



Interview

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Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Naw A---, August 2017

This Interview with Naw A--- describes events occurring in Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, during the period between 2010 and August 2017, including a proposed dam project and negative consequences of gold and lead mining.

- *The Italian-Thai Development PLC (ITD) and a Burma/Myanmar Government Ministry of Electricity administrator conducted assessments for a proposed hydropower dam project several times in 2011 at Tanintharyi River, B--- village, Ler Mu Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District without providing any information about the project to local villagers.*
 - *Villagers continue to oppose the ITD dam project because of the livelihood difficulties it would create by submerging many villagers' lands. Therefore, they urge NGOs, CBOs/CSOs, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government to support their effort to halt the dam project.*
 - *Naw A--- argues that 100,000 kyat (US \$73.38) for each betel nut tree damaged and around 5,000,000 kyat (US \$3,669.04) for each acre of land submerged by the potential dam project should be paid by the ITD Company as compensation. In addition, Naw A--- proposes that a further 10,000,000 kyat (US \$7,338.08) should be paid as remedy for every dam victim if the dam goes ahead.*
 - *Shwey Htun Company and GMS Public Power Company has been conducting a lead and gold mining project in Ta Naw Th'Ree River for more than one year after being granted permission from the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government. However, villagers are concerned about the negative health consequences of the companies allowing poisonous mercury to flow into the water that villagers drink.*
 - *Villagers and some CBOs/CSOs workers met with the owner of Shwey Htun Company, Ko Cho, in Dawei Town and compelled Ko Cho to drink the mercury contaminated river water next to the gold mining raft after he claimed that the water was drinkable..*
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Interview | Naw A--- (female, 41), B--- village, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (August 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 August 7th 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 Mergui-Tavoy District, including four other interviews, two incident reports, one situation update and 46 photographs.²

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

Ethnicity: Karen
Religion: Christian
Marital Status: Married
Occupation: N/A
Position: Sunday school teacher

I work for the Karen Human Rights Group [KHRG]. Can I record your voice and use the information that you will provide for me?

Yes, you can.

Can you please tell me your name and your address?

My name is Naw³ A---. I live in B--- village, Western Htee Mo Pwa area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District.

I received information about a proposed dam project which will be conducted in B--- village.⁴ Is this true? Can you please describe what you know about this issue?

Yes, it is true. Many villagers talk [have concerns] about the [proposed] dam project and say that the company will construct the dam [in their area]. In 2011, the Italian-Thai Development PLC⁵ [ITD] company came to [the dam project area] and conducted multiple assessments over several months. I saw that they tested the soil, stone and other materials [such as water], but local villagers do not know the current status of the dam project.



This photo was taken on August 7th 2017 in B--- village, T’Hpo area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photo shows interviewee Naw A--- discussing the potential impact of the proposed Italian-Thai Development PLC [ITD] dam project as well as the gold mining project in Ta Naw Th’Ree River conducted by GMS Power Public Company and Shwey Htun Company. She described the negative consequences that would be caused by the gold mining project and dam project in her area.
[Photo: KHRG]

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

³ Naw is a S’gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person’s name.

⁴ KHRG published a News Bulletin in June 2017 detailing villagers’ concerns and contestation of this hydropower dam project: “[Proposed Hydropower Dam Project in Tanintharyi Region, Mergui-Tavoy District, 2017](#)” June 2017. For additional information, please also see: “[Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, March 2017](#),” September 2017.

⁵ 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 projects 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](#),” KHRG, June 2017 and “[Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, March 2017](#),” September 2017.

If the dam is constructed in your area, what do you think would be the benefits and negative consequences of the dam project for villagers?

I do not think the dam project will benefit villagers, but rather, it will cause multiple negative consequences such as submerging the lands [farms, plantations, villages] we rely on. As we are native people from this area, we seasonally collect vegetables such as bamboo shoots and fruits from the forest for free. We would have to buy food after the dam is constructed. Even if we receive compensation money for our flooded land and plantations, we will face [livelihood] difficulties after we use up the money. We are ordinary villagers from rural areas and so we do not have the necessary knowledge to do business with the amount of [compensation] money we would receive. We would be somewhat supported while we still have [compensation] money, but we would then face major livelihood challenges when our money is spent.

If the company [ITD Company] were to pay compensation money for your damaged land and plantations, such as your betel nut plantations next to the proposed dam, how much compensation do you think they should pay?

