money. I would kill him if I saw him in someplace. Now I need to pay back my debt for two more months<sup>32</sup>.”*

There are some youth who can make money for their families by working in other countries. There are also some youth who cannot send money for their families. They don't get a good job, so they cannot make a lot of money for themselves as well as for their families. It is no problem for the people who have a good job and get an adequate salary. But there are many problems for those who don't get good jobs, especially for their families in the home town. They have no more land to use to earn their livelihood. In addition, they have to pay back the money that they borrowed for their children's migration.

Honestly, they thought their family livelihood problems would be solved by sending their children to make money abroad. Moreover, they thought they could probably buy new and better land when their children sent them money. Further more, they hoped to get capital money from their children to do a small business within the township, in order to get a higher and a better living standard. But when things didn't happen as expected, they have to struggle even harder to survive.

It is really difficult for parents who have to pay back their loans. They took out loans with a high interest rate so they cannot pay back both capital and interest in time. As they are farmers, they don't have any other jobs which they can do to make extra money. They can pay back their debts by working for the money lender if the money lender is good and understands the situation of their people. But if they face the money lender who just looks out for their own interest, and has no sympathy for local people, the money lender takes advantage of the weakness of the local people and confiscates their lands and property.

It is for a very good purpose that young people go and work abroad. But because of inconve-

---

31) Interview # 6

32) Interview # 8 with a villager from Lawsai village in Deemowso Township. On file with author.

nient jobs as well as bad situation for their family, there are many negative effects for their family living in Deemowso Township. When their children cannot send back money, the families have to lose their property and struggle for their lives even more than before. It is one of the impacts of emigration of Karenni youth for their families.

## Conclusion

A famous proverb says, “Youth are the future leaders”; but for the youth in Deemowso Township, their minds and ideas are closed by the current government. To become a good leader in a community, they need to be creative. To become a creative person, they need a job with a purpose. In the current situation, most youth don’t have jobs, so they become aimless persons. Moreover, lack of knowledge and experience combined with oppression by the military government greatly limits their opportunities to develop, which only makes their situation worse. They lack ambition and motivation because they have lost heart. Their easy going attitude prevents them from contributing anything useful to the community. They lose their confidence; they have no courage to do something within the community and make the right decision for their future lives. They feel like they are worthless for themselves as well as for their community.

Going abroad in itself is not a bad thing for youth in Deemowso. It is also an honor for them that they go there and make money for themselves as well as for their family. But they are exploited by local businessmen even before going abroad. In addition, they are struggling very hard in the other countries and facing multiple problems. They are exploited by their employers and forced to work jobs that the other countries’ citizens don’t want to do. In addition, they are not earning what they should earn. It is degrading for them.

When they don’t get good jobs, it creates problems, not only for themselves, but also for their families who are left behind in the township. To be able to send their children to work abroad costs a lot for families. They have to borrow it from somewhere or sell their property to get that amount of money. When their children cannot send back money, they lose all of their property and end up struggling harder than before. It is really difficult for them and becomes a vicious cycle.

Overall, the government and its officers are responsible for the well being of the local community. They are exploiting the natural resources in Karenni state every day. But they fail to provide basic needs for the community. They don’t find a way to solve the current livelihood problems for the community. They ignore the things that happen in the community, such as lack of job opportunities and insufficient income. Moreover, the government officers take advantage of young people who want to go abroad. In fact, they should help them in the case that young people want to solve their livelihood problems by themselves. The government and its officers should not act like that. It is a shame.

If the livelihood problem is solved, the young people in Deemowso Township will not leave their community anymore. They will stay in the community and do good things for the community in order to achieve a peaceful, united and developed community. With youth, the community can carry out social occasions, develop the community, participate in religious festivals and celebrate the rich culture of the Karenni people. In addition, they can achieve the goals that they



want to preserve their own literature, customs, traditional clothes, instruments and beliefs.

For the Karenni local people in Deemowso Township, they all are fed up with living in poverty and the unstable political situation, including civil war. They really want to escape from living like that. It is their big hope that to live in a peaceful community and have a job with adequate income, in order to earn their living sufficiently.

## Recommendations

### *To the Current Government (SPDC)*

- » Stop fighting ethnic armed revolution groups and end the conflicts and restore peace and stability to the state
- » Provide basic needs for the community such as education, health and transportation
- » Solve the current livelihood problems by creating vocational trainings and job opportunities for local youth
- » Stop ignoring ethnic people and give equal rights to them
- » Stop corruption in the government departments
- » Support farmers by addressing their problems with technology and information.
- » Support farmers by creating good supply markets for their products
- » Provide support for citizens living in other countries, especially migrant workers who are treated unfairly
- » Support youth and provide opportunities for youth to become creative persons
- » Reduce restrictions and encourage NGOs to conduct development projects for local people

### *To the Ethnic Cease Fire Armed and Revolution Groups*

- » Negotiate with the SPDC for a moratorium to end the conflicts and work toward building a peaceful community
- » Stop demanding taxes from local people
- » Provide education and other support as much as possible for local people

### *To the Local Community's Leaders and Families*

- » Lead young people by setting a good example and encourage young people to contribute their skills to the development of local community instead of working overseas

### *To the NGOs*

- » Help the local people by providing vocational skill trainings in solving their livelihood problems
- » Provide the basic needs for the community such as education, healthcare and housing
- » Try to form a new partnership with the SPDC to solve local community problems

### *To the Youth*

- » Research and understand the work and living conditions for migrant workers in other countries before going to work there (look before you leap)
- » Be brave and demand your basic human rights from the government
- » Be an ideal person for the community and use your ability for your community



# The Causes and Effects of Displacement in Pasaung and Shadaw Townships in Karenni State

by Lae Moo

## Introduction

Displacement is very common in Karenni, Shan, Karen, and Mon states as well as Teasserim division of Eastern Burma. The displacement in Karenni state has occurred for the past few decades, but most of the people there don't know the reason for displacement or the military abuses against them. Nowadays, the Pasaung and Shadaw townships are facing more forced displacement than other townships in Karenni state.

