



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, June to August 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the period between June and August 2017, including education, healthcare, villagers' livelihood, land issues, development and military activity.

- *In Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, the main educational challenges faced by rural villagers are difficulties in accessing education, low quality of education due to insufficient school materials and a changing examination system, as well as a lack of recognition of KNU schools and limited opportunity to teach Karen language.*
 - *Villagers in rural areas of Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District faced health challenges due to a lack of health services and medical supplies, insufficient clinics and health workers as well as expensive medical fees.*
 - *The main livelihood challenges that rural villagers in Thandaunggyi Township faced are insufficient harvest crops due to climate change and land confiscation by the Bu Yin Naung military school, Thandaung Peace Group, Ministry of Industry No (1), and several business companies including Asia World Company and Kaung Myanmar Aung Company.*
 - *Villagers were not consulted when development projects were implemented on or near their lands, such as the construction of electrical poles near villagers' lands by the Ye Thu Ya Company.*
 - *The Tatmadaw conducted several military trainings in June and July 2017, that negatively impacted villagers' plantations and animals, which were damaged or hit by bullets during military training. Civilian trust in the Tatmadaw also decreased due to ongoing land confiscations as well as Tatmadaw soldiers not being held accountable for their actions.*
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Situation Update | Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (June to August 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in August 2017. It was written by a community member in Toungoo 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 along with other information from Toungoo District, including two incident reports, nine interviews, 186 photographs and four video clips.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. 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.

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.

This situation update describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the period between June and August 2017, including, education, healthcare, villagers' livelihood, land issues, development and military activity.

Education

Of the 158 high school students from the high school in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District who took the matriculation exam for the 2016-2017 academic year [issued by the Department of Myanmar Board of Examination under the Education Ministry] only 12 students passed. Meanwhile, of the 170 high school students from the Leik Tho high school in Leik Tho Town who took the 2016-2017 matriculation exam, only 13 high school students passed. According to a female high school teacher in Thandaunggyi Township, the number of the high school students who passed this exam has decreased compared to the previous year.

One reason why so many high school students failed the matriculation exam is the recent change to the Myanmar national education system. Previously, it was compulsory for every student to pass the [annual end of year] exam and therefore advance to the next grade [even if they were unqualified]. As a result, even some students in Standard 10 lack basic writing and reading skills. Other difficulties for students taking the exam include the large differences between the examination questions which were formed by Department of Myanmar Examinations and the school curriculums used by many students. A local female teacher [in Toungoo District] said that both the education system and the school curriculums have always changed whenever a new government came to power. Thus, students' qualifications are now being more carefully tested. Previously, kindergarten students were taught how to read and how to write. However, kindergarten students were not taught how to write after 2016 [due to the curriculum change]. Therefore, incoming first grade students do not have basic writing skills because they did not learn those skills in their kindergarten class.

Construction began for a [new Burma/Myanmar government] primary school in Leik Pyar Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District in 2015 but has not yet been completed. Local students have instead had to study at the old school in Leik Pyar Gyi village, which was built by the village community. The old school is heavily damaged and is insecure and unsafe for local students because it is vulnerable to heavy rain and strong wind.

Local schools in some rural villages [in Thandaunggyi Township] are safely constructed but in some of those schools, there are many school teachers but only a few local students. Therefore, the local school teachers divide into groups and alternate taking responsibility to teach students; only two teachers teach the students every month while the other school teachers stay in their houses [to rest].

There are 36 households and approximately 30 students in Lay Eain Su village, Than Moe Taung village tract, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. However, there is no school in this village so local students travel and study at a school in Hto Bo Gyi village which is around two miles away from Lay Eain Su village. Those students who attend the school in Hto Bo Gyi village are primary students and have to cross both a stream and a vehicle road when they walk to the school. Therefore, [villagers] are worried for these students [safety]. This year [2017], due to heavy rain, the stream between Lay Eain Su village and Hto Bo Gyi village was flooded, preventing students from going to school. In addition, [villagers are] concerned about car accidents as they cannot transport their children to school every day.

