



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

August 30, 2018 / KHRG #17-125-A1-I1

Toungoo Interview: Saw Q---, November 2017

This Interview with Saw Q--- describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, between 2012 and 2017, including information on land confiscations, stone mining, land confiscation, dam construction, displacement and village agency strategies.

- *Since 2000, land confiscations are on the rise because of corporate development projects.*
 - *Local civilians have become internally displaced due to land confiscations and the flooding in the aftermath of hydropower dam construction.*
 - *Rural communities have used many strategies to protect their land from confiscation. These include fencing their land, protesting on the street, and submitting complaint letters to both the Karen National Union and Myanmar government authorities. However, as of today, these efforts have been unsuccessful and risky. Villagers who have led these activities have been sued by private companies and Myanmar government authorities.*
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Interview | Saw Q---, (male, 42), A--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (November 2017)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Toungoo District on November 3rd 2017 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including one other interview.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

Position: N/A

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern Burma/Myanmar, 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.

What is your name?

My name is Saw Q---

How old are you?

I am 42 years old.

Are you married?

Yes, I am.

How many children do you have?

I have five children.

What is your occupation?

I am working on a plantation.

Where do you live?

I live in A--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District.

What are the main types of agency strategies that villagers use if they have concerns about negative development projects coming to their area?

Mostly, the development projects [in the area] are long-term plantations. This means that lands are often confiscated for these projects. Sometimes it leads villagers' displacement because they have to leave their homes due to development projects. Some people have even been sued.

Did this happen before or after the 2012 preliminary ceasefire?

The land confiscation relating to corporate development projects has been occurring since 2000. Land confiscation has occurred since 2000 until now, 2017, but the situation has not been resolved yet. I mean that the case is connected with a lawsuit. Villagers are trying to protect their land from land confiscation so they fence their land, protest on the street and submit complaint letters. They also submit complaint letters to the KNU authorities to help solve their problems and to get back their land. They are doing these types of activities.

However, if you asked me whether they are successful with what they are doing? I would answer they have not had any successes until now.

I would like to mainly focus on the village agency strategies that they [villagers] use in cases where they face human rights violations that have happened due to development projects after the 2012 ceasefire.

After the 2012 preliminary ceasefire, the act of land confiscation became more obvious. In the past during military-rule, villagers were very weak and unable fight against land confiscation. They also did not feel safe to fight against it. They lived in fear. They started to feel more confident to raise land confiscation as an issue after the 2012 ceasefire.

Nowadays, you will see that the Kaung Myanmar Aung Company (KMAC)³ and Tatmadaw who are confiscating villagers' land in Toungoo District. Not only them, there are also other companies including the Asia World Company⁴ that are confiscating villagers' land. The land that was confiscated in 2000 has been confiscated still after 2012. To build a dam, the Asia World Company confiscated villagers' land in 2000.

Which dam?

It is the Thauk Yay Hkat hydropower dam, which is also called the Htone Bo Dam⁵. The dam was scheduled to begin operations in 2000 by the Shwe Swan Inn Company⁶. In 2014, villagers reported to the KNU that land had been flooded and land had been confiscated by the company. Villagers received some compensation from the company [for damages].

You said that the agency strategies that villagers use are demonstration/protest and submitting complaint letters. What are the challenges of these types of agency strategies?

³ Kaung Myanmar Aung Company (KMAC) or Kaung Myanmar Aung Group of Companies is a Myanmar-owned business group with investments in teak plantations in Toungoo District, and mining, agriculture, shipping, construction and real estate development within Myanmar. Their chairman is Mr Khin Maung Aye. KMAC have been implicated in land confiscation cases in southeast Myanmar which have included intimidation and threats to villagers who were customary owners of the lands, and launching legal cases against villagers accused of trespassing on the confiscated land. See "Chapter 6: Development, ["Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar,"](#) October 2017, KHRG. For an interview with a KMAC day labourer, see ["Toungoo Interview: U A---, 2017,"](#) November 2017, KHRG, and for a villager sued of trespassing, ["Toungoo Interview: Htantabin Township, November 2015,"](#) June 2017, KHRG.