People living in Shadaw and Pasaung townships have suffered displacement from the State Peace and Development council (SPDC), the ruling the government in Burma. In addition, the armed conflict between Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the SPDC in Karenni state has been the most intense in the Shadaw and Pasaung townships for a long period of time. The forced displacement of villagers from those townships by the SPDC is increasing. The SPDC continues to increase its military camps and military operations in these townships, through launching offensives (attacks) on ethnic armed forces. The military implements the criminal four cuts policy and forced relocation of villagers which results in loss of land and homes (property) and human right abuses. All of these are directly ordered by the SPDC and has resulted in over 27,987 villagers becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and countless more refugees who must flee to other countries. As a result, it has greatly affected the innocent villagers.

The displaced villagers are living in unstable conditions in the jungle without access to food, shelter or healthcare. They also lack security and any form of education for the children. The SPDC must take action to stop these abuses and take responsibility for actions against innocent villagers. Villagers in Shadaw and Pasaung townships are ordered to build military camps for the SPDC army due to Burmese army operations and military expansion of camps. Anyone who does not obey those orders will be tortured by the SPDC army. Afterward, people face forced relocation, land confiscation, forced labor, killings, rape, torture and arbitrary arrests and abuses by the

SPDC military.

The purpose of this report is to document the forced displacements in Shadaw and Pasaung townships. It also aims to document the military abuses on villagers and their suffering resulting from displacement caused by the SPDC regime. This report will proceed as follows: section one and two are summaries of the issues. Section three explains the reasons for the displacement in Pasaung and Shadaw townships which includes; military operations, increasing military camps, four cut policy, forced labor, forced relocation, killing, torture and arbitrary arrests. Section four will discuss the consequences of displacement on people in Pasaung and Shadaw townships.

This report is based on research conducted in two refugee camps and an area outside a camp along the Burma-Thai border. Interviews were conducted with 24 people including leaders, camp committee leaders, villagers from Shadaw and Pasaung townships who are IDPs, field staff who are working with IDPs in Shadaw and Pasaung townships, Karenni Social Welfare and Development Center (KSWDC) organization and defectors.

## Background

Karenni state, the smallest state in Burma, is located in eastern Burma, bordered on the east by Thailand and the province of Mae Hong Son, on the north by Shan State and on the South by Karen state. The capital of Karenni state is Loikaw. The state is divided into four townships: Bawlakehe, Kantharawaddy, Kyebogyi and Moby. These are further divided into seven townships: Loikaw, Shadaw, Demawso, Pruso, Bawlakeh, Pasaung and Meh Set. There are many different kinds of ethnic people living in Karenni state. The three main groups are; Kayah, Kayan (Padaung) and Paku. Other ethnic groups include; Manu, Manaw, Yinbaw, Yindalah, Khakoe and Khabar and also Shan and Pa-O ethnicities. Each ethnic group has their own language, customs, and belief system. There are Animists, Buddhists and Christians who include Baptists and Roman Catholics.

Most People in Karenni state rely on natural resources for their livelihood, including hunting fishing and farming. Most people in Pasuang and Shadaw townships are living in the mountain areas, but some are living in low areas. In our forefather's time, people living in Pasaung and Shadaw townships could practice their own culture and tradition, peacefully. They were free to go wherever they wanted around the country and people did not need to worry about their livelihood. Their main foods came from their hillside cultivation, but people could also earn money from hunting, fishing and the natural resources. In addition, parents could send their children to school with the money they earned.

Villagers' lives were very peaceful until the armed conflict between the SPDC and the KNPP began. Now, due to the armed conflict, people are losing their land, livelihoods and rights while the SPDC orders the people to relocate to new relocation sites. They do not give the people enough time to relocate and people have to leave their property behind in their old villages.

People don't want to leave their villages but the armed conflict forces people to leave their homes. The armed conflict also causes people to become poor from living under the oppression of the military. People who live along the border areas such as the Shan-Karenni and the Karenni-Karen borders have suffered the most human rights abuses. If the battles occur in those areas the

SPDC soldiers come and create problems for the villagers. If they are suspicious about someone they will often arrest, torture and sometimes even kill them. Thus, the armed conflict has made people the victims of war and displacement. Although, the SPDC regime signed the (UDHR) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they continue to violate the following UDHR articles; 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 19, 23, 25, 26<sup>1</sup> in Burma. Additionally, since 1990, the SPDC regime has increased its military camps in Passuang and Shadaw townships and launched attacks on KNPP with several human rights violations occurring in those two townships, resulting in the forced displacement of villagers.

After 1995, the ceasefire was broken between the SPDC and KNPP, the SPDC ordered people in Pasuang and Shadaw townships to relocate and move frequently. Many people had to flee to refugee camps in Thailand. The SPDC forced the relocation of all villages in Shadaw after the ceasefire was broken. The purpose of this action was to undermine support for the armed opposition groups by cutting their access to supplies and information from villagers.

The SPDC army has been accused of massive human rights violations in this region. It has been alleged that villagers live under the constant threat of arbitrary arrest, execution, land confiscation without compensation, slave labor for the army, and women are threatened with rape. Several waves of forced relocations, by the army, have taken place in Shadaw and Pasaung townships.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, people face a lack of food, access to medical services and education. These are the impacts from the forced displacement occurring in Shadaw and Pasaung townships.

## The Causes of Displacement

The displacements in Shadaw and Pasaung townships have been occurring since Burma got independence from the British, but most of the people do not know that the displacements began during that time. Afterward, the political crisis in Burma caused more people in Karenni state to become displaced. The main causes of displacement in Shadaw and Pasaung resulted from the military operations, expanding military camps, and the armed conflict between SPDC and KNPP. The SPDC continues to practice the four cut operation policy in these townships. In addition, forced relocation, forced labor, torture and arbitrary killing and rape have caused more displacements as well.

### *Increase in Number of Military Camps*

After signing ceasefire agreements with most of Burma's ethnic groups, the SPDC has increased military camps in border areas to carry out attacks against the remaining few armed opposition groups and to eliminate armed groups based along the border. SPDC military campaigns also aim at controlling the territory where infrastructural development projects (dams, roads, bridges) are planned. The SPDC has been systematically increasing military camps in Pasaung and Shadaw district since 1990. After the ceasefire agreement was broken between the SPDC and KNPP in 1995, the SPDC continued to expand its military camps in Passung and Shadaw.