For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

Most primary students attending school are provided with one school uniform, six pencils and six notebooks. Middle school students and high school students, however, do not receive any support. Non-government organisations [NGOs] also provided one dozen notebooks to students in some villages but students in other villages do not receive any NGO support. This year, the number of students increased but many students' parents could not support their children fully due to financial hardship. In addition, there are insufficient textbooks for local students. As a result, students who fail their class exams and do not advance to the next level do not receive textbooks whereas students who pass their class exams are prioritised to receive these textbooks. Many of the students who have to use the old textbooks cannot use them any longer because either the old textbooks have been lost or they have been heavily damaged. Another challenge for students is that in 2015, [the Burma/Myanmar government] hired temporary unqualified teachers in order to teach students in rural areas in Thandaunggyi Township. Some of those teachers have only completed Standard 9; these teachers do not receive a salary but instead are given a stipend of 3,000 kyat³ [US \$2.22] per day.

There are many subjects taught at school but the Karen language is not allowed to be taught during the school period. The Karen language is allowed to be taught before the school day starts at 8:00 am or after school between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm. It [Karen language] is allowed to be taught for only one hour per day. Although the Burma/Myanmar government allows the Karen language to be taught, it is not allowed to be taught during the school day. Local villagers are responsible for finding Karen teachers who can teach the Karen language. Some of the Karen teachers who teach the Karen language receive a salary of 60,000 kyat [US \$44.40] per month. Some of the Karen teachers do not receive a salary but villagers collect money from the village community in order to support those teachers. Karen teachers who teach the Karen language in Karen National Union [KNU] controlled areas receive 6,000 baht⁴ [US \$183.36] per year which is provided by the Karen Education Department [KED]. In August 2017, many school teachers in many different places have been replaced. Changes in teaching assignments have caused some school teachers from towns to move to rural areas and some school teachers from rural areas to move to towns.

If the number of the students is between 50 and 100, a post primary school [after Standard 5] should be constructed for them. Most of the primary schools in the mountainous areas are constructed by the NGOs, the Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC] and the Karen Women Empowerment Group [KWEG]. However, there are no schools in some areas. Local schools in the KNU controlled areas are not officially recognised by the Burma/Myanmar government. The Burma/Myanmar government has not constructed any school in the KNU controlled areas. Therefore, some villages in the KNU controlled areas build bamboo schools and hire local village teachers because they really want their children to be educated. Then, they hire local teachers in their villages in order to teach their children at those schools. In addition, they also have to buy pens, pencils and schoolbooks in order for the children to study. These bamboo schools are primary schools. If the local students complete their primary school education, they can go on to study at the KNU established Hto Lwee Wah high school in Toungoo District.

There is a local middle school established by the KED in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. More than 200 students study at this school. Some of the students cannot attend the Burma/Myanmar government [high] school due to financial and livelihood issues and some students are the children of displaced villagers and they had to flee their villages before the ceasefire agreement [2012]. However, the local students have to attend the Hto Lwee Wah high school after they finish the middle school. The middle school in Thandaunggyi Township and the Hto Lwee Wah School were established by the KNU-KED but these two schools are not

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the December 21st official market rate of 1,351 kyat to US \$1.

