



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Field Report

August 29, 2014 / KHRG #14-1-F1

Toungoo Field Report: January to December 2013

This field report describes events occurring in Toungoo District between January and December 2013. It includes information submitted by KHRG researchers on a range of human rights abuses and other issues of importance to local communities, including violent abuse, landmine contamination, the loss of land and other negative impacts on livelihoods related to infrastructure and industrial projects, on-going militarization and a lack of access to education.

- *On June 26th 2013, Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion #30 Deputy Commander Major Hsan Htun violently abused a villager from S--- village, inflicting serious injuries.*
- *KHRG did not receive any reports of landmine incidents that resulted in the death or injury of civilians or reports of the planting of new landmines in Toungoo District in 2013, but landmines planted in the past still remained in the ground, which restricted villagers' freedom of movement.*
- *On October 30th 2013, due to a leak in a dam near Swa Town, houses and paddy fields in and around nearby Toungoo Town were flooded, causing significant damage to livelihoods.*
- *Villagers reported ongoing feelings of insecurity as the Tatmadaw continued to rotate troops and re-supply military bases, and established a new base near Klaw Mee Der village in Htantabin Township in March 2013.*
- *Villagers also raised concerns regarding a lack access to education, as there were still no schools in some areas and teachers appointed by the government were reluctant to work in rural areas.*

Violent Abuse



This photo was taken on July 1st 2013 by a KHRG community member in Toungoo District, and shows the 30-year-old villager, Saw L---, who was violent

Despite the preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen National Union (KNU) that has been in place since January 2012, the Burma/Myanmar state armed forces, the Tatmadaw, continued to abuse the human rights of villagers in Toungoo District in 2013. Among the different types of abuses documented by community members trained by KHRG, one report described the violent abuse of Saw L--- by the deputy commander of Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB)¹ #30, Major Hsan Htun. On June 26th 2013, Saw L--- was traveling from his home village, S---, to P--- by motorbike to deliver a receipt for the sale of some dog fruit,² when he encountered Major Hsan Htun and his soldiers on the road. Major Hsan Htun told him to stop the motorbike and questioned him regarding a vehicle incident which had taken place the previous night. Major Hsan Htun verbally abused him, kicked him in the chest and punched him in the face, and kicked his motorbike. The Major then ordered his soldiers to take Saw L--- into their camp, which they did, but Saw L--- left after a short while to continue his errand. After he had visited his destination and was on his way home, Major Hsan Htun's soldiers stopped him again and took him into their camp. After a short while, Major Hsan Htun appeared, who was drunk, and proceeded to order Saw L--- to stand up and sit down repeatedly, forced him to drink alcohol until he was intoxicated and shouted at him using abusive language. Later, Major Hsan Htun and several soldiers took Saw L--- back to his village, and when they arrived at around 10:30 pm, they beat him severely in front of the village school, punching and kicking him and hitting him with the butt of a gun. Consequently, Saw L--- sustained serious injuries to his face and eyes requiring medical treatment.³ After his wife complained to a national parliamentarian, Operations Commander (G3) Ye Htunt and the commander of Tatmadaw IB #30 provided Saw L--- with some compensation to pay for medical treatment, but no action was taken against Major Hsan Htun.

abused by the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion #30 Deputy Battalion Commander Hsan Htun and his soldiers on June 26th 2013 in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. The photo was taken when the victim was in hospital being treated for injuries sustained from the beating. [Photo: KHRG]

“On my way to P--- village I encountered Tatmadaw Major Hsan Htun and his troops. They questioned me and cursed at me then kicked my chest. They punched me and kicked me again and again until I fell off the motorbike. When I was on my way home, [the soldiers] stopped me again and brought me to their camp. When I arrived at the army camp, I heard gun shots three times in [a nearby] Roman Catholic Church. After a moment the Major came back to the camp and asked me why do you stand and cross your arms like that? Don't you know this is an army camp? I replied that I respected him and therefore had stood and crossed my arms, but he asked me to uncross my arms. Then he took me to the kitchen hut and gave me alcohol. I refused to drink but they threatened to punch me and pour alcohol on me [if I didn't], then I had to take [drink] three cups of alcohol. They took me home and before I entered my house they punched me and I fell down and then two of the soldiers stood me up and they beat me and violently abused me again. After I bled, they went away.”

Saw L---, (male, 31), Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, (Interviewed in August 2013)⁴

Landmines

¹ Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for garrison duty but sometimes used in offensive operations.

² Dog fruit, also known as jengkol, is a bean containing sulphur and a mildly toxic amino acid. It is native to Southeast Asia and is commonly eaten with rice and fish paste.

³ This information was included in previously published KHRG report [“Toungoo Situation Update: Than Daung and Tantabin townships, February to July 2013,”](#) KHRG, January 2014.

⁴ This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in August 2013.

KHRG did not receive any reports of landmine incidents resulting in the death or injury of civilians or reports of the planting of new landmines in Toungoo District in 2013. However, villagers and KHRG community members reported that landmines planted earlier still remained in the ground and had not been removed.⁵ According to local villagers in Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, the front line leaders of the KNLA have said that they do not have the technical skills necessary to conduct demining activities, and they are also afraid to remove the mines.