1) <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a1>

2) ( <http://www.tbcc.org/resources/resources.htm#reports>..... <http://www.burmaissues.org/En/Igoppression.html>)

Before the ceasefire was broken, there were three military camps in Pasaung and only one in Shadaw. The SPDC increased new military camps in Bwaylaykoh, located on the Karen – Karenni state border. One camp is in Bwardoh and the other two are in Hteelaykee. The Hteelaykee military camps are controlled by the SDPC and (KNPLF) Karenni National People League Front. They change their Light Infantry Battalion every six months or once year. In the current situation, the LIB (337) battalion has taken responsibility in Pasaung township and the LIB (337) battalion is from Bawlakae township. According to the researcher, there are more than 12 military camps currently in Pasaung township. In the past, there was one military camp in Shadaw, but nowadays, the SPDC expanded by two more military camps in Shadaw. One is located south of Shadaw in Tar Ta Maw, near the Salaween River. The other one is located north of Shadaw in Daw Ta Na village and the camp is called Htin Yu Taung. These two military camps are the main camps in Shadaw.

The more the SPDC increased military camps in Pasaung and Shadaw township the more they have caused innocent villagers to be displaced, because human rights violations always occur everywhere the military establishes their bases. One interviewee said:

*"The military occupied the land from villagers when they built new military camp. Mostly, Kayah village are on the hill therefore which is a good strategic location for the military. Villagers are forced to dig bunkers and tunnels, build fences for military camp. In July 2007 the army came in to the village and occupied the villagers' farm land and set up their outpost camp on villager farm."*<sup>3</sup>

Villagers cannot refuse the military orders, because if they refuse, the SPDC soldiers will cause problems for the villagers. Living near the military camp is very difficult for the villagers, because they cannot go to their farms freely and the military also makes the villagers prepare and bring their own food, such as vegetables and rice, to the soldiers. The military does not allow people to cultivate far from the village, which means villagers are faced with further hardships as cultivation is very difficult because the land near the villages has poor soil:

*"The Burmese Soldiers didn't allow our villager to do cultivation far from village so we faced with food shortage. We couldn't grow paddy very well because the fertilizer near the village is not good and we haven't had changed to do cultivation far from village."*<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the military expanding their camps in Pasaung and Shadaw townships, people have been prevented from traveling outside of their village to their plantations. Therefore, people's income and amount of food they can produce is very limited. People must ask permission from the military to go outside to tend to their plantations. This means villagers have to obtain a travel document from the military and must pay a fee set by the soldiers. The villagers have to return on time and if they are late, they are punished with fines or by being tortured by the soldiers.

The people in Pusanng and Shadaw townships have been living under oppression from the SPDC regime for a long time. People cannot bear to live under the oppression, therefore people

3) Interview#1, Member in IDPs committee, Thai-Burma border, on file with author

4) Interview # 5, with a villager from Ti Ree Dar village in Shadaw, Karenni state, on file with author

are trying to escape from these hardships. Meanwhile, increased military camps inside villages and near the villages are creating more displaced people in Pasaung and Shadaw Townships. The expansion of military camps in Pasaung and Shadaw are one of the tactics used to displace people by the SPDC military.

### *Military Operations*

In Karenni state the SPDC began wide operations in 1995, after the ceasefire agreement was broken between the SPDC and KNPP. At this time, Pasaung and Shadaw townships became the most targeted areas for military operations, because these areas are controlled by the armed opposition groups. The military operations in Pasaung and Shadaw townships have many goals in their effort to control territories, such as clearing armed opposition groups along the border, pressuring the armed opposition groups to sign a ceasefire with the SPDC regime and to cutting the villagers' and KNPP's access to information, food and supplies.



*A victim of landmine. Photo by KnHD*

There are many small villages in Pasaung and Shadaw townships and many people in these villages have been suffering human right abuses during the military operations. The military operations are particularly terrible in Pasaung and Shadaw townships, because they destroy people's property, force villagers to work as porters and guides, inflict sexual harassment on women, demand food and money from the villagers, kill people and their livestock, burn their houses and put landmines around the villages. Many people died and were injured by the landmine explosions and in those areas, if people are slow to run away; they are arrested, tortured, killed, raped and sent to Loikaw prison. One of interviewees shared that:

*"The Burmese armies entered village and destroyed our village many jungle. When we are caught by Burmese soldiers, we are forced to be a porter. Also they beat, tortured and outrage our villagers. And the soldiers also put landmine in village if they didn't see villager in village."*

During military operations, people are frightened to go and work in their fields, because if the SPDC soldiers see them they will be arrested, questioned, tortured, forced to porter and accused of being connected with armed opposition groups. In addition, if they see people on their way they will arrest them or force them to be porters for them. Moreover, young women are frightened to go outside, if the soldiers see them they will be in danger, because the SPDC soldiers can rape them and nobody can claim it as a case, even if the village headmen reports the case to the SPDC captain. People have to report armed opposition group news to the SPDC troops as well. Moreover, people cannot go outside freely during the night time, and if people don't understand Burmese language they are beaten by the soldiers.