⁴ Asia World is a Burma/Myanmar company with significant investments in the shipping industry, infrastructure, and plantations in Myanmar. It is known within Burma/Myanmar as Shwe Swan In. Asia World and its additional companies owned by Myanmar national Stephen Law were added to the US Sanctions list in July 2016 due to their historic and continued links to the Burma/Myanmar military regime, see ["US extends sanctions, further targets Asia World,"](#) Myanmar Times, May 17th 2016. KHRG analysed the impact of Asia World and other private company's roles in development in Chapter 6: Development, ["Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar,"](#) October 2017, KHRG. In KHRG's operation area of Toungoo District, Asia World constructed a hydroelectric dam resulting in damage to villagers' land and the relocation of villagers, see ["Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011,"](#) KHRG, September 2012 and continue to develop on land traditionally used by villagers, see ["Toungoo Field Report: Slow transitions towards real change, January to December 2015,"](#) January 2017, KHRG. Additionally, in Mergui-Tavoy District, Asia World confiscated villagers' land for plantations, see ["Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Muh Lah and Ta Naw Tree Townships, January to June 2015,"](#) KHRG, October 2015.

⁵ For more information on the impact and construction of the Toh Boh dam, see ["Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011,"](#) KHRG, September 2012; see also ["Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh Dam construction site in Toungoo,"](#) KHRG, August 2012. Many villages remain displaced years later, see the Toh Boh dam case study on page 196 of ["Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar,"](#) October 2017, KHRG.

⁶ Asia World is a Burma/Myanmar company with significant investments in the shipping industry, infrastructure, and plantations in Myanmar. It is known within Burma/Myanmar as Shwe Swan In. Asia World and its additional companies owned by Myanmar national Stephen Law were added to the US Sanctions list in July 2016 due to their historic and continued links to the Burma/Myanmar military regime, see ["US extends sanctions, further targets Asia World,"](#) Myanmar Times, May 17th 2016. KHRG analysed the impact of Asia World and other private company's roles in development in Chapter 6: Development, ["Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar,"](#) October 2017, KHRG. In KHRG's operation area of Toungoo District, Asia World constructed a hydroelectric dam resulting in damage to villagers' land and the relocation of villagers, see ["Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011,"](#) KHRG, September 2012 and continue to develop on land traditionally used by villagers, see ["Toungoo Field Report: Slow transitions towards real change, January to December 2015,"](#) January 2017, KHRG. Additionally, in Mergui-Tavoy District, Asia World confiscated villagers' land for plantations, see ["Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Muh Lah and Ta Naw Tree Townships, January to June 2015,"](#) KHRG, October 2015.

On April 25th 2014, the Asia World Company/Shwe Swan Inn Company that implemented the Htone Bo Dam project paid compensation money for confiscating villagers' land.⁷ When they built the dam, the land flooded and water covered all the roads and bridges around there. Because they do not have a bridge anymore, villagers have had to travel by boat to go to another place. It is very hard for villagers to travel. A car sank under the water after being placed on a boat. Therefore, the villagers requested [the company] to build a bridge for them.

They [villagers] also protested against the construction of a new dam called Thouk Yay Hkat. The company that implemented the Htone Bo Dam and Shwe Swan Inn Company promised to agree with villagers' request. They met with the KNU authorities as well as villagers. Even though they said that they would build a bridge requested by the villagers, the bridge has not been built until now. They promised the villagers that they would complete the bridge by April 2014. Villagers also waited to see what would happen. Because the company did not fulfil their promise, villagers started protesting against them on April 25, 2014. The bridge has still not been built until now.

What are the successes of these types of agency strategies?

To look back at the agency that the villagers used, there were a few successes. In some places, villagers received compensation but in other places, they have not received any compensation at all. Some of the villagers received a small amount of compensation from the Shwe Swan Inn Company. Htone Bo village is flooded but local villagers have not received anything until now. They cannot measure the land that has gone under water. So, there are few successes that villagers have had so far.

What is the reaction of powerful actors to these types of agency strategies?

The villagers reported the case to the KNU and also reported the case to the Burma/Myanmar government. They also reported the case by letter to the relevant companies. The KNU helped villagers in some places so that villagers could receive compensation. However, some cases that were submitted to the Burma/Myanmar government have been transferred to the KNU authorities.

When the KNU met with the companies [to discuss the complaints], they responded that they have been permitted [to implement projects] by the government. Villagers still submitted complaint letters to receive compensation. I think if these three powerful groups [KNU, Burma/Myanmar government, companies] work together to solve the problem, the problem can be resolved easier. The current situation is that only one group is working and the other two are not, so it is not enough to have these problems solved. It also shows that they do not care about civilians.

I need to clarify something about the company names. You have mentioned the Shwe Swan Inn Company and Asia World Company. Are they the same or separate companies?

