



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Photo Set

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Hpapun and Thaton Photo Set: Livelihood Challenges

This Photo Set illustrates the impact of serious caterpillar and mice attacks on villagers' paddy in hill and plain farms in Lu Thaw and Bu Tho Townships, Hpapun District as well as in Bilin Township, Thaton District between July and September 2016. The villagers in both districts faced serious livelihood challenges because insects destroyed their paddy. Villagers were unable to cultivate their hill and plain farms and collect enough rice, causing them to face food shortages and financial difficulties. Although some villagers in Bu Tho Township have received insecticide plastic containers from the Karen National Union (KNU), other villagers affected by these insect attacks report that they may need to rely on local humanitarian providers in the future in order to meet their survival needs.

Photo Set | Lu Thaw and Bu Tho Townships, Hpapun District and Bilin Township, Thaton District (July to September 2016)

The following photos were taken by community members in Hpapun and Thaton districts who have been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. They are presented below, censored where necessary for security purposes.¹ The 20 photos below were received along with other information from Hpapun and Thaton districts including 359 other photos, six video clips, a general update on the situation in Dooplaya District and Hpapun District, and six interviews.²

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.

² This Photo Set was compiled by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun and Thaton districts who have been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the

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These photos were taken on July 30th 2016 in Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. The photos show rice paddy leaves in Pay Kay village tract which turned grey following caterpillars and mice attacks on the villagers' hill farms and plain farms. After the insect attacks, many villagers were no longer able to collect paddy grains or work on their farms to gain a harvest. Furthermore, many villagers did not have any other job opportunities to earn their livings. Some villagers can only collect very few paddy grains from the rice field and cannot produce enough rice for their family to sustain themselves for the year. Accordingly, they face a food shortage. *[Photos: Karen Agriculture Department]*





These photos were taken on July 30th 2016 in Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. The above two photos show the small traps villagers set up around their hill farms to protect their paddies from mice attacks. Additionally, they also used other traditional practices to protect their farms from further destruction. The two photos below show the mice that they killed from the traps and from sling shooting. They were able to hunt and trap several hundred mice per night. Even though they set up traps and tried to protect their farms in many different ways, they were not able to sufficiently protect their hill farms. [Photos: Karen Agriculture Department]



These photos were taken on July 14th 2016 in Kheh Pa Hta plain farms at Kheh Pa Hta village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. The first photo shows villagers gathering their nursery paddy plants in order to prepare to plant nursery paddies on their farms. They were only able to collect half of the nursery paddy plants which they planted (four baskets of paddy grains) because insects destroyed the rest of the nursery paddy plants. The second photo shows Saw A---, an upset farmer who had half of his nursery paddy plants destroyed by

caterpillars. As a result, he did not have enough nursery paddy plants to plant on the six acres of his plain farm. While he was sitting on his farm land he expressed that only paddies stems are left after the attacks. The third photo shows caterpillars attacking paddy plants and the fourth photo shows a plastic bag full of caterpillars that the owner had removed from the plants. The villagers did not have enough money to buy insecticide and moreover, no one sells insecticide near the villages because they live in deep rural areas [which are hard to access by traders]. Farmer Saw B--- testified, *“I cannot buy insecticide to kill caterpillars on time because my village is not close to any insecticide shops. The only insecticide shop is in Hpapun Town. If I go to Hpapun Town, it will take two days and one night to walk [to Hpapun from Kheh Pa Hta plain farms]. If I travel for two days, caterpillars will eat all of my young paddy plants because there are too many caterpillars [on the farm].”* Saw A--- also reported that he had to plant nursery paddy plants twice in order to collect enough nursery paddy plants to plant his entire field. Nevertheless, he is not sure whether or not he will be able to collect enough paddy grains for the year. He said that without a sufficient amount of paddy grains he won't have enough money to buy [additional] rice to support his family. In cases like this, villagers like Saw A--- may need to rely on support from local humanitarian providers. [Photos: KHRG]



The first two photos were taken on October 28th 2016 at Aoo Thaw Khee village, Meh Nyu village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show mice, caterpillars and other tiny insects that have destroyed the newly planted paddy plants. Even when paddies were producing fruits/grains, insects across Bu Tho Township still continued to eat the paddy plants. The third and fourth were taken on September 19th 2016 in Naw C---'s plain farm at Ma Mu village, Bu Ah Der village tract, Bu Tho Township. These photos show a villager checking caterpillars that were attacking his paddy plants. This is a type of caterpillar that cocoons itself into the paddy leaves. They start by eating the paddies' very young leaves; they then move on to eat the stem and, afterwards, the roots. The third photo shows paddy plants which dried up due to caterpillar attacks. Due to the many problems that villagers in Meh Nyu and Bu Ah Der village tract had to face in 2016, many villagers worried that their livelihood situation would be seriously at risk and that they might face serious food shortages in the coming years. [Photos: KHRG]



The two photos above were taken on September 3rd 2016 at Aee Su Khee village, Aee Su Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, Thaton District. The first photo shows mice that were killed on the hill paddy farms where the mice attacked. The second photo shows the hill paddy farms of Aee Su Khee and Wah Tho Plaw villagers that were attacked by mice during the growing season. As the paddies could no longer be cultivated after the paddy plants were damaged, the villagers grew sesame plants on their hill farms instead. Villagers who live in Aee Su Hkee village tract and other village tracts in Bilin Township mainly cultivate hill and plain farms and live in rural areas. When bamboo shoots in the local area were blossoming in the beginning of 2016, villagers noted a significant increase in the amount of mice that started attacking the paddies. The mice destroyed all of the paddy plants that they planted during the rainy season. According to KHRG researchers, almost all of the hill farms in Aee Su Khee village tract were ruined and many of the hill farm's owners could not work on their farm any longer. Villagers reported to KHRG researchers that they would definitely face food shortages in 2016 and 2017. Naw D--- and Saw E--- also reported, *"We cannot find any other jobs for our livelihood and there are no jobs opportunities here. We try to cut bamboos to earn some income but the bamboos were also blossoming [not ready for cutting] so we cannot do anything to earn a living. We are planning to do logging and log bamboos but before we can start, we have to get permission from the KNU leaders. If we are not given permission, we will not have any other [livelihood] options"* [Photos: KHRG]



The two photos above were taken on September 9th 2016 at Karen Nation Union office which is in Bu Tho Township office, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show villagers from Bu Ah Der village tract receiving insecticide plastic containers from the KNU at the Bu Tho Township office to spray insecticide on their hill and plain farms. In 2016, the KNU distributed insecticide to villagers whose farm was attacked by caterpillars and mice. At the same time, KNU's Bu Tho Township officials gave training to the civilians so they will know how to correctly use the insecticide and how to protect themselves when using the insecticide. [Photos: KHRG]