



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, May to August 2016

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District during the period between May and August 2016, including livelihood issues, gold mining, health and education.

- *In May 2016, more than half of the civilians in Dwe Lo Township had to stop working on their hill farms because all of their paddy plants were destroyed by mice.*
 - *Between 2015 and 2016, Chinese wealthy individuals conducted gold mining in Bu Law Klo River, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. This impacted civilians' livelihoods because it destroyed their river-side farm lands and civilians could no longer easily travel and use the river for their livelihood.*
 - *Between May and August 2016, diarrhoea, headaches, leg or arm pains, and flu were common illnesses faced villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. They usually accessed medical treatment through nurses or medics in the village, but without money they could not access medical treatment.*
 - *In 2016, Dwe Lo Township Karen Education Department [KED] chairman Saw Bwah reported that, "students in Dwe Lo Township still have to pay the student fee for the teachers' salary but we will try for the students [to get] free education in the coming year".*
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Situation Update | Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (May to August 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in August 2016. It was written by a community member in Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received from Hpapun District.

Introduction

Between 2010 and 2014, civilians who had boats in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District could travel on [Bu Law Klo] river for their livelihood without any difficulty. [However], between 2015 and 2016, civilians faced human rights abuse [livelihood impacts] from gold mining [project] ships. Gold mining ships ploughed the sand and stone in the river to make a bank, [which interrupted] the boats' travel route. [Therefore], when the boats travelled on the stone bank it caused boat accidents.

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

Since May 2016, many mice were coming, digging paddy seeds [from the ground] and eating them after civilians planted [the seeds] on their hill farms. Then, all of the paddy [plants or seeds] were gone. [Approximately] Seventy percent of the civilians in Dwe Lo Township could not work on their hill farms anymore.

In the past there were ten ships, [but] in August 2016 four more ships arrived when it was not raining much. The civilians who have farm lands beside the river have boats and travel by boat, [but] the soil [on their farm lands] collapsed [into the river] more and more, so they gathered together and discussed the problems that they will face in the future with the leaders, who gave permission to the ships [to mine the river for gold].

Since January 2016, flu, malaria, headaches, leg and arm pains are common illnesses faced by civilians in Dwe Lo Township.

Mice [attacking paddy]

Between [January and] May 2016 civilians or hill farmers planted paddy, but mice were eating and digging the paddy seeds [from the ground] after [the farmers] had planted them. Pah Tee² S--- lives in Ma Lay Ler village, Ma Lay Ler village tract, and his livelihood is working on a hill farm. Mice ate all of his [paddy seeds] after he planted them, so he said,

“I saw mice eating [destroying] paddy when I was a child once. They ate premature paddy grain and then when the [mature] paddy grain turned yellow [again]. This year, there are many villagers, hill farmers or land farmers [who] cannot harvest [the paddy] because of the mice eating their entire paddy. Now, I am at the old age of sixty years old and I face [the problem of] mice eating the paddy on my hill farm or on many other people’s hill farms again. There are many hill farmers [who] cannot work on their hill farms [anymore]. I set up snares on my hill farm’s boundary [so that] the mice will not eat [my] paddy, but they could not [stop the mice] as usual. This is not happening only in Ma Lay Ler [village], civilians or hill farmers in Bu Law Traw village are [also] facing this [problem] too. [Therefore], the civilians or hill farmers will face the rice problem [food shortage] in the coming year of their lives”.

And then, I [KHRG community member] asked Pah Tee S--- “You [are] facing the problem of mice destroying your paddy till you cannot work [harvest] on your hill farm anymore, how will you live and how will you eat in the coming year?” Pah Tee S--- replied, “[We] hill farmers are working on hill farms [but] we cannot eat [harvest] rice therefore at the harvesting time we all, children and wife, have to harvest on our neighbours’ hill farms or lands farms which are not [destroyed] by mice. Then they will share some rice with [us] for our lives in the coming year”.

River problem

One Hpa Weh Hta villager named U³ T--- in Lay Hkaw Htee village tract reported that,

“Between 2015 and 2016, some civilians who had money cooperated with Chinese wealthy individuals and asked permission from the Karen leaders to conduct gold mining in Bu Law Kloh River. Karen Leaders gave Bu Law Kloh River to them, so they started conducting gold mining in 2015, until now. Gold mining ships are ploughing the sand or stone to become a bank in the centre of the river. Water cannot flow normally, so it causes problems for our livelihoods by the people who drive boats on the Bu Law Kloh River. It causes boat accidents, as boats hit the bank and [we lose] some of the food in our boats, such as rice, onions, snacks and oil.