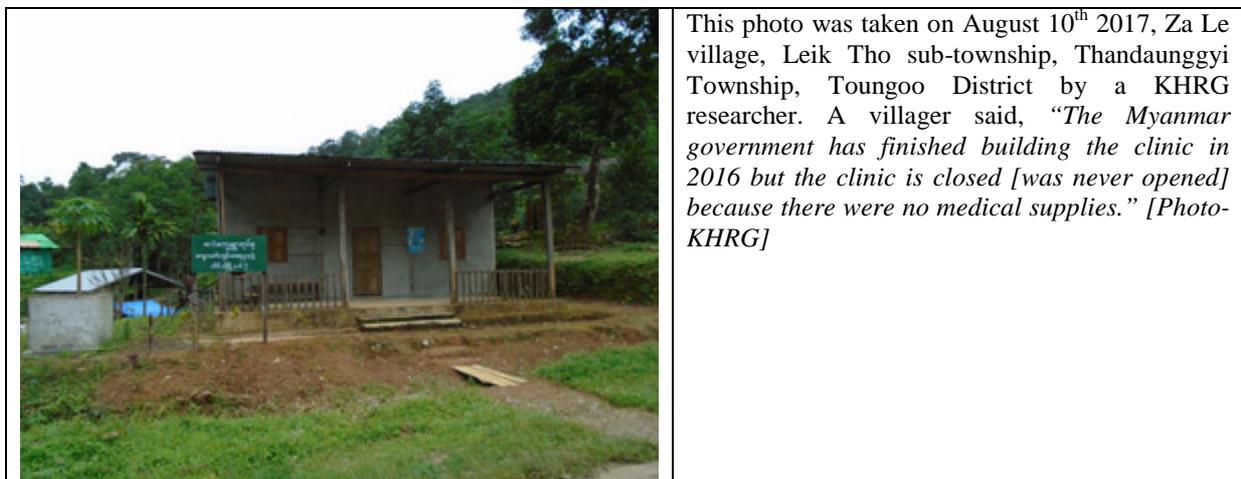
⁴ All conversion estimates for the Thai Baht in this report are based on the December 21st official market rate of 32.72 baht to US \$1.

recognised by the Burma/Myanmar government. That is why it is difficult for the students who graduate from Hto Lwee Wah high school to continue their further studies.

Healthcare

Regarding the healthcare situation in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, most of the local villagers face health issues due to an outbreak of seasonal flu [or disease] and have cough and running nose. Most of the villagers who suffer from this seasonal flu are young children and adults. Most of the young children are taken to Thandaung Myo Thit hospital to receive medical treatment. Some of the villagers who suffer from seasonal flu went to hospitals to get medical treatment whereas other villagers went to local clinics run by local medics.

When sick villagers go to the hospital, they only receive pills and other basic medicine and they were compelled to buy medicine from the pharmacy which was not provided by the hospital. There are clinics in some villages but there is no medicine in other clinics. Consequently, it is difficult for health workers to provide medical treatment to sick villagers when they are on duty.



There are only four hospitals in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. There is one hospital in Baw K’lee Town, one hospital in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, one Thandaunggyi Township hospital and one hospital in Leik Tho Town. A few clinics were recently constructed in some villages in Thandaunggyi Township but medicine was not provided to those clinics. Health workers from Mother and Child Care [a Burma/Myanmar government healthcare association] regularly went to rural areas either once a week or bi-monthly in order to give vaccinations [to children and mothers] but they did not look after sick villagers because they went back to their places [in town] immediately after giving vaccinations. Many local pregnant women did not receive either medicine or health awareness information.

There are no doctors who deliver babies [obstetricians] in rural areas. Instead, local pregnant women rely on local midwives to help them deliver babies. Villagers have to go to hospitals to get medical treatment when they are sick as there are no hospitals or clinics in their villages. However, it is difficult for villagers to go to hospitals because the distance between villages and hospitals is very far. Therefore, villagers cope by getting medical treatment from local health workers who lack skills. Sick villagers whose condition would normally improve after one or two days [if they were to receive medical treatment from hospitals] actually only improve their condition at least one week after receiving medical treatment from local health workers. There is no pharmacy in rural areas so villagers must buy medicine from Thandaunggyi Town and Toungoo Town.