I think they should pay 100,000 kyat [US \$73.38]⁶ per betel nut tree to us because betel nut trees give fruits annually and we also strongly desire to get fruits [earn income] from the trees that we planted. The price of land in the [Tanintharyi] Town is expensive; for example, a small area in which we can only build one house costs between 5,000,000 kyat [US \$3,669.04] and 10,000,000 kyat [US \$7,338.08]. Thus, even though we are in a rural area, they should pay us [land owners] at least 5,000,000 or 4,000,000 kyat [US \$3,669.04 or US \$2,935.23] per acre of land in addition to the remedy [additional financial support to redress villagers' suffering].

How much money do you think [ITD Company] should give you as remedy?

They should give us 10,000,000 kyat [US \$7,338.08] [as remedy for each dam victim].

Do the Karen National Union [KNU] government and the Burma/Myanmar government meet with villagers and investigate the dam project on behalf of villagers?

No, they do not do that [this year]. In the past, the ITD Company came to the proposed dam project area with a Burma/Myanmar government [electricity administrator] and the Tatmadaw in 2011 to conduct a dam project assessment.



These photos were taken on August 9th 2017 by a KHRG community member in Mergui-Tavoy District. These photos show a notice board and sign left by the Italian-Thai Development PLC from when they conducted a survey in B--- village, T'Hpo area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy

⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the December 13th 2017 official market rate of 1,363 kyat to US \$1.

District. The proposed dam project area is close to the villagers' houses and plantations. [Photos: KHRG]

What did they [Tatmadaw and Burma/Myanmar government] do?

They [Burma/Myanmar government and Tatmadaw] did not say anything [about the dam project], but the Tatmadaw acted as security guards for the ITD Company staff and Burma/Myanmar government representatives.

Did the Karen National Union [KNU] government say [do] anything [related to the dam project]?

No, they did not.

What about Non-Government Organisations [NGOs and CSOs] like Candle Light Group⁷? Did they investigate the dam project?

We are local villagers and we do not have knowledge about the strategy we should use in order to respond to the company. Thus, they met with us [villagers] and gave us awareness training.

Which organisations were responsible [for the awareness training]?

They are Candle Light Group, Ta K'Paw Group⁸ and Htee Moe Pwa Ta Oh Su Oh Kler [KESAN].⁹

What awareness [training] did they conduct?

They gave us awareness training and provided suggestions about how villagers can respond and use their agency to accept or reject dam projects conducted by companies or wealthy individual people.

What is your perspective and concerns regarding the dam project?

I believe that all villagers from the villages located near the Ta Naw Th'Ree River do not want the dam project [to be constructed across the Ta Naw Th'Ree River] because we know about the negative consequences of the dam project and the difficulties of being displaced. If we have to displace to other places, we will face difficulties in supporting our children's education and [collecting sufficient] food. When the dam is constructed, all villagers have to displace because our land will be flooded so I know that we would then face numerous difficulties. Therefore, I know that all villagers who live near the Ta Naw Th'Ree River, including myself, do not agree with the dam project.

How many villages will be submerged by the dam project?

They [company] said 12 villagers will be submerged: Mo Ro, Ta Moo, Ta Baw Klow, Kyaw Peh Khee, Ler Hpa Doh, Day Plaw, Pral Ku, P'Htoo Klo, Th'Ra Hta, Bu Tha Plaw, Dah Thway Kya and Naw Tay villages.

⁷ Candle Light Group is a local Karen Christian CBO that works on land issues

⁸ Ta K'Paw Group is also a local Karen Christian CBO that works on land issues.

⁹ The Karen Environmental and Social Network (KESAN) is a community-based, non-profit organisation that works to improve livelihood security and gain respect for indigenous people's knowledge and rights in Karen State. KESAN's mission is centered around development of sustainable rural livelihoods based on the principles of democratisation from below and "Free, Prior and Informed Consent." For more information, please see: <http://www.kesan.asia/>

Will the dam project only submerge villages? What about plantations?

Plantations will also be destroyed by the dam project.

I also received information about companies [GMS Power Public Company and Shwey Htun Company] and wealthy individuals who conducted gold and lead mining polluting the water. Is this correct?