² *Pah Tee* or *Dtee* is a familiar S’gaw Karen term of respect attributed to an older man that translates to “uncle,” but it does not necessarily signify any actual familial relationship.

³ *U* is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

Similarly, my friend's boat in Meh Way accidentally hit the bank of stone when he was carrying dog fruits [from Meh Way to Hkaw Htee village]. When he was arriving at Meh Toh Hta, all of his dog fruits were lost. In my opinion, the [Karen] leaders should not give permission to the gold mining ships [workers to conduct the gold mining] in the Bu Law Kloh River anymore. Moreover, there were ten gold mining ships in 2015, but now there are four more gold mining ships in August [2016]. I see that, if the gold mining ships [workers] are always [conducting gold mining] in Bu Law Kloh River, this will cause problems for the boat drivers and will destroy the civilians' farm lands; the farm lands' boundary collapsed [into the river] so it impacts civilians' livelihoods.

Regarding the problem that we face [about] travelling by boat, I solved this by gathering together the people who have boats and discussing about [the issue that] travelling by boat is not easy like it was before. Therefore, starting from now we always have to be careful and drive slowly when we are travelling. Even though it will take time, a little longer, we have to be patient on our travels”.

Health

Since May [2016], many children or adults in Ma Lay Ler village tract, Meh Cho village tract, Waw Mu village tract, Meh Way village tract and Hku Thu village tract had to face common illnesses such as diarrhoea, headaches, leg or arm pains and flu. Any people who faced the flu had to suffer for at least ten days, but only flu medicine could treat it [not general medicine or a drip]. There were many people who got the flu and were getting better after they took medicine or drips, but they still felt leg or arm joint pain.

Regarding the flu, this was treated by young [health workers] in the village. They were trained at the Karen hospital in the town. [Villagers] had to pay all medicine costs to Thara/Tharamu [health workers]. If they [villagers] do not give money, even if they called them, [the health workers] would not come to [the patients]. Some villagers who had money accessed medical treatment at the hospital in town, but some patients did not have money for [medical] treatment so they had to severely suffer for a very long [time]. For people who did not have money to access treatment, some of them got better by receiving traditional [medical] treatment or taking natural medicine. Regarding the flu treatment, one woman who lived in Yaw Mu Village, named Mu Ghar⁴ U---, reported the flu, because she and many of her neighbours [also] faced [and] suffered from the flu.

Civilians' livelihood

Civilians' livelihoods in Dwe Lo Township are farming, hillside cultivation, sesame plantation and some [civilians] who have money conduct gold mining and sell [snacks] at home. When dog fruits are mature some of the villagers sell dog fruits. This [information on] civilians' livelihoods was reported by V--- village tract leader Saw W---.

Education

Dwe Lo Township Karen Education Department [KED] chairman Saw Bwah reports [that regarding] education in Dwe Lo Township, “All children can go to the school. We set up high schools and middle schools in the village that have many households and primary schools in village that have few households.

Most of the teachers are from the village [that has the schools], but some are from Burma/Myanmar government education department or Karen Education Department [KED]. Teachers' salary is provided by the Karen Education Department [KED]. We [KED] pay

⁴*Mu ghar* is a familiar S'gaw Karen term of respect attributed to an older woman that translates to “aunt,” but it does not necessarily signify any actual familial relationship.

[teachers] seven thousand baht or nine thousand baht [US \$196.90 or \$253.09]⁵ [per year] but there is not enough [money for the teachers] so village tract education [department] leaders or village education [department] leaders asked for more money from the students' parents for the teachers. Teachers from the Burma/Myanmar government do not ask for the salary, they are voluntarily teaching [the children]. We [KED] do not have to pay them because they receive salary from the Burma/Myanmar government. Now, students do not yet get free education. This coming year, [we] will arrange for the students to get free education”.

Conclusion

There was so much rain so [I] could not afford to travel very much [during this reporting period]. Therefore, the situation in Lu Thaw Township and Bu Tho Township are not included in this Situation Update, it includes the situation in Dwe Lo Township only. This Situation Update is not only [from] my opinion, [because] civilians/victims reported [the problems that they faced] to me when I was traveling around, so I reported it.

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2014 to January 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, April 2014 to February 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Human rights violations by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh of BGF Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District, between 2012 and 2015,” (September 2015)

⁵ All conversion estimates for the Baht in this report are based on the January 10th 2017_official market rate of 35.54 Baht to US \$1.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District