For these reasons, the military operations force more innocent villagers to be displaced to

the forest or to Thailand, where they live as refugees. People can't complain if they don't like the soldiers' behaviors':

*"We always need to follow the Burmese Soldiers orders if we didn't obey their orders they arrested us, torture and beat us and ask for money. We couldn't complain whatever they did on us and no one can take action on them."*<sup>5</sup>

People in these areas have to run away very often when the military operations are underway. If people know Burmese soldiers are coming, they run and hide in the forest to avoid danger and stay away from the SPDC troops. People usually prepare extra food for when they must hide in the jungle, if people have two pots and two blankets they put one in their village and one in a hiding place. It means they must always be on guard for military operations, and prepare hiding places and supplies ahead of time. It is not easy to avoid military operations because if soldiers see people hiding they will make trouble for them and may even shoot them. Some villagers died from being shot by soldiers while hiding. According to the interviewees:

Burmese soldiers killed Nga Rhe, Shaw Reh and Saw Sar Roo when they were trying to hide in the jungle. People are losing their rights, they cannot do hunting at night time because if the Burmese see them they get tortured and people must hide in forest. For these reasons, military operations in Pasaung and Shadaw townships forced people to be displaced and cause people much trouble.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Four Cuts Policy*

One of the most effective tactics of the SPDC for controlling populations involves a counter-insurgency strategy known as the 'Four Cuts Policy'- food, finance, information and recruitment. The aim of the Four Cuts strategy is to sever links between the civilian population and the forces in opposition to the central government. Forcible relocation of people acts as an effective method of breaking these links and enables the SPDC to fragment communities in order to consolidate its control. The policy is aimed at turning 'black' rebel-held areas into 'brown' (contested or free-fire) zones, and thereafter into 'white' zones that are securely controlled by government forces. The Burmese military regime has used this strategy since the mid 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

The SPDC four cuts policy has forced more and more people to be displaced from their homes and become internally displaced people (IDPs). The Burmese army always suspects that the IDPs are linked with the KNPP and provides information to the rebel groups. the Four Cuts Policy is a tactic for attacking local people who support the KNPP. Therefore, the Four Cuts Policy is another way for people to be displaced to the forest or to Thailand to live as refugees.

Villagers' are facing a lot of problems, because the SPDC military junta systematically abuses human rights, especially when they carry out the Four Cuts Policy and practices that continue

---

5) Interview 5.

6) Interview# 5,16,19,12

7) <http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo019/fmo019-3.htm>



today. The four cut policy displaces people because it forces people to run away and hide in the jungle. Since the SPDC military started practicing its Four Cuts Policy, the Pasaung Township has become a “black area”, a black area is a free fire zone (the territory controlled by armed opposition groups). When the SPDC recognized the Pasaung area as a black area, people had to flee to safer places. As a result of the Four Cuts Policy, people are losing their freedom of movement and it is hard to work for their livelihood. The Four Cuts Policy causes people to live in worry and fear of becoming displaced people. This is an awful policy for the innocent village in Pasaung and Shadaw townships.

The Four Cuts policy is terrible for the people in Burma and since the SPDC started it, the displacement inside the Burma has been increasing. The Four Cuts Policy also caused people to become increasingly poor. Naw O Ble, a mother living in Karenni refugee camp (2) told about her life when she lived at Lah Law Htee village in Pasaung said that:

*“I always fled to the forest to hide with my family to save our lives and when the military made the four cuts policy it made me very upset because I had difficulties feeding my children, we always ate potato, vegetable bamboo shoot with rice porridge, and It was not enough for us”<sup>8</sup>*

### *Military abuses*

Under the SPDC regime ruling in Burma, many human rights abuses continue to occur throughout the country. In the townships of Pasaung and Shadaw, where the research is focused, the SPDC military is causing many kinds of abuses, including forced labor, forced relocation, torture, arbitrary arrests, rape and killing. These abuses are described in more detail in the following section of this report.

### *Forced Labor*

Forced labor in Pasaung and Shadaw townships has occurred since the SPDC regime took power in Burma and continues today. Nowadays, villagers in Pasaung and Shadaw townships have become one of most popular sources of forced labor in Karenni state, especially people living in rural areas. The military use villagers in those areas as a tool for their military purposes. The military use many kinds of forced labor in Pasaung and Shadaw townships, including; portering, building military camps, making fences, digging trenches, guides and human shields for military operations, and transporting water for soldiers. All these kinds of forced labor are happening in Pasaung and Shadaw. In Shadaw township; Daw Naw Kalu, Daw Ta Ku, Lyar Du Kall, Lae Du ka Sha, Nan Aung Lay, Kkar Leh and Kyuelae villagers have suffered forced labor. Moreover, the villages in Pasaung township such as Gaylo, Kabwaydoh, Kabwaypoe, Buego, Kwarkee, Yawbul and Bwardoh are facing the same situation as Shadaw.

It is difficult for forced laborers in these two townships to follow the military orders and the SPDC says there is no forced labor in Burma; we only have “voluntary labor”. When villagers

---

8) Interview 16

have to porter for the military, they must obey the order. The villagers also have to follow the soldiers carrying heavy military equipment, rations and ammunition. The villagers have to go very far from their village when they are portering, and the military does not provide food for the forced laborers. Sometimes, a villager has to porter for the military for a day, a week, and sometimes even for a whole month and they do not receive any medicine from the soldiers while portering. Some SPDC soldiers are so cruel that they kill a porter who is too sick or has no more energy to carry the materials. Being a porter for the SPDC military is made even worse, because their lives are at risk if an ambush or a battle occurs with armed opposition groups while moving through the jungle. There is no security for the villagers and sometimes they get tortured while working as porters, even women are forced to work as porters. A villager who used to be a porter many times, from Shadaw village said:

*"I had to porter for 30 days, sometime we had to porter 4 or 5 days. It really worse being a porter for the Burmese solder because we had to carry things more than we can carry. I really disappointed because we had to carry ration for them but they did not treat us as a human. They ordered us to carry like an animal."*<sup>9</sup>

A woman told about her felling:

*"I had to run and hid when the Burmese armies come. If they caught us they asked us to be a porter even men or women. I once was caught and I had to work for one week as a porter. It is very hard being a porter for them because I am a woman I couldn't walk as fast as a man with carry a big thing."*<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, people have to build military camps without pay and during construction they also have to make fences for camps, dig trenches, and cut wood for the camp. The military orders one person per family to do this work. If people are unable to go, they must pay fines 2000-2500 Kyat. Even though villagers have to work hard for the military, they are not provided with food. Villagers have to bring their own food and tools to work in the military camps. Even women and children have to work building constructions, fences, digging trenches and cutting wood as well. A woman who lives in a relocation site discussed her feelings about working for the military in relocation sites:

*"They forced us to cut big trees such as 40 inch girth and 16 feet long. If people do not have equipments, they had to curry by themselves. Then, children have to go instead of their parents if parents are not home. The military did not give any fee for us."*<sup>11</sup>

People in Shadaw and Pasaung have to serve as guides for the military operations. When the Burmese soldiers come into the villages, they demand men to work as guides for them, because

---

9) Interview#9, a villager from Shadaw village Shadaw township, Karenni state, on file with author.

10) Interview # 20

11) Interview#6, a villager from Shadaw village Shadaw township, Karenni state, on file with author.

the Burmese soldiers are afraid of landmines and confronting armed opposite groups. For this reason, villagers have to create a new road for them. The SPDC do not want to deal with the KNPP armed forces, because fighting could happen while the villagers are guiding soldiers along the road. The Burmese soldiers torture villagers and do not give them any food:

*"I can speak Burmese language a little more than other villagers. The Burmese armies order me to guide way; I have no chance to refuse them back if I refuse the Burmese soldier will threaten me and torture me. At that time the LIB are 102 and 75"*<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the SPDC using villagers as forced labor, people leave their villages and hide in the forest, or move to safer places; all of which contributes to the ongoing displacement in Pasaung and Shadaw. Another consequence of forced labor is that people lose time to work for their livelihood. One of interviewee who is a widow said:

*"I had to carry stone to rebuilt car road for many times. For the reason that I couldn't care and fed my children very well and I cannot work alone to feed my 7 children and sent them to the school."*<sup>13</sup>

A 55 years old woman in forced relocation said that "We couldn't do our job very well because we have to work for Burmese military camp frequently."<sup>14</sup>

### *Forced Relocations*

When the SPDC created the Four Cuts Policy, they ordered civilians to move to relocation sites. People in Maw Chi area had to move to Pasaung township, to a place called Ywar Teit relocation site and people in Shadaw Township had to move to Shadaw relocation sites. The SPDC forced the relocation of about 96<sup>15</sup> village tracts in Shadaw after the ceasefire agreement broke between the SPDC and KNPP. A villager who lost his property because of forced relocation said:



A villager rebuild home in new relocation site.  
*Photo by KSWDC*

*"The SPDC ordered our villager to move from our village to news relocation site in Shadaw. They gave us three days to move but before those three days they order us to leave our village immediately. We couldn't bring our properties with us because we don't have times. We lost our hose,*

12) Interview#17

13) Interview#20, a villager from Mawchi, Pasaung township, Karenni state, on file with author.

14) Interview#5

15) Interview# 5,1,4,8,7

*farms and our traditional building. Most of our properties are left in our old village and our pig and chickens as well. And the Soldiers told us that if the other people asked you something, you must say that the rebel order us to work for them and took our pigs and chickens so we don't want to stay here anymore and we move to new relocation site."*<sup>16</sup>

People did not know the reason why they had to move to relocation sites. Then, they were given limited time to move from their village to the relocation site. Moreover, the military did not give any assistance, transportation or otherwise, for people to move to the relocation site. Thus, people could not carry their property with them and they had to walk from their village to the relocation site. That is why people have faced many problems with moving to the relocation sites. People do not want to move, because they love the way they are and where they belong, but they could not make any complaint to the military. The army orders that "If people did not move to the relocation site within the limited time they will be arrested, killed and their village are burned". An interviewee said:

*"The Burmese soldiers did not tell by saying, they do as they say by practically. They burnt our village during we were moving to Shadaw relocation site. Villages have been burnt for a week. Now we lost all our properties because of we have to move in new place. The Burmese army does not give any compensation to our villagers and they didn't feed us as well."*<sup>17</sup>

Many people from Shadaw Township fled to the Thai- Burma border in 1996, because the military regime forced people to move to relocation sites. People did not want to move to the relocation site, because they love their home land and they know that they would have to start over again when they arrive at the relocation site.

During military operations, people are forced to move to the relocation sites without any government support. No preparations are made for housing, school or clinics and only a small amount of rice is provided. The land in the relocation site is too small and the soil is unfertile for cultivation of food crops. If the villagers want to cultivate in other land, far from the relocation site, they must request permission to travel. If the travel request is approved, they must pay a fee of 500kyat per week. One woman from Shadaw relocation camp said:

*"The military gave us two and half kilograms of rice per a family for a month. The two and half kilogram of rice is just one day for our family to eat. There is nothing in new relocation site. We need to rebuild new house and our new farm and cultivation. I lost everything in my old village such as my farm, house, land, cows, chickens and pig"*<sup>18</sup>

The forced relocation has also caused people to lose their land and properties. Although the military provides a new place for relocation, there is nothing in the relocation area of interest to the people who must start over again. There is no peace in the relocation site and villages have to

---

16) Interview 5,6

17) Interview#6

18) Interview#5

exist under oppression by the military. It has caused people to flee to the forest or to their relatives in Thailand.

### *Torture, Arbitrary Arrests and Killings*

Torture, arrest and killing are the methods used by the military in Pasaung and Shadaw townships. People have been tortured and arbitrarily arrested by the SPDC since the armed conflict began. The SPDC also uses these abuses as a tactic to eliminate people who stay in armed conflict areas or “black areas”. The worst abuses mostly occur in black areas that are identified by the SPDC, where people are arrested without any reason, tortured and killed. These violations occur mostly during military operations when the soldiers see people coming and going to work in their fields on the hills or returning from hunting. When the SPDC soldiers see them, they arrest the villagers and accuse them of passing information to the armed opposition groups. In addition, if the villagers do not understand Burmese language the soldiers torture them. The innocent villagers are working in their fields to get their daily food and income. However, the SPDC violence on innocent villagers continues and nothing is done to stop this violation and no one can take action against the military. Villagers have to follow the SPDC orders and suffer the military abuses against them. Many villagers are tortured, arrested and killed in these two areas. Sometimes, the soldiers arrest people, torture them brutally, especially if they suspect the villagers have connections with the armed opposition.