They are the same. At first, the company's name was Asia World. In the past, Asia World was unpopular and had a bad name because they committed human rights abuse throughout their operation areas by doing logging, gold mining and other development projects. They also worked with the military government and conducted projects without prior consultation with villagers. After, when the Tatmadaw and other ethnic armed groups including the KNU signed the preliminary ceasefire in 2012, the Asian World Company changed its name to Shwe Swan Inn Company. They just want to erase their bad name and make a new name for themselves.

⁷ Asia World and Shwe Swan Inn refer to the same company.

So, the company name was Asia World before 2012?

Yes.

Now, they change their name to Shwe Swan Inn just to erase their bad name?

Why I can say about this in detail is that, in March 2017, a Shwe Swan Inn Company manager told me about the company. I forget the name of the manager. He said that the company was founded by Laung Sitt Han, a son of Kon Sa. He cooperated with the Burma/Myanmar government to build the Htone Bo Dam. But after the dam was constructed, he said that it was a privately owned dam. Later on, we knew that this company somehow had connections with the government.

How do powerful actors seek to undermine or limit the success of villager agency strategies?

There are around four to five companies in the area. To weaken the success of village agency strategies, they ask for documents from the villagers such as land titles or a permission letter from the government. So, this really causes problems for villagers.

In the past, they did not apply for or have Land Form #7⁸. Land Form #7 was introduced in 2012 or 2014. In this case, some villagers missed their chance to apply and some could not afford to apply for it. So, when the companies ask [villagers] to show documents, many of the villagers cannot show them. There is flooding in the upper part of the Htone Bo River where the whole area was confiscated by the company. In the lower part of the river, the Asia World Company is developing a long-term plantation project.

Again, the Asia World Company works on stone production and brings their stone cracking machines with them to the project site. They identified the land around Htone Bo Dam as their land. They mine stones and break down the rock with the cracking machines. They threaten the villagers when villagers go to ask about this. They reply that the villagers should not come and talk to them but go to talk with the government directly. They also said, "*We do this because we have permission from the government*". So, this is a huge challenge that villagers face and undermines village agency.

What are the main types of agency strategies that villagers use if they have experienced development-related abuses?

Firstly, they submit complaint letters to the village administrator but the cases cannot be solved by the village administrator. This is because the companies influence the village administrator. Then villagers submit [complaint letters] again to township and regional level administrators to solve their problems. However, their problems are usually ignored.

In addition to this, villagers were even sued by companies. They submitted complaint letters for a long time but no one out there has helped them solve their problem. When no one was taking action, villagers started fencing their land before they were sued [by the companies]. They submitted the letter but they were ignored and they have not received any compensation. They submitted the letter because they want to get back their land. The companies and relevant authorities have not taken any action to protect villagers.

Therefore, villagers organised themselves and started fencing their own land. They cut bamboo to fence their land to prevent the companies from entering. Companies such as Kaung

⁸ Land form #7 is the land grant required to work on a particular area of land. In Burma/Myanmar, all land is ultimately owned by the government.

Myanmar Aung mostly do long-term plantation projects like growing rubber and teak trees. The Kaung Myanmar Aung Company grows teak trees on villagers' land. The land is recognised as "vacant, fallow, virgin" by the government. In 2009, the government permitted the company to use 2,400 acres of land. All of the permitted lands are lands used by local villagers.

The only thing that villagers can do to protect their land is to stay on their land and not to leave the place at all, because there is nowhere for them to stay if they lose their land. They have been hustled to leave the place but villagers just remain there because there is nowhere for them to go apart from the land they currently live on. So, the companies sue them [villagers] for being there.

The worst thing I have ever heard and seen is that there are more than 30 acres or 50 acres of Daw Bs---'s land in Na Ga Mauk/Htone Bo area that has been confiscated by the KMAC owner U Hkin Maung Aye. His manager is U Saw Maung. They confiscated around 50 acres of Daw Bs---'s land and hustled her to leave. She is widowed and she found a place where she has only a little space for herself. In order to cover her house with a tarp, she has been unable to make poles. She cannot afford to buy the poles and she has no idea where to go and find them [from the jungle] as well. So, she just tied up a small bamboo hut on U Hkin Maung Aye's small teak tree plantation and set the tarp on top of it.

What happened to her house?

She does not have her house anymore. It was broken down by the company and she was hustled to leave. This happened when Htone Bo village was relocated because the company planned to build a dam. As she did not have her house anymore, she returned back to her place and she was later on hustled by the KMAC staff [to leave].

At that time she was sobbing and saying *"I have this amount of land. Just give me 500,000 kyats per acre of land as compensation. Instead, I do not even have enough space for myself."* U Hkin Maung Aye wanted to see her in order to pay compensation but his staff did not want him to meet her. His staff said that it will be problematic if he goes to see her.

I am not clear why U Hkin Maung Aye could be stopped by his staff even though he is the owner of KMAC?

Daw Bs--- wanted to meet U Hkin Maung Aye to tell him that her land was confiscated. She wanted to meet him by herself because she cannot read or write. She wanted to express her feelings to him. But, she was not allowed to by one of the representatives of U Hkin Maung Aye.

What factors make it more likely for multiple villagers to work together instead of working separately?

I would like to recall one case that I know. Three villagers were sued between 2012 and 2014.

Who sued them?

KMAC. U De--- and Saw V---, they are father and son, were sued by the KMAC. KMAC raised the issue that they were trespassing and working on the company's land.

When were they sued?

They were sued in February 2014. I met with them and we had some conversations about the case. At that time, they faced trial and I followed them. The company suing them is like them making a threat because the company wanted other villagers to see this and to be afraid of

them. When this happened several times, in 2015, villagers started to know that it is not effective to face the company alone.

Therefore, villagers tried to organise around five or six neighbourhood villages that included Yay Ao Sin village, Nan Ga Mauk, Htone Bo, Kyauk P'Htoe, Kyet Khay Khyaung and protested against KMAC. They demonstrated three times. The first time, they demonstrated on their land. For their slogans, they used "No KMAC" and "Return our land". They shouted out loud to get back their land while walking around their land. They did the same thing at the same place for their second demonstration. For the last protest, they marched to the place where KMAC is located in Toungoo Town to ask them to return their land.

Every time villagers started a protest against KMAC, a notable event would happen because KMAC hired people to demonstrate against villagers and support them instead. Villagers protested in order to get back their land. There were only 80 people in their first protest. In their last protest in Toungoo Town, there were approximately 200 people who joined the protest. In the protest, KMAC also had their people [who they hired] that protested against the villagers who protested the KMAC. Some people from the KMAC side did not know the reason they protested for. They said that they would be paid 3000/5000 [\$2.22/3.69 US] kyats⁹ if they joined the protest. They went around with trucks and marched. In order to protest, there was an issue for villagers, which was that they had to wait for months from the authorities to give permission to protest.

The particular thing was that when villagers protested one day, the company's people would have a counter-protest against them the next day. The company did not have any issues and they did not have to submit a proposal letter to [gain permission to protest from] the authorities. Even though the villagers worked together collectively, they have not had that much success. At first, they had some successes when they solved the problem at the township level. However, villagers are weak in education, don't have sufficient knowledge of the law and legislation and they also have financial problems. Villagers already won one time in the township court trial. The company was not satisfied with that however and they appealed the decision again at the district court and it took years [for the case to be resolved]. That was intended to weaken villagers' efforts and their agency strategies.

However, the villagers kept themselves strong and did not give up during the court case. Some villagers loaned them money to hire lawyers/attorneys. They won again at the district level. The deputy manager of KMAC, U Thaug Nyunt, sued the villagers again at the regional level on November 21st, 2017. The challenges for the villagers are as I have told you earlier. Villagers have weaknesses, such as knowledge of the laws, financial ability to hire a lawyer, etc. Now, they are seeking support from any organisations that can help them resolve their land problem.

What kind of information is most important for villagers in order for them to take action against negative development projects?

The most important thing for villagers is to have their cases documented, by having the record of the year of the incident, the company and the responsible persons' names, the year of the project and media support. Some media are not reliable because of their unprofessionalism. Still, there are media agents that do not practice freedom of expression because villagers' voices are not all included [in media reports] so villagers need to get support from reliable media sources that work transparently. Villagers need to have media groups that represent the villagers' voices and that write true events based on villagers' voices with transparency and accountability. They should not be biased.

⁹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the February 21st 2018 official market rate of 1,319 kyats to US \$1.

How have past experiences with development projects impacted village agency strategies?