Although villagers wanted to go to the hospital, the medical fees are too expensive for them to pay and it costs more than they expect. Therefore, they seek medical treatment from local

health workers in their villages instead of going to hospitals in towns. The Karen Baptist Convention provided basic healthcare training to villagers who live in mountainous areas so those villagers have gained some knowledge and skills. Afterwards, those villagers went to help sick villagers by providing pills and basic medical treatment. Although they [villagers who attended basic health training] tried to help villagers, many villagers still requested medicine from their houses because there is no clinic in their villages. Some sick villagers reported that it was very difficult for them to travel to the hospital in town from mountainous areas. Moreover, they have to bring two members of their family in order to get medical treatment from hospital. They [sick villagers] also reported that they have to buy medicine from the hospital.



This photo was taken on August 13th 2017, Thandaung Myo Thit Hospital, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District by a KHRG researcher. A villager went to the hospital to get medical treatment. Most of the patients are children who suffered from seasonal flu. *[Photo-KHRG]*

The KNU medical unit, the Karen Department of Health and Welfare [KDHW] and Backpack Health Worker Team [BPHWT]⁵ all operate [mobile health units] in the KNU controlled areas. Therefore, villagers can receive medical aid from them whenever they are available at different villages. At other times, villagers must carry sick villagers to clinics in order to receive medical treatment because there are clinics and health workers in the KNU-KNLA army camps and its' militarised areas. If villagers are not seriously sick, health workers just give them pills and they [sick villagers] return home. Although the KNU has a [mobile] medical unit and a clinic, it is insufficient for local villagers because there are only a few health workers in the [mobile] medical unit and clinics. Thus, they are not able to go to every village and provide [sufficient] medical aid. Moreover, they [mobile medical unit] have to provide medicine to villagers so it causes problems when the KNLA soldiers are sick [due to insufficient medicine].

The KNU [mobile] medical unit travelled to several villages and provided medical treatment to elder villagers and women as well other villagers and students who are sick. The KNU medical unit also gave medicine and vaccinations to local students. They [KNU medical unit] went to provide healthcare services in Maung Nwe Gyi village and planned to go to Nan Chan Kwin village but Light Infantry Battalion [LIB]⁶ #599 increased the number of active Tatmadaw security guards along the road from Maung Nwe Gyi village to Nan Chan Kwin village. Therefore, the KNU [mobile] medical unit was unable to treat villagers in Nan Chan Kwin village. As a result, those villagers were not able to access healthcare services. The KNU [mobile]

⁵ Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is an organisation that provides health care and medical assistance to displaced civilians inside Burma. KHRG reports that cite BPHWT include "Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe Township (February to April 2016)" and "Thaton Township, Thaton District (January to June 2015)."

⁶ A Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up to date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

medical unit also sometimes does not have sufficient medicine for villagers. Therefore, villagers have to find their own means to buy the medicine that they need.



This photo was taken on June 23rd 2017 at the sub-middle school of Maung Nwet Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. KNU health workers were traveling around KNU controlled area and providing healthcare services and medicine. They also offered vaccines for the sub-middle school students. [Photo: KHRG]

Livelihood

Most of the local villagers in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District work on plantations to secure their livelihoods. Some villagers work on rubber plantations and some of the villagers work on seasonal plantations, including cardamom plantations, betel nut plantations, betel leaf plantations, coffee plantations, durian plantations and dog fruit⁷ plantations. Villagers reported that they are dependent on good weather in order to regularly get fruits from these plantations.

Villagers reported that the crop harvest rate was three times lower this year compared to last year due to climate change. In 2017, the price of durian and dog fruit is higher [compared to previous years] so villagers tried to grow and sell durian and dog fruits and in order to secure their livelihood. However, some villagers had difficulty securing their livelihoods because they were not able to grow a lot of dog fruits and durian fruits this year. Therefore, [some] villagers tried to borrow money from cardamom merchants in advance in order to support their family's livelihoods, pay expenses such as funeral costs and pay their children's school fees. Although villagers promised to pay back the money that they borrowed after the cardamom plantation harvest, the cardamom merchants refused to lend any money to the villagers. This caused difficulties for villagers to secure their livelihoods. According to one of the cardamom merchants, he cannot lend money to villagers because the cardamom trade is uncertain due to the unstable political situation in 2017 and because fighting is still breaking out along on the border.