In Toungoo District, the KNLA has informed villagers of the locations in which they can be sure that they have planted mines in the past, and have banned villagers from travelling in those areas.⁶ However, beyond the resulting restrictions on freedom of movement, villagers are still particularly concerned about landmines planted by the Tatmadaw, as they have not been informed of the locations of those mines. KNLA soldiers in the area are also unable to help the villagers with this problem, as they do not know where the Tatmadaw has planted landmines.

Development projects

KHRG has received information from villagers in Toungoo District regarding development projects in varying stages of implementation and their impacts on local communities during 2013, in particular on livelihoods.

During a discussion with a KHRG community member, villagers reported their concerns regarding flooding in early 2013 caused by the Toh Boh dam, which was built on the Day Loh River by the Shwe Shwun In Company. The Peh Leh Wah Bridge was covered by water during the flooding and local roads were also damaged. For those reasons, it became difficult for local villagers to move freely to engage in their livelihood activities. The Shwe Shwun In company built a new road from Toungoo Town to Kler La village in order to improve transport conditions after the bridge was submerged, but the road was not well built and collapsed during the rainy season.⁷ In 2012, KHRG also received information about the displacement of 100 households in Toungoo District as a result of the construction of the Toh Boh Dam. The Shwe Shwun In Company had planned to complete the construction of the dam in 2010, but failed to meet its target. However, the dam was completed in 2012, which resulted in the displacement of more than 100 households that had been located near the construction site.⁸ As of August 2013, KHRG had received information that some landowners from four different villages in Htantabin Township had received compensation from the Shwe Shwun In Company after their land was damaged due to the construction of the Toh Boh Dam.⁹

In February 2013, business people entered an area next to A Ma Ya village in Thandaunggyi Township and began mining stone. According to local people, they were not consulted regarding this project. This mining resulted in the destruction of half of the land belonging to a

⁵ See for example: [“Toungoo Situation Update: Than Daung and Tantabin townships, February to July 2013,”](#) KHRG, January 2014.

⁶ For examples of areas in which KNLA soldiers are unable to remember where mines were originally planted, which presents serious problems for removal, see [“Toungoo Situation Update: Than Daung and Tantabin Townships, February to July 2013,”](#) KHRG, January 2014.

⁷ This information was included in previously published KHRG report [“Toungoo Photo Set: Ongoing militarisation and dam building consequences, March to April 2013,”](#) KHRG, February 2014.

⁸ This information was included in previously published KHRG report [“Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh dam construction site in Toungoo,”](#) KHRG, August 2012.

⁹ This information was included in previously published KHRG report [“Compensation for land flooded by Toh Boh Dam operations in Toungoo District, August 2013,”](#) KHRG, July 2014.

villager from A Ma Ya, Saw N---. The project is led by Gyi Zin Oo. The villagers are concerned about the project, as they don't know its purpose or which armed group(s) may be behind it.¹⁰

“A stone mining project is planned in our region and if the implementation [continues], there will be many problems.”

Saw N---, (male, 56), Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District
(Interviewed in October 2013)¹¹

Villagers also mentioned that even though there were no additional dam projects in 2013, dams that had been constructed in the past continued to have a negative impact on their livelihoods, as they tended to cause flooding whenever when the water levels became particularly high during the rainy season. Flooding occurred in Toungoo town during the night of October 29th 2013 as a result of a leak in a dam in nearby Swa Town. Homes were flooded and paddy fields destroyed, with a significant impact on local villagers' livelihoods leading to a food shortage. Because water covered the roads, local people had to load their motorcycles onto trucks and remove them from the flooded areas. For each motorcycle transported, they had to pay 2000 kyat (US\$ 2.05)¹² and they also had to pay 500 kyat (US\$ 0.51) for each passenger.



These photos were taken on October 30th 2013, and show the extensive flooding in Toungoo town as a result of

¹⁰ This information was included in a previously published KHRG report; “Toungoo Incident Report: Stone mining in Thandaunggyi Township, June 2013,” KHRG, August 2014.

¹¹ This information was included in a previously published KHRG report; “Toungoo Incident Report: Stone mining in Thandaunggyi Township, June 2013,” KHRG, August 2014.

¹² All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the August 5th 2014 official market rate of 973 kyat to the US \$1.

a leak in a dam in nearby Swa Town. [Photos: KHRG]

Ongoing militarization

Since the Burma/Myanmar government signed the preliminary ceasefire agreement with the KNU in January 2012, the Tatmadaw has continued to regularly rotate its troops and transport rations and weapons. According to KHRG community members, some of the Tatmadaw's army camps are being repaired. As local communities expected the withdrawal of army camps, this maintenance and/or strengthening of military infrastructure is causing anxiety among civilians and leading people to fear that fighting may resume.