Yes, it is correct. When local people conduct gold mining and use the mercury chemical as part of the gold mining process, they do not allow the mercury to flow into the river [Ta Naw Th'Ree River], but they [GMS Power Public Company and Shwey Htun Company] allow lots of the mercury chemical to flow into the river. As mercury is a poisonous chemical used in the gold mining process, it can cause diseases such as kidney failure if we drink water polluted by mercury. Nevertheless, many villagers drink water from the river and local villagers face many illnesses. Moreover, most villagers do not have money to access medical treatment at the hospital. People who have money went to the hospital for medical treatment, but some people died because they did not have money [to access treatment]. Additionally, the ships [of the Shwey Htun and GMS Power Public Company] that conduct gold and lead mining in the river have damaged the river; sand and stone banks created by the project have blocked the route taken by the villagers who travel in the river [by boat]. Thus, we have to pull our boats that are stuck in the sand and stone banks so our travelling time has increased from three hours to the entire day.



This photo was taken on April 2nd 2017 in Maw Hpo place, K'Hpo area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. This photo shows Shwey Htun Company's ships for gold and lead mining owned by Ko Cho. Shwey Htun Company has been cooperating with GMS Power Company to conduct a lead and gold mining project at Ta Naw Th'Ree River for more than one year. Villagers have reported concerns about poisonous mercury flowing into the river as chemical waste from this lead mining project and have said that the companies conducted gold mining without reporting information to the authorities. *[Photo: Local Villager]*

Do you see any people becoming sick because of the polluted water by the gold mining project?

I am not sure whether people [from my area] get illnesses by drinking polluted water [from the river] or not, but some patients were diagnosed with illnesses because of drinking polluted water when they went to see the doctor at the hospital in Myat Town.

So they fell sick by drinking the polluted water from the gold mining, is this correct?

Yes, this is correct because there was no mercury chemical in the past.

Does the gold mining project provide any benefits for villagers?

There are no benefits for villagers.

Which authorities did they get permission from [to conduct the gold mining project]?

They got it [permission] from the Karen National Union [KNU] leaders because the KNU Mergui-Tavoy District Vice Secretary P'Doh Thwoo Yeh talked about the gold mining project in the [consultation] meeting that I attended in April 2017. He said that he granted permission to [the

company to] conduct gold mining so the project should not be disrupted by anyone. Nevertheless, civilians are aware of the negative consequences of gold mining so they submitted complaint letters [to both the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government].

Did the Non-Government Organisation [NGOs] and CBOs/CSOs cooperate with villagers to stop the [gold mining] project?

Yes, they did. They [NGOs, CBO/CSO and villagers] met with the company head once in Dawei Town. They asked the company head, “*Where do you get drinking water while you are conducting gold mining?*” He replied, “*I just drink the water beside the gold mining raft. I drank the dirty water from the [Ta Naw Th’Ree] River.*” As he is in a high-level position at the company, he probably does not drink the water from the river in his daily life, but he said that he drinks the same water from the river as the villagers. Thus, they brought a bottle of water from the river and gave it to him to drink; they compelled him to drink it against his will.

What is the company and leader’s name?

I don’t know the company’s name, but the owner’s name is Ko Cho.

Where does he live?

I don’t know. He is Chinese [from China].

What is the company situation now? Are they [company workers] still conducting gold mining?

I think that they have postponed the project temporarily.¹⁰

Have you received any information about whether they will cease the project?

I don’t know. I do not travel there [gold mining area].

Do you have any more information to add? If you have, you can report it now.

Villagers from the Htee Mo Pwa [Ta Naw Th’Ree] River side do not want the gold mining project to continue. We want NGOs, CBOs/CSOs, the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government to collaborate with villagers and stop both the dam project and the mining project. Villagers rely on their land, farms and plantations so if we lose them, we will face serious difficulties and will possibly become the servants of the people [who have money and land]. Therefore, we wish for the NGOs, CBOs/CSOs, KNU and Burma/Myanmar government to be with us [on our side].

Do you have anything else to say?

No.

Good morning. Thank you.

Good morning.

Further background reading on the situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

¹⁰ According to the most recent update received by KHRG in November 2017, the gold mining project restarted in November 2017.

- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: K’Ser Doh Township, June to September 2017” (December, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Hpuh A---, January 2017” (October, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, March 2017” (September, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, February 2017” (September, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, February 2017” (September, 2017)

Mergui/Tavoy (Thanintharyi) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)