Some of the villagers earned a living in Thandaunggyi Township by foraging and selling bamboo shoots during the rainy season. Villagers have to carry those bamboo shoots from the forest to the village and are only able to transport one or two bamboos per day. They can transport approximately 20 viss [32 kg]⁸ of bamboo shoots for every trip. However, the price of one viss [1.6 kg] of bamboo shoots ranges from 120 to 180 kyat [US \$0.09 to \$0.13] so it is difficult for these villagers to secure their livelihoods. In particular, villagers from many villages in Leik Tho Town who work on dog fruit plantations have had to supplement their incomes by foraging bamboo shoots in the forest and cutting and selling bamboos. Women also foraged bamboo shoots in order to meet their livelihood challenges.

Villagers mainly rely on the land because they grow seasonal plantations in order to support their livelihoods. Villagers have owned these lands since their great grandparents were alive and have been working on these lands for a long time. Since 2000, the Tatmadaw have started to confiscate both cultivated lands and uncultivated lands that villagers own. The Tatmadaw

⁷ Dog fruit, also known as jengkol, is a bean containing sulphur and a mildly toxic amino acid. It is native to Southeast Asia and is commonly eaten with rice and fish paste.

⁸ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg or 3.52 lb.

have not returned those lands to villagers. It is very difficult for villagers to secure their livelihoods without land. Villagers in Leik Tho Town cooperated with local NGOs to often request Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #603 to return the confiscated land to villagers. However, LIB #603 has not returned the confiscated land to villagers.⁹

Many villagers' lands from 12 village tracts in Leik Tho Town were taken and transferred to the Mait Tha Lin Taung reserved forest; villagers did not have legal documents for these lands. Therefore, they faced many livelihood challenges after their lands were taken. In 1998, in order to undertake elephant yam plantation projects and other long term plantation projects, 1,300 acres of villagers' land in Than Moe Taung village tract, Leik Tho town was requested from the Land Measurement Department by U¹⁰ Paing (a business man and former manager of Department of Agriculture), Sai Maung Eh (a business man who lives in Thandaunggyi Township), former Tatmadaw officers and their close friends; however, they did not come to clear unwanted plants and wastes in those land areas. In 2017, business people (former government officers) and the Thandaung Peace Group¹¹ went to the Thandaunggyi Township Land Measurement Department to meet with staff from the Land Measurement Department, who showed them a map of land area that they requested. In July 2017, they [business people and Thandaung Peace Group] went to Lay Eain Su village, Than Moe Taung village tract, Thandaunggyi Township to measure the land area that they confiscated. These land issues caused problems for villagers.

In addition, Ministry of Industry No.(1) confiscated villagers' land in A---village, Sauk Pin Chaung village tract, Toungoo Township in 1996 in order to build a reservoir on the confiscated land. However, no compensation was provided to local villagers. In 2014, local villagers opened the case in a court in order to reclaim their ancestral land and won the case. Nevertheless, in 2017, Ministry of Industry No.(1) sued villagers and reopened the land case in court. The villagers did not win the [reopened land] case.

Tatmadaw soldiers from Bu Yin Naung military school in Thandaunggyi Township confiscated villagers' land in 2016 and set up signboards on the confiscated land.¹² Local villagers have tried to request for their lands to be returned in many different ways but the Tatmadaw have not returned the land to villagers. The Tatmadaw are now growing long term plantations on villagers' lands. Additionally, they fire heavy weapons as practice and use villagers' land as target practicing areas.¹³ This causes problems for villagers to support their livelihoods.

⁹ In 2014, Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #603 confiscated over 200 acres of villagers' land without providing any compensation.. See "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July 2014.](#)" December 2014.

