



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Hatgyi Dam update and consultation concerns,  
December 2011 to May 2013**

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*This News Bulletin provides an update on the Hatgyi Dam project in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District between December 2011 and May 2013. During this period, the company in charge of the dam's construction held consultation meetings with the affected community to explain the benefits of the project, such as the provision of electricity generated by hydropower, but also explained that approximately 300 or 400 villagers in certain areas would need to be relocated due to the flooding that would occur during construction. This bulletin highlights local concerns related to the consultation process carried out by the company. In one meeting that had been facilitated by a local Border Guard Force commander, a presentation about the project was delivered by representatives from the dam construction company in Burmese, which could not be fully understood by the Karen-speaking attendees. One villager also stated that, if necessary, they would relocate downriver of dam in Hpa-an District, while the company designated a different area in Bago town for relocation. Villagers reported that they felt they could not oppose the KNU's approval of the project, while the BGF commander informed KHRG that the consent of the local community is necessary.<sup>1</sup>*

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In December 2012, Myo Myint Shwe, the individual in charge of the Hatgyi Dam construction project, requested that Meh Lah and Meh Say villagers living near the dam construction site attend a meeting in Myaing Gyi Ngu. Myo Myint Shwe is normally based in Yangon and his company was contracted by the Burma government to construct the Hatgyi Dam.

During the meeting, Myo Myint Shwe explained that, *"The dam [construction] is to be determined by the KNU headquarters, and we met with 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade [Hpa-an District KNU] leaders already, and they have agreed. If the dam is constructed, it will provide electricity and, moreover, your lives will be improved. Villagers from the areas which are flooded by the dam will receive compensation."* Villagers were also informed that those who lost their houses will be relocated to Bago town.<sup>2</sup>

In February 2013, a resident of Ma Eh village who lives near the dam site reported to KHRG that, *"If the Hatgyi Dam project is implemented, over 300 or 400 villagers in Ma Eh village will be*

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<sup>1</sup> This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information collected in Hpa-an and Hpapun districts from a community member and a KHRG staff member who have been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It summarises information from two incident reports received by KHRG in July 2013 and one short update received in June 2013. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

<sup>2</sup> This information was collected by a KHRG community member on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Hpapun District, and remains on file with KHRG as an unpublished Incident Report.

affected.” While the Burma government has proposed that the villagers be relocated to Bago, the Ma Eh resident explained that, if the dam is constructed, villagers from those areas would move downriver of the dam in Hpa-an District.<sup>3</sup>



These photos were taken on April 29<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Taw Kyah village, Htee Tha Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District by a community member trained by KHRG. They show the location along the Salween River where Hatgyi Dam would be constructed. The photo on the left shows a sign in Burmese that says “Taw Kyah”, which means “between the mountains” and is the name of one of the villages that would be flooded if the dam is constructed. According to the KHRG community member, a local resident wrote this in protest of the dam and the relocation of Taw Kyah village. The photo on the right shows the area below the sign where resident villagers gather at a boat yard each day. [Photos: KHRG]

On May 29<sup>th</sup> 2013, KHRG met with Tatmadaw-Border Guard Force (BGF)<sup>4</sup> Commander Saw Htaik Win, who is in-charge of the area around the Hatgyi Dam site. Saw Htaik Win reported that, *“Currently, Hatgyi Dam is still in the testing period and a Burmese company is playing a key role in the dam project, and an assessment is being carried out by technicians from China and Thailand. The assessment period [to determine if the land is suitable for a dam] is three years. Now, two years of the assessment period have already passed, and only one year is left. They have already obtained satellite imagery, but there is some indication that earthquakes may happen around the dam site, so they need to make sure of this within this year. But, if the assessment project is not completed within three years, the dam construction project will not happen.”*

BGF Commander Saw Htaik Win also added that, *“If the construction of Hatgyi Dam happens, there are about nine villages which will have to move [be relocated away from the area which will be flooded]. The company will need to build a water supply [system to the relocation site] and build a bridge across the Salween River; in addition, they will have to build a small city, a clinic, school and provide job opportunities for those [relocated] villagers.”*

BGF Commander Saw Htaik Win explained that, when the dam construction company representatives visited the area in December 2011, he organised a consultation meeting between those representatives and villagers from the Meh Lah area. As he explained, the

<sup>3</sup> This information was collected by a KHRG community member on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Hpa-an District, and remains on file with KHRG as an unpublished Incident Report.

<sup>4</sup> Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry or light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see [“DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force”](#) *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, [“Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa’an District,”](#) KHRG, June 2009.

company representatives presented information about the dam project in the Burmese language and with a projector. However, the villagers did not understand the content of the presentation because it was written and spoken in Burmese, and villagers said, *"If the KNU leaders agreed, villagers cannot oppose."* After the meeting, the villagers were given lamps by the dam construction company. According to Saw Htaik Win, although the KNU leaders have agreed, if the local villagers do not give their consent, the company and Burma government cannot do the project.

According to Saw Htaik Win, it was estimated that if the Hatgyi Dam were built, it would produce 20,000 megawatts of electric power.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpapun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, November 2012," (June 2014)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Restriction of movement in Dwe Lo Township, December 2013," (June 2014)
- "Hpapun Photo Set: BGF Battalion #1013 land confiscation for army base in Dwe Lo Township, June 2012 to November 2013," (June 2014)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Home guard killed by Tatmadaw landmine in Lu Thaw Township, January 2014," (June 2014)
- "Chapter: Drug production, use and the social impacts in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire," (June 2014)