There are two townships in Toungoo District, Htantabin and Thandaunggyi. Villagers in Htantabin reported that in late 2013, Tatmadaw Light Infantry Division¹³ (LID) #66, which had been based in the township, was replaced by Military Operation Command (MOC)¹⁴ #9. Likewise, troops based in Thandaunggyi Township, particularly in Ker Weh Army Camp were rotated regularly together with rations and ammunition.

The Tatmadaw also rotated its troops in Thandaunggyi Township. On November 28th 2013, they sent 125 horses to Thadaunggyi town to be used to transport rations to the different camps in the mountainous areas. Thirty eight Dyna brand trucks were used to bring these horses to Thandaunggyi, and 32 trucks transported rations, ammunition and other military equipment. They began transporting these rations from Thandaunggyi town to Ker Weh army camp on December 1st 2013.¹⁵

"We think the military rotation and ration transportation are supposed to stop during the ceasefire period, but it is still happening in our area, so it makes us doubt whether the ceasefire is true or not. We are also feeling uncomfortable because we think that fighting could happen any time in our area."

KHRG community member, Toungoo District
(Received in March 2013)

Local people in Klaw Mee Der village in Htantabin Township reported that, on March 15th 2013, the Tatmadaw started to build a new military camp in the area, causing anxiety among local villagers who said that that they couldn't live comfortably knowing that there was a camp in their village.

"The Tatmadaw built one more military camp in the Klaw Mee Der area and the place [where the Tatmadaw army camp is built] is called Nat Tha Mee Taung [Fairy Mountain]. We do not know the date that they finished building [the camp] and started staying there. However, because there is more of a military [presence], we are not feeling very comfortable and we do not want the [number of] military camps to be increased. If possible, we want the Tatmadaw to withdraw their troops"

Saw D---, (male, 30), Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District

¹³ Light Infantry Division (Tatmadaw); commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

¹⁴ Military Operations Command. Comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

¹⁵ This information was included in an unpublished Situation Update from Toungoo District received by KHRG in December 2013.



These photos were taken on on March 21st 2013 on the Kaw Thay Der vehicle road, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District. They show Tatmadaw LID #66 soldiers traveling to Bu Hsa Hkee Army Camp during troop rotation. Local villagers mentioned that they had seen that LID #66 had sent a lot of food to Bu Hsa Hkee Army Camp. During this rotation, LID #66 transported two bulldozers as well as food. [Photos: KHRG]

Lack of education

Lack of access to education was reported to be a serious problem in Toungoo District. Villagers reported to KHRG that there was a shortage of teachers at the Burma/Myanmar government schools in their areas. The villagers also raised concerns that the government teachers were mostly from urban areas, which made them reluctant to teach in rural areas. Whilst there are some primary schools, the villagers also described great sadness that they didn't have any high schools in some areas. Even if there were schools, there was no one who would teach. There are some educated young people in the district, but after they finish school, they tend to do other kinds of work because teaching is not well paid, so there is no way for them to share their education with younger children.

Most of the schools in Toungoo District are primary schools, which are recognized by the government, but they still don't receive enough government support. Some schools open only during some years, and then close during other years, because some of the students' parents cannot afford to pay the teachers' salaries. Students' parents reported that the Government teachers do not visit the schools regularly. For these reasons, lack of access to education is a big concern for local villagers.

¹⁶ This information was included in an unpublished Interview from Toungoo District received by KHRG in August 2013.

During 2013, the Burma/Myanmar government officials in Toungoo District established two high schools; one in Htantabin Township and the other in Thandaunggyi Township, but they did not have enough teachers and were not receiving enough support from the government. However, the Burma/Myanmar government township level leaders tried their best to ensure that children in their areas were able to go school. Since parents believe that education will make their children's lives children easier, it's a big concern for them when they can't find teachers for their children.¹⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, villagers reported that forced labour had decreased hugely in Toungoo District in 2013; KHRG did not receive any reports of forced labour from Toungoo District during the year. However, occasionally when villagers had been travelling, Tatmadaw soldiers asked them to transport some of their supplies without compensation. Aside from these ad hoc and opportunistic requests, Tatamadaw soldiers generally didn't ask villagers to transport them or their supplies. Villagers mentioned that even during troop rotations, the Tatmadaw had mostly carried their supplies by themselves, which left them freer to manage their own livelihoods. However, despite the decrease in the use of forced labour, other issues such as ongoing landmine contamination, the impact of infrastructure development projects on local communities, ongoing militarisation and a lack of access to education continued to be of great concern to villagers in Toungoo District.

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

- "Compensation for land flooded by Toh Boh Dam operations in Toungoo District, August 2013," (July 2014)
- "Toungoo Interview: A---, August 2013," (July 2014)
- "Tatmadaw mortar shelling and other military activities in Hpapun and Toungoo districts, December 2013," (July 2014)
- "Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire," (July 2014)
- "Toungoo Incident Report: Motorbike accident kills villager in Thandaunggyi Township, August 2013," (June 2014)

¹⁷ This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Than Daung and Tantabin townships, February to July 2013](#)," KHRG, January 2014.

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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