¹⁰ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

¹¹ *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh*, or 'Thaundaung Peace Group', is a local militia located in Toungoo District. The group split from the Karen National Union in 1997 and was initially led by Khe R'Mun. Reports from the field claim that they are currently led by General Bo Than Myin, have around 300 troops stationed at Leik Tho Base (Battalion Commander Bo Kyaw Win), in Leik Tho Township, and an additional 40 soldiers at Pya Sa Khan Base (Battalion Commander Khin Maung Lwin), near Thandaung town. It has been reported that they control a number of different illicit operations, including gambling and black market car licencing. They are also allegedly employed as security personnel by local companies and wealthy individuals involved in logging and mineral resource extraction, in addition to having direct involvement in the lumber and mineral business. *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh* should not be confused with *Nyein Chan Yay A'pweh*, which is occasionally translated as Peace Group but refers to the Karen Peace Army (KPA), aka the Karen Peace Force (KPF). Nor should it be conflated with *Aye Chan Yay*, another small militia group also operating in Toungoo District that the Thaundaung Peace Group has come into conflict with. It is also distinct from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council, which is also sometimes translated as 'Peace Group'.

¹² KHRG has previously reported on this land confiscation by Bu Yin Naung military school in "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2015 to January 2016.](#)" KHRG July 2016.

¹³ KHRG has previously reported on this military training by Bu Yin Naung military school in "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, November 2016 to March 2017.](#)" KHRG November 2017.

Local villagers from Na Ga Mauk village, Yay Owe Sin village and Hto Bo village in Na Ga Mauk village tracts and many villages from Doe Thoung village tract in Thandaunggyi Township mostly work on plantations to secure their livelihoods. However, Asia World Company¹⁴ and Kaung Myanmar Aung Company¹⁵ have recently confiscated many villagers' lands. In 2016, Tatmadaw soldiers from Bu Yin Naung military school confiscated 581 acres of villagers' land in Thandaunggyi Township. Villagers did not receive any compensation for their lands which were confiscated and it has become difficult for villagers to secure their livelihoods.

After the Kaung Myanmar Aung Company confiscated villagers' land, it caused a land dispute and therefore Kaung Myanmar Aung Company and local villagers sued each other. Some of the villagers work on banana plantations to earn a living and therefore can only earn income by selling bananas. However, instead of using their income to pay for family expenses, they are spending their income on travel costs to reach the court.

Local villagers did not have any land left to work on after their land was confiscated. Thus, they left their villages and migrated to other areas to find jobs. They have to cut bamboo, do logging and work as daily labourers in order to survive. Some of the young women had to go to towns to look for jobs and had to work as waitresses in tea shops or as housemaids in other people's houses. They have to support their families [who stay in the villages] with their monthly wages. Some of the villagers have to work as daily labourers such as plantation clearers, carpenters and gas station workers.

Some of the villagers went to look for jobs in areas far from their homes. Due to many different reasons, they are not currently able to return to their villages and also cannot send money back to their families. As a result, families in other villages face financial problems and cannot afford to send their children to school anymore. Due to these financial issues, many children have had to suspend their educations even though they know that education is very important for them. These are the negative consequences of livelihood challenges.

Land issue

Local villagers in Thandaunggyi Township and Htantabin Township, Toungoo District confronted many land issues because their lands were confiscated by business companies, Tatmadaw and other individuals.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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 for trespassing, [“Toungoo Interview: Htantabin Township, November 2015,”](#) June 2017, KHRG.

The lands that Bu Yin Naung military troops [Tatmadaw] confiscated are local villagers' ancestral lands. Villagers grow long term plantations on these lands and mainly rely on these lands because they work on these long term plantations to support their families. Therefore, they cooperated with land policy experts and took suggestions and advice from people who know the land law policy in order to get back land or prevent land from being confiscated. Tatmadaw from the Bu Yin Naung military army camp confiscated villagers' land for use as target practicing areas and have planted new rubber plantations on the confiscated land. However, no compensation was provided to local villagers, causing them to face severe livelihood challenges.



This photo was taken on August 2nd 2017 in B---village, Sauk Pin Chaung village tract, