



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Interview**

September 25, 2017 / KHRG #17-33-A1-I1

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**Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, March 2017**

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*This Interview with Saw A--- describes events occurring in Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, during the period between 2012 and 2017, regarding a proposed hydropower dam project.*

- *The Italian-Thai Development PLC and the Burma/Myanmar Government Ministry of Electricity conducted a survey for a hydropower dam project in 2012 at Tanintharyi River which is 2.7 kilometres distance away from B--- village, Ler Mu Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The survey was conducted without local people being informed.*
  - *Villagers' farms and plantations which they work on for their livelihoods are situated near the project area of the dam. The proposed hydropower project will flood around 18 villages, as well as farm land and plantations. The road that they constructed also damaged the civilians' land and plantations.*
  - *GMS Power Public Company held a consultation meeting with some village leaders and community based organisations (CBO) staff in Tanintharyi Town Hall, Tanintharyi Township; which is very far from the dam project area, on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017. Some representatives of villagers from the dam project area could not attend the meeting because they did not have money for transport.*
  - *The Burma/Myanmar Government Minister of Electricity held a presentation about the benefits and negative consequences of the hydropower construction project. He said villagers do not have to worry about the damage of the dam project.*
  - *Villagers do not want the project to go ahead and they worry for their future and security, but they do not know how to stop the project or where they have to report this case to. Therefore, they want any organisations who work on behalf of civilians to give them knowledge and awareness about village agency (strategies) and where they should report the case to.*
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**Interview | Saw A--- (male, 28), B--- village, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (March 2017)**

*The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Mergui-Tavoy District on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017 and is presented below*

*translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received along with other information from Mergui-Tavoy District, including 12 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Christian

**Marital Status:** Single

**Occupation:** Farmer

**Position:** Villager

**Firstly, could you please tell me your name?**

Mostly, people call me Saw A---

**Where do you live? Which village, Township and District do you live in?**

I live in B--- village, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District.

**What is your marital status?**

I am single.

**We heard that the [hydropower] dam will be constructed in your community, could you please tell me the name of this dam?**

I do not know the name of the dam because people [dam project workers] have not informed villagers [about the project].

**Who is in charge of the dam construction project? Is it led by a company, government or any organisation?**

The company that came [to my community] the first time was Italian-Thai Development [ITD]<sup>3</sup>, in April 2012. The company that came the second time was GMS Power Public<sup>4</sup> Company [GMS] on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

**So there are two companies working [on this project], correct?**

Yes <sup>5</sup>

**What did the ITD Company and GMS Power Public Company do when they came to your community?**

The ITD Company [workers] came to my community without informing us [local civilians] about their project. For the dam construction project they conducted a survey by measuring the area, then they dug a hole in the ground and tested [the water and area] using their own technical knowledge. When the GMS workers came to my community, they held a consultation meeting with village leaders about whether they will come [to conduct the dam project] or not.

**How many members [ITD workers] came the first time?**

I do not accurately know the number of them, but I know there were many people who came on that day. They included Burma/Myanmar government staff who cooperated in the dam project and the Thai company representatives.

**Before they [ITD workers] came to your community, did they let the village head/administrator know about the dam project?**

They came to my community in 2012 without informing us about their project and conducted their survey.

**How about the company that came in 2017?**

They [GMS] invited the [Burma/Myanmar government] community administration leaders [to attend the consultation meeting] on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017. They said some organisations such as

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<sup>3</sup> Italian Thai Development Public Company Limited (ITD) is Thai company with investment in construction of highways, railway, dam, industry in Myanmar and other parts of Asia. ITD construction project have resulted in relocation, destruction of plantation and lack of compensation for villagers, see "[Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw E---, July 2012.](#)" March 2013. ITD also have investment in Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) which began as a joint venture with Max Myanmar Company. The Dawei SEZ has resulted in environment destruction, threat and forced eviction of villagers, imprisonment of villagers who refused to relocate, destruction of livelihood through plantation, farming and paddy damaged, forced to accept inadequate compensation. Improper facility at relocation site, see "[Dawei SEZ Fact Sheet.](#)" Mekong Watch, December 2016. Also see "[Proposed Hydropower Dam Project in Tanintharyi Region, Mergui-Tavoy District, 2017](#)", June 2017