There was not much village agency in the past prior to 2012. They wanted to but they did not feel safe to [act]. After 2012, village agency strategies became stronger. However, there are still weaknesses in villagers' agency strategies. When villagers start to know their rights, they start demanding to get back their rights that have been taken away. In this circumstance, laws that have to do with villagers' rights are not effectively used and are still too weak to protect villagers. For instance, villagers lose trials when they have financial problems [because they cannot afford to hire lawyers/attorneys]. Related to this, I would like to talk about a case that happened. In 2007, villagers whose lands were confiscated in 1996 were sued.

Do you mean that villagers' land was confiscated in 1996, but they lived in the confiscated land, so then they were sued?

Yes, the one that sued them was from [Burma/Myanmar government] Industrial Zone #1. However, villagers won the trial in 2012 or post-2012.... I forget the year. However, they [Industrial Zone #1] worked with other departments such as the Forestry Department and Land Department and sued the villagers again in 2017. Villagers lost the trial for the second time. The first time they sued the villagers they lost. The second time they sued the villagers and they won. I have no idea how they won the second trial. But, one thing we clearly know from this situation is that villagers could not pay lawyer fees.

Worse than this, one of them, who is an old lady, could not even pay for the transportation fees [to travel to court] so she walked from her home to Toungoo [the location of the court], which is around 15 miles between, to attend the court meeting. Actually, transportation only costs 500 kyats [\$0.37 US]. She walked a long distance to reach the court and she was late. She apologised for being late but she was rejected and she lost the trial. Actually, she won the first time she faced trial but she lost the second time. After they [villagers] lose a trial the second time, they cannot do anything. They want to get back their land but they do not have any way to. They cannot afford to solve the problem in court and the laws are also not protective of them. Finally, the whole village cut down bamboo and fenced their land to protect their territory.

Which factors cause village agency tactics to be different in different areas? (For example, people in Toungoo District protest while people in Dooplaya District submit complaint letters.)

There are two things we have in Brigade #2/Toungoo District. When villagers demonstrated against KMAC, some people financially supported them, for instance, by hiring transportation trucks if there was a long distance [between villages and protest sites]. Protesters were also provided food because they protested for the whole day.

Do you know who helped villagers? Did villagers buy their own food?

They had to have food to eat and transportation trucks to travel. Actually, they also asked for help from organisations that are working on humanitarian aid.

Do you know the name of the organisations?

I cannot remember the name of the organisation that supported the protesters. At first, villagers protested by walking on foot but it was time-consuming and did not bring them to their targeted place quickly. So, they asked to go with transportation trucks. But for some places, they could not afford to do this as there was a lack of financial aid and human resources. So, they organised the villagers among the villages and made a protest, particularly Nant Thar Kone village, Kyun Kone village and Ywar Thit village. They worked together to fence their land

instead of protesting on the streets because they have limited human resources and do not have someone to lead them. When villagers do not have someone to lead them, they just fence the land as a village agency strategy. Where there are places that villagers have someone to lead them, they head to the city and create a demonstration. They head to the city to ask [the authorities/companies] to return their lands. Actually, they [villagers] did not want to protest. At first, they asked [authorities/companies] to return their land without making any noise. As it did not work out, they [villagers] finally decided to show up on the street to protest. They did not mean to hurt the company's reputation, they just wanted to get back the land that was confiscated by the company.

What recommendations do you have for business developers in your area?

I would like to say that as they think of their profits they also should consider and respect the villagers' livelihoods. It is very ugly to put the villagers in harsh conditions that they do not even have a narrow space left for them to stay while companies are making huge profits. So, I would like them to have a mind of humanity and support humanitarian access. One more thing is that they should conduct the projects which are in compliance with the international standard for whatever project they are doing. The implementation of the projects also should be in line with laws and should not be above the laws. Now, what they are doing is not like that. They do not apply the laws because they do not consult with villagers [prior to implementation of projects]. They are conducting the projects with the permission that come from the government. This means that they do not respect villagers. So finally, I would like to say that no matter whatever business/project you are doing, you have to consider others' feelings and have sympathy for them and do not hurt them.

Do you think there are any changes with regard to agency strategies and development projects since the preliminary ceasefire (2012)? How and why?

There are many changes with regards to agency strategies. Villagers have started fencing their lands named [in Burmese] *Tun Tone Taik Pwel* protest, etc. Villagers have used village agency strategies gradually [since 2012]. They also feel very confident to face courts regarding court cases. They think that it will not work out with only the villagers' voices and protests, but that it is better to face the court and justice system. Now we can say that villagers are more willing to face justice and law. In the past, they were very afraid to go to court. They did not get involved in attending court meetings at all. They just let it go. Later on, they have gotten to know their rights and they feel more confident. They are not afraid to face the law, but the real problem is that they do not have knowledge about the laws. Regarding this issue, villagers need reliable attorneys who stand on the villagers' side and represent villagers in court.

The last part you have explained is relevant to my next question, and you have already answered it as my question is "Have villagers used the law in order to protect themselves in cases of development abuse?" They have used the law in order to protect themselves. Can you tell me more about this and, if possible, can you provide any examples?

Honestly, villagers only want to use the law when they know that using other agency strategies does not work for them. They have used more kinds of violent forms of agency strategies as well, but they learned that the situation does not change. Therefore, they finally decided to use the law to protect themselves.

Can you tell me an example of when this happened?

Perhaps, I have talked about this already earlier. KMAC is currently suing villagers in the regional court. They sued the villagers and reported the case to the regional court on November 21st, 2017. Villagers faced difficulties going to court because they have financial problems.

Some people are purchasing rice as collateral and they pay back the money later when they receive their salary. Due to this, they are not able to go to the regional court in Bago Region. Villagers are very motivated to try to have their problem solved but the only issue for them is the cost of court fees and hiring attorneys. And also, villagers seek help from local NGOs/CBOs/CSOs. They also ask for help from KHRG. Even though KHRG cannot solve their problems directly, KHRG has been requested by the villagers to help them connect with other organisations, especially organisations working on law and justice and that can represent villagers in court. They cannot go with the previous attorney. The previous attorney was quite helpful but under some circumstances, villagers had financial problems. That is why they finally lost the case. To make themselves stronger, they are seeking help from various organisations.

What are the main types of agency strategies that villagers use if their land and plantations are unexpectedly affected by development projects?

We do have villagers that have faced this kind of experience in places like Htoe Boh/Na Ga Mauk. At first, they prevented the company from coming in, but they could not so villagers took pictures of them [company workers] as evidence. They recorded the company name, the people who lead the project, incident date and other relevant information and they submitted it to CBOs/ CSOs who are working on documentation like KHRG. They also give the information about their concerns and how they feel about it to every CBOs/CSOs that comes into their areas.

How do villagers decide if their agency strategy is risky or not? What do they do if they think it might be too risky?

Villagers are faced with many risky situations when they use agency strategies. However, the goal of what strategies they decide on is to protect their land. They will protect their land even if they must risk their lives. They recognise their land as indigenous land. They have been evicted [by the company] but they do not listen to them and are just stay on their land. They said they will face any attack on them without withdrawing. They will protect their land with their lives. They do not have a plan to sell their land.

What recommendations do you have for business developers in your area?

In development, we have both advantages and disadvantages. We should consult with villagers and inform them about the pros and cons of projects prior to implementation. We need to get consent or agreement of local villagers before conducting development projects. The most appropriate way is to consult with villagers for any development projects. For me, I do not recognise that a project is conducted with dignity without consulting with villagers. I will just recognise this kind of project as lacking in dignity by using fraud, threats, and pressures on villagers to have their project implemented. The best way to conduct a development project by either companies or others is to have meaningful consultations with villagers. A remark that I would like to give is: do not conduct an undignified project. Even though they [companies] do not want to let all the villagers know [about projects], they should at least let the villagers who are more likely affected by the project.

Ok, I have asked you a lot of questions. So, would you like to add more? Do you have anything more to say?

I do not want to say more about this. But, finally, I would like to say that development projects should not be implemented through cooperation with only the government and local armed groups. Mostly, they have received permission from the government and conducted projects. And sometimes, they approach local armed groups to get permission from them and conducted the projects [without consultation with villagers]. I just don't want the process to go on like this; I would prefer a process where a project is done with villagers' consent and willingness. They

should never use their power to undermine villagers. It should never happen. They should value mutual respect. When they misuse their power, it really hurts villagers. They should respect villagers' voices. They should prioritise the safety of villagers. They should also focus on the villagers' future life and their well-being.

You have provided us with a lot of information so thank you so much for taking the time for this interview.

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

- “Toungoo Interview: U A--- 2017” (November 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Saw Bx---, January 2016” (February 2018)
- “Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh dam construction site in Toungoo” (August 2012)
- “Toungoo Field Report: Fighting grounds: land disputes, militarisation and development challenges in a time of ‘peace’, December 2015 to December 2016,” (April 2018)