*A villager killed by SPDC soldiers during military operation. Photo by KSWDC*

died, the SPDC soldiers released him. People from Shadaw village like to hunt traditionally but if the villagers meet SPDC soldiers in the forest, they are accused, threatened, tortured, and questioned.<sup>19</sup>

Villagers are losing freedom of movement because the military doesn't allow people to travel to their hill fields freely and villagers cannot go outside out of the village. If the SPDC soldiers see them, they will be tortured and killed as well. Many villagers have been killed without any reason

According to the research, on February 2010, when the Daw Mue Leh villagers came back from hunting, they were confronted by soldiers of the LIB 516 and the army Light Infantry Battalion 516 who arrested those four villagers. The Burmese soldiers accused them of connecting with armed opposition groups and questioned and tortured them. After that, they released three villagers but the soldier still detained one villager. His name is Meh Rhe and he is 21 years old. He was tortured more than his friends, because his name is similar to the another Meh Reh who is a commander in chief of KNPP armed opposition group. After torturing Meh Reh excruciatingly, he nearly

19) Interview# 5

in Pasaung and Shadaw townships.

One of villager said:

*"They arrested Nya Reh who live in Daw Ta Ma village and they asked me "do you know him?" and I replied that" yes, I know" after they said to me that don't tell anything and be quite. They killed him in Daw Ta Ma village. I have seen they arrested Nya Reh by my eyes. They torture him and cut him Longi after they tied him with his longi. Nya Reh has lost his mind and could not speak very well. After they torture him, they jab Nya Reh with knife and he fell down but he haven't died yet but they buried him. I saw everything what happen to Nya Reh because I went to Tiridar for taking ration."*<sup>20</sup>

## The Negative Effects of Displacement

The main effects of displacement are a lack of health care, lack of food, lack of education for the children and lack of security. These effects are described in more detail in the following section if this report

### *Living Conditions of Displaced People*

Nowadays, people in Pasaung and Shadaw townships are suffering the effects of displacement, which has caused big problems; people have become homeless, live in unstable conditions, lack health care, have no education for the children and lack security. People in these areas continue to face these effects and the SPDC doesn't provide any support to the villagers.

The human rights abuses in these two townships add to the people's problems and create their unstable living conditions. Human rights abuses as mentioned earlier create unstable living conditions for villagers, because they must live with constant worry and fear. Since the armed conflict between the KNPP and the SPDC, SPDC military camps have increased which has forced more people to move to relocation sites.

People living in forced relocation sites have to struggle to survive and do not receive any support from the military. They must start new cultivation at the relocation sites. There are no resources at the relocation site and people are not allowed to return to their former village to collect stored rice or their possessions. Only a few villagers are allowed to return to their village and collect rice to share with other families. However, once those supplies are finished, people face severe food shortages. In this case, the military orders all people at the relocation site to pool their rice, to share with other families in the camps. People living in relocation sites are ordered to provide free labor on military bases and road construction projects. These villagers have no time to find work and support their families. There are no schools, clinics, and homes in the relocation site, leaving people to provide all their basic needs by themselves. The places near the relocation site are not suitable for cultivation and the men are forced to porter, make fences, dig trenches, and serve as guides for the military. Sometimes women and children have to do the same work as

---

20) Interview#10, a villager from Daw Wel Raw village, Shadaw township, Karenni state, on file with author.



men. The people cannot earn an income for their families, because they are forced to spend most of their time serving the needs of the SPDC soldiers.

The people who hide in the jungle also face severe food shortages, because their fields and crops have been destroyed by SPDC soldiers and they must rely on collecting wild fruits and vegetables while hiding in the jungle to survive. Most people hide rice in the forest to eat when they are hiding from SPDC soldiers, but the amount is small and only lasts a short while. Some villagers go back to their village to get food when they can find nothing to eat in the forest, but it is dangerous because the SPDC soldiers plant landmines in their village. Some villagers were killed or injured by exploding landmines when returning to their village. In some areas, people clear a small space in the forest to plant vegetables and other crops while they remain hiding in the forest.

Some people have managed to flee to Shan State and Karen state where they can live temporarily. Some people have died of starvation while hiding, and they face constant threats to their security. If SPDC soldiers find them, they can be investigated, arrested or even killed. The villagers have managed to overcome these problems for many years, but the living conditions of displaced people is worsening and there are hardly any signs of change. The people who are hiding endure health problems as well, because there is no medic in the hiding places. Most people in hiding places get malaria, anemia, and skin diseases and some people die while hiding because they have no access to medicine or food. People in both relocation sites and hiding places cannot get food, health care and their children are losing their future.

### *Lack of Health Care*

The health care is very poor in relocation sites and temporary hiding places, as there is no clinic in those places. The forced relocation sites lack sanitation and clean water and the overcrowded living conditions and food shortages make life very difficult for the people living there. Forced labors make many people weak and susceptible to infectious diseases. The most common diseases are malaria, anemia, diarrhea, worms, yellow fever, skin diseases and acute respiratory infectious diseases. Mothers and children face the most serious health problems. If there is no clinic nearby, people are left without medical care, as security problems prevent them from traveling to the city. The health problems in hiding areas are even more severe, due to chronic food shortages and an almost total lack of medical care. However, the range of diseases suffered is similar to those at the relocation sites.

People cannot access medicine easily when they are sick. People do not have money to travel to find a cure for their diseases in Pasaung and Shadaw townships and the hospital is very far from villages' tracts. People do not receive any health care from the SPDC army. People received some



*A woman gives birth at relocation site  
whit mobile health worker group. Photo  
by KnHD*



A child suffering from a skin disease. Photo by KnHD

medicine from the mobile health workers such the Karenni Health Department (KnHD) and Back Pack Health Worker group. One interviewee said: "We have faced health problem the most when we were in relocation site.

There were many people from different villages and stay the same place therefore there are a lot of infection. People have died by disease and children got diarrhea. Two to three people die in a month. Some people got depression too."<sup>21</sup>

Nge Reh, a supervisor of KnHD who working with displaced people said, people are suffering more skin disease in the summer, because people do not have clean water. In rainy season, people get malaria and diarrhea and in the winter, people get acute respiratory infections diseases. Children under ten years old get acute respiratory infections disease more than other people. Most women and children suffer from deficiencies in vitamin (C) and vitamin B1. There is no clean water in relocation sites thus, when the people get skin disease, it is hard to cure it and it often leads to children getting secondary infections.

People cannot go outside of the camps to buy medicine; people have to receive permission from the SPDC soldiers first and if they do not get permission and go outside of the camp anyway, they will be tortured if they are caught.

People in hiding places lack access to health care except for occasional mobile health worker groups. A medic who cures people in the forest, said that people living at hiding places are suffering from malaria, diarrhea, fevers and skin diseases. If people in hiding places become ill, and do not have medicine some people die from malaria and other diseases. Naw O Bleh, a villager from Lah Law Htee said:

*"My husband passed away in jungle during hiding. He got malaria disease and died. We face a big problem while we run and hiding in rain season. We can't cook rice and we slept under the rain. Sometimes we got ill but we didn't have medicine to take. So many children got malaria disease but we can't help, because we do not know how to do it".<sup>22</sup>*

## *Lack of Food*

Lack of food is one of the main problems for the displaced people. As a result of human rights abuses, people living in the forest and relocation sites cannot work in their fields. One main reason for lack of food is that people living at forced relocation sites are not allowed to cultivate their

21) Interview#6,5,8

22) Interview#16 a villager from Lah Law Htee in Pasaung township, Karenni state, on file with author.

fields, which are often far from the relocation site. Furthermore, people cannot go outside the relocation sites to make income and get food to support their families. The SPDC only provides a small amount of rice for the people in relocation sites. The support is very little and insufficient to relieve the suffering of the villagers. Beh Reh, a villager in Daw Mu lae said “they showed us rice bags and told, and they took photo and then they said” you can go, they do not give rice bag to us. They are pretending as if they provide big rice bag to us.”<sup>23</sup>

People are not allowed to go back to their old villages to collect their stored rice. The SPDC soldiers also burnt up people’s rice stores, houses, and destroyed other properties in their former villages. Most people who have tried to do farming at the relocation site say the land in the relocation sites is not suitable for cultivation, due to poor soil conditions and no security. For these reasons, people living in relocation sites are suffering from food shortages. In addition, people have to work for the military when they need to be working in their paddy fields. If people resist or complain about the order, they will be tortured and forced to work more than other villagers in the military camps. For that reason, people have less time to work on their farm so they face food shortages. Moreover, the SPDC forces elderly people, women and children to work together. Some have to work for military camps; carrying water and cutting fire wood and building fences around the military camp. Although people do not have enough food for themselves, the military demands vegetables and fruits from the villagers for their soldiers. This is another reason why the people do not have enough to eat.

People in the hiding places also face a food crisis. Most villagers’ tracts in Pasaung and some village tracts in Shadaw townships are located in “black areas”. Villagers living in the black areas cannot do hillside cultivation very well, because they have to run and hide in the jungle frequently. Due to military operations, the SPDC soldiers destroy people’s farms, fields and plant landmines in people villages. When people come back to their villages, there is nothing to eat, most things are destroyed by the SPDC soldiers. In addition, people in the hiding places also lack enough food. People cannot go back to their village to take food because their villages are already burnt and landmines have been planted by SPDC soldiers. People are searching for food in the jungle to relieve their empty stomachs and sometimes get food poisoning. The result of people hiding for a long time in the jungle, is that they are not able to do their cultivation and farming, subsequently people face food shortages. Sometimes people are arrested or tortured by the SPDC soldiers when they try to get food from their village. One of the interviewees said:

“I had run and hidden in forest my whole life. I faced with food crisis and I fed my children rice soup for many weeks till I moved to Maw Chi Small Township. When we run we couldn’t carry a lot of food to eat in hiding place. It was not easy to struggle in the jungle. Especially, in raining season period.”<sup>24</sup>

## Lack of Education for Children

There are no schools for children living in the jungle and no access to education for the displaced children living in relocation sites. Children in hiding areas have never been to school,

---

23) Interview#10

24) Interview#20

because they have always had to run away with their parents when the SPDC soldiers come. Many villages do not have a school. Makeshift schools in the villages are built by villagers as a self help basic primary school. However, almost all children do not finish their education even to primary school level. The effect of displacement and military ruling in the country means that many children are denied their right to an education. People who live in Pasaung area have a very hard life, because they live under constant fear of the military. They must work hard just to survive, therefore parents cannot think about education for their children. With so much fear and anxiety, it is difficult to raise their children very well. Thus, children grow up to be uneducated and they have to take care of their younger brothers and sisters when their parents go to farm and have no opportunity to study.



Makeshift school at relocation site. Photo by KSWDC

There is a school which is near the relocation site where children can go to school if their parents can send them but most of these children do not have an opportunity to study, because their parents are poor farmers and do not have the means. Their parents cannot afford to pay school fees or to buy books for them. It is very expensive to study, because the parents have to pay for everything. Even though the military government built schools, there are not enough teachers and teaching materials for the students. Children are also expected to help their parents with work. When children's parents go to farm, children also go to the field and herd cows. Most of the children's parents at relocation sites have little education; those parents do not know to encourage their children to learn in town. One person interviewed said,

*"I never been to school, I go to field and herd cow every day. My parents told me nothing and did not push me to go to school."*<sup>25</sup>

Townships like Pasaung and Shadaw are very far from relocation sites. Most displaced people do not have their relatives in town, so parents do not want their children to go and attend state school in other townships. Some children in relocation sites have already finished primary school while they were staying in their former village but they cannot continue their further education, because parents do not have enough money to support their children and there is no school in relocation sites. One of interviewees said:

*"The reason that I fled to this refugee camp (2) was the Burmese soldier threaten us. And an*

25) Interview#11

*other reason was I have never been to school and I want my three children to learn their education here*"<sup>26</sup>.

Children in have no educational opportunities, due to security problems and they are always on the move. There are no teachers, schools or books. In some areas, parents have tried to encourage their children to study with formal teachers for a short time. However, children rarely have the chance to study.

### *Lack of Security*

Life for displaced people is difficult both in the relocation sites and in the hiding places. People have to live under fear because of the way the SPDC rules the country. Villagers in relocation sites are afraid of the violence and human rights abuses. People have to get permission from SPDC soldiers before they go anywhere. The passes are usually only valid for a day and some are one week. The villagers do not get much time to travel to their places to work. Moreover, security for the villagers outside of the relocation sites is very risky. Villagers who are seen outside the camps are vulnerable to capture, arrest, torture, and killing, even if they hold valid passes, as they are accused by SPDC troops of supporting rebel forces. Women are more vulnerable, and many cases of rape have been reported by women who have gone outside the camp to forage for vegetables or get water. When villagers go to their farm, SPDC soldiers check their bag on the way. If they see a person carrying rice, they suspect them of taking the rice to feed the rebel group so they took it away from the villager. Then, they go to villager's house and investigate the suspected villagers. One of the interviewee said:

*"I have felt no safety for me if I still live in relocation site because Burmese soldier and KNPLF were suspected on me that I contacted with Karenni Army and they came to my house and check my house. I also have experience that Burmese soldier said my friend supported rebel group after she was arrested by Burmese soldier".*<sup>27</sup>

People have lost their freedom of movement and can longer go hunting in relocation sites. The SPDC troops are threatening villagers and harassing young women when they come into villages. The SPDC troops do whatever they want, because no one can take any action against them. People who hide in the jungle also do not feel safe, because they have to live in the jungle quietly to avoid being found by the soldiers. If SPDC soldiers see villagers in hiding, they will shoot them. A woman, from Poe Bue Ko, who was shot by an SPDC soldier said:

*"While hiding in jungle the Burmese military saw us and shot gun to us and we have to run again. At that time, I was cooking rice near my children when I heard gun shoot I took my children and run with other villagers."*<sup>28</sup>

---

26) ". Interview # 13, villager from Gaw Baw Htar village, Pasaung township, Karenni state, on file with author

27) interview#6

28) interview 18



## Conclusion

The causes of displacement in Pasaung and Shadaw townships result from the political crisis, military abuses, and armed conflict in Karenni state. People in these two townships are suffering from human rights abuses and violence inflicted by the SPDC military. The increasing number of SPDC military camps, their ongoing military operations and their continued practice of the

Four Cuts military operation is causing more people in Pasaung and Shadaw Township to become displaced. Through these activities, the SPDC military continues to commit human rights violations including; forced relocation, forced labor, torture, killings, unjustified arrests and detainment, and rape. All of these abuses cause people to be displaced, losing their home and property, and forcing them into hiding in the forest or fleeing to Thailand to live as refugees.

Through the SPDC controlled media, the government portrays a false message to the people of Burma about how it is helping its' people and how the military is protecting the people, but in reality everything they say is opposite to the truth. The SPDC proudly pronounces its' motto which says: "the power of the military is the power of the country" while at the same time, they continue to commit serious human rights abuses against the people in Pasaung and Shadaw Townships that this report has documented. Ironically, the SPDC regime has signed the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) which is supposed to protect and guarantee human rights for all.

People in these areas continue to be forced to work for military camps whenever the military demands. People are forced to construct fences around the military camps, cut firewood for soldiers, cook and carry water and dig trenches. Moreover, villagers forced to be porters to carry ammunition, rations and supplies without receiving food, water, or being paid. They also have to spend a long time away from their families. Villagers forced to work as porters for the soldiers are often tortured and killed. People cannot work in their fields to produce food and earn income, because they are forced to spend their time and energy as forced laborers and for this reason, they suffer severe food shortages and no get income. People living in forced relocation sites and in hiding places within the black areas suffer food shortages, lack of health care, lack of security and lack of education for their children. They continue to lose their personal property due to ongoing military operations and forced relocation. The SPDC soldiers have confiscated people's properties, burnt their buildings, killed innocent villagers and planted landmines in the villages during their operations. The SPDC regime did not set up clinics or school for the children in forced relocation sites.

The SPDC must stop their human rights abuses and must give back all rights to the people. Moreover, they have to change their policy on education, health and business to help the people. They have to build schools and clinics, and provide good education and health care for the people. Finally, the SPDC must stop; forcing people to relocate, killing people, making arbitrary arrests, torturing and raping civilians, forcing people to do labor for them, and expanding military camps and military operations in Pasaung and Shadaw Township.



## Recommendations

### *To The State Peace and Development Council*

- » Stop human rights violations against villagers in Pasaung and Shadaw Townships.
- » Stop the violent actions of the army against people in relocation sites.
- » Stop military operations and expanding military camps in Pasaung and Shadaw townships.
- » Fully respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- » Immediately stop forced labor, forced relocation and respect human rights.
- » Accept the ILO request to investigate forced labor and human rights abuses in Burma.
- » Stop planting landmines in local lands.
- » Do not force people to work; make fences, dig tunnels, carry water and cut wood for military camps.
- » Build clinics and schools for the people who are displaced and living in relocation sites.
- » Take strong action on soldiers who commit human rights abuses against the local people.
- » Stop ignoring education in rural areas, and promote and implement education for children in rural areas.
- » Stop ignoring people's health care in relocation sites and set up clinics for the people.

### *To the NGOs*

- » Try to help people who suffer from health problems in Pasaung and Shadaw townships.
- » Strongly pressure the SPDC to respect the UDHR.
- » Research more about displacement in Pasaung and Shadaw and report that research to the United Nations
- » Provide self-sufficient vocational training programs for displaced people.
- » Encourage CBOs (Community Based Organizations) and humanitarian organization to increase support and work for displaced people.

### *To the UN*

- » Pressure the SPDC government to respect human dignity and stop human right violations.

- » Encourage neighboring countries of Burma to cooperate on changing the policy and system in Burma.

*To Thai Royal Government*

- » Accept displaced people from Burma with compassion and treat them by humanely.
- » Encourage the SPDC government to stop human right abuses.



EARTHRIGHTS INTERNATIONAL

EarthRights International (ERI) combines the power of law and the power of people in defense of human rights and the environment. We specialize in fact-finding, legal actions against perpetrators of earth rights abuses, training for grassroots and community leaders and advocacy campaigns. Through these strategies, ERI seeks to end earth rights abuses, provide real solutions for real people and promote and protect earth rights.

For more information about ERI, visit [www.earthrights.org](http://www.earthrights.org)