<sup>4</sup> GMS Power Public Limited is a Thai private power company and has projects in China, the Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. For more information see KHRG report "[Proposed Hydropower Dam Project in Tanintharyi Region, Mergui-Tavoy District, 2017](#)", June, 2017

<sup>5</sup> It is not currently confirmed whether both ITD and GMS are working on this project bilaterally although many villagers believe that to be the case. KHRG is currently awaiting follow up information from researchers.

CBOs and CSOs [community based organisations and civil society organisations], which were based in that community, could attend the meeting and villagers wanted us to go on their behalf. Therefore, we [KHRG community member and CBO/CSO workers] attended that meeting. The meeting was held by GMS and a representative of the [Burma/Myanmar government's] Ministry of Electricity.<sup>6</sup>

**Did they [dam project workers] invite your [Karen National Union] community administration leaders to meet with them?**

They only informed the [Burma/Myanmar government] Township Administration leaders.

**What did they talk during that meeting?**

They talked about how they will construct the dam project, the benefits of the dam project and the voltage of electricity that the dam will produce. They said we [villagers] do not have to be worried about anything [the damage of the dam project]. I don't understand all of the processes that they presented about. Their presentation was on the voltage of electricity that the dam will produce, who in Tanintharyi Division will get electricity, how they will share the electricity to the foreign countries and finally how they will generate a lot of money quickly, which will be beneficial for the whole [Burma/Myanmar] country.

**Who said this, GMS [Power Public Company] workers or the Minister of Electricity?**

The [Burma/Myanmar government] representative of Ministry of Electricity said it. One Kaw La Wah<sup>7</sup> from Canada came with GMS but he did not say anything.

**Did they talk about the previous company ITD?**

Yes, they did. They presented about the result of the survey that was conducted by the previous company [ITD] and the number of the villages will be destroyed [flooded] by this dam project. One member from the Burma/Myanmar government participated with ITD on the survey [2012] and he also presented at this meeting [February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017].

**So he attended on behalf of the [Burma/Myanmar government] Ministry of Electricity, right?**

Yes

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on this meeting, see "[Proposed Hydropower Dam Project in Tanintharyi Region, Mergui-Tavoy District, 2017.](#)" July 2017.

<sup>7</sup> This is a colloquial Karen term referring to white person.



These photos were taken on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017 by community member in Mergui-Tavoy District. These photos show GMS Power Public Company signs during a consultation meeting in Tanintharyi City Hall, Tanintharyi Township with villagers. The Burma/Myanmar government representative of the Ministry of Electricity presented about the benefits, objectives and negative consequences of the hydropower dam project. [Photos: KHRG]

**Do you know his name?**

No, I don't.

**You know the name of the companies that will construct the dam, but you do not know the name of the leaders who organised the dam project, correct?**

Yes [that is correct].

**Which stage of the dam project has been completed? For example [did] they measure the area and clean [the vegetation on that] area?**

They [ITD] finished measuring the area [for the dam project] in 2012, but I do not know when they [GMS] will measure it again in 2017.

**Did they clean the vegetation and fence at the area where they will build the dam?**

No, they have not done it yet.

**So you just know that the dam will be constructed in this area, right?**

Yes, because that area was measured by the ITD Company in 2012. The GMS Power Company also talked about that area.

**So they [GMS] have not started the project yet. They held a consultation meeting about the dam project with you [villagers] correct?**

Yes

**How large will the site of the dam be, in acres?**

I don't know exactly the acreage of the area. They will construct the dam across the Ta Naw Th' Ree River.

**Could you please tell me the location of the dam project?**

The area of the dam project is at P'Yo Kwee deep pool, across the Ta Naw Th'Ree River. It is 2.7 kilometres away from B--- village, Ler Mu Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, Brigade #4. This area name is used by KNU administration.

**What is the name of the area according to the Burma/Myanmar government administration?**

They call it Na Ga Aaing deep pool, [it is located 2.7 kilometres away from] B--- village, Kaw Ma Pwin area, Tanintharyi Township, Tanintharyi Division.

**Are there any villages near the project area?**

There are villagers' farms and plantations, upon which they work for their livelihoods, which are near the dam project area. Villagers live 2.7 kilometres away from that area.



This photo was taken on February 8<sup>th</sup> 2017 by community member in Mergui-Tavoy District. This photo shows the villagers' betel nut plantation and Tanintharyi River where the proposed hydropower will be constructed. There are 18 villages, farm lands and plantations that will be destroyed by the dam project. [Photo: KHRG]

**What do the villagers plant on their land?**

They plant betel nut, durian and many other [fruit trees] on their plantations.

**What ethnicity are the B--- villagers, Karen or Bamar?**

They are all ethnic Karen villagers who live in B--- village and 17 other villages around the dam project area. There are no Bamar<sup>8</sup> ethnic people in that area.

**What is their religion?**

They are all Christians.

**What do they do for their livelihoods?**

They work on animal husbandry, farming on hills, plains and plantations and hunt [wild animals] for their livelihoods.

**What do you do for your livelihood?**

I work on a paddy farm and plantations and I also hunt [wild animals] for my livelihood.

**Are you Christian?**

Yes, I am.

**Now, we will return to issues related to the dam project. Are there negative impacts for civilians from the dam project?**

They [project workers] came to the dam project area with their cars and trucks and they measured the road [that they will travel] on [which is on] the villagers' land and plantations.

**What did they [dam project workers] damage?**

When they made their road, it damaged civilians' betel nut trees, durian trees, coconut trees and some other young fruit trees that villagers planted on their plantation.

**Is the area that they will construct the dam on villagers' land?**

Yes, that area is the villagers' land.

**These are all damages that are caused by the dam project, correct?**

Yes

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<sup>8</sup> The majority ethnic group in Myanmar, also known as ethnic Burmese or Burman.

**What are the negative consequences and dangers of the dam project?**

If the dam is constructed, there will be flooding over all the villages, including villagers' land, farms and plantations around that area.

**When they [dam project workers] presented about the benefits of the dam, did they also present about the damage [negative consequences] of the dam and the flooding to the civilians?**

Yes, they did. They said there will not be much damage. [Yet] villagers know the dam project will destroy [flood their land].

**If there is flooding of the civilians' villages what responsibility will they take for the civilians' livelihood and places to live?**

They said they will take responsibility for building churches/monasteries [in replacement for those that] will be destroyed by the dam project, but [so far] they have not done any preparation for us yet. They just said that and have not taken any action, so we do not believe them and we don't want it [the dam project].

**Do the villagers' want the dam project?**

No, they do not want it because the dam construction project will cause flooding. The flooding will drown all of their land and farms. Because of this, we will not have land to farm for our livelihoods.

**Did the villagers protest the dam project? If yes, how did they protect it?**

We do not accept or agree with the dam project, but we haven't protested it.

**Did you report to them that you did not accept the dam project in the [consultation] meeting to them?**

I did not report it, but some other villagers reported it and some of them wrote a letter [about how they do not want the dam]. The percentage of the people who do not want the dam project is higher [than the people who want it].

**Were the people who attended the meeting villagers or village leaders?**

There were some villagers and some village leaders who attended the meeting.



**Where did they hold the meeting?**

It was in Tanintharyi city hall, Tanintharyi Township. They held the meeting in the [Tanintharyi] town and some villagers were not able to attend the meeting because it was very far from them. They [would] have [had] to go by boat and by car to arrive at the meeting venue.



These photos were taken on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017 by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy District. These photos shows GMS Power Public Company holding a consultation meeting in Tanintharyi City Hall, Tanintharyi Township with villagers, however some representatives could not attend the meeting due to the distance from their village to the meeting site and the fact that some villagers did not know where to go for the meeting .  
[Photos: KHRG]

**Even though the villagers have concerns about the dam project, will they just wait and see [what will happen]?**

Yes, they do not want the dam project. If the dam project happens, they cannot do anything because they do not know what they have to do [to stop the project]. We are afraid [of the authorities].

**Did the villagers report this case to any organisations?**

They reported it to the CBOs and CSOs and said *“If you meet with the upper authority people, please inform them that we do not want the dam project for us”*. We do not know where we have to go and report this case [to stop the project].

**How many villages will be flooded by the dam project?**

They said there are 14 villages that will be flooded, but [I think] there are 18 villages that will be flooded.

**Is the place where the dam will be constructed close to your village?**

Yes, it is.

**Did the villagers who attended the meeting include the representatives of all the 18 villages?**

No, some village [representatives] could not reach the meeting because the meeting was held in a town which is very far from their villages. Some villagers [from certain villages] have never been to the town so they didn't know where to go for the meeting and some of them do not have money [to pay the taxi fee to get to the meeting]. Some villagers had money for the taxi fee and could attend the meeting.

**In the meeting did they tell you the date when they will start constructing the dam?**

No, they did not.

**Do the ITD Company and the GMS Power Company cooperate on the dam project?**

I understand that they are working together because the ITD Company collected surveys and measured the area for the GMS Power Company.

**Did they [GMS workers] explain their connection with ITD to you [villagers]?**

No, they did not. We just think that they [ITD and GMS] have connections because the Burmese [Ministry of Electricity representative] came with both ITD and GMS.

**What are your perspectives on the [potential] benefits and damage from the dam project to your community?**

I know that the dam project is a very dangerous thing and it will cause difficulties for us. Therefore, we don't want the dam project.

**Do you want to report anything else?**

I want to report that, even though we don't want the dam project, we do not know how to act on this [in order stop the project]. Therefore, what should we [villagers] do if the dam project occurs in our community? If it occurs, we will not be able to do anything and we just have to face it. Therefore, we need knowledge and awareness of how to go and tell them to [stop] the dam project, where we have to report this case to and how to appeal against them in order for the project to be ceased.

**Which organisation do you want to give you awareness?**

Any organisations can give us awareness.

**What is the perspective of KNU leaders and what do they do [for the village on the dam project]?**

As I am a villager, I do not know their perspectives, but I know that they never came to our community and told us about this [dam project].

**So the KNU leaders do not take any responsibility on this project and do not report anything about it, right?**

Yes, because they don't know anything about the project yet.<sup>9</sup>

**Do you think villagers can report this case to the KNU [government]?**

I think we can report it to them and inform them about this case.

**Do you believe that the KNU will take action and solve this case for you?**

I cannot predict that they will do it or not, but we can report it to them.

**Do you have any information about the dam that I did not mention? If you have, you can report it now.**

I don't have other information, but I would like to report that we [villagers] do not want the dam project. We don't know how to take action on this [stop the project], we are worried for our future livelihoods and we are in fear.

**Can KHRG use the information that you provided for us in the media, to share with other organisations who work for the local civilians so that the government will know about the case?**

You can use the information that I provided for you, but I worry that if the people [authority] know this information, then they will look for me and they will do something to me [which is a security concern].

**When we publish information or report we [KHRG] are always aware [of the security for] the people who provide information for us and their security concerns. We do not show**

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<sup>9</sup> In December 2016, KNU signed a Memorandum of Understanding allowing large scale development by certain companies in Tanintharyi Region. Civil society groups strongly disagreed with this Memorandum, see, "Tanintharyi Development Projects Must not Proceed without Transparency and Accountability" December 2016.

**people's names and addresses, or information relating to the people who provide information to us.**

I allow for the information that I provide to be used.

**Thank you**

Thank you

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

- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ta Naw Th’Ree Township, 2017” (July, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Dawei Township, February to May 2015,” (June 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Naw M---, October 2015,” (October 2016)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Muh Lah Township, November 2015 to January 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar,” (August 2016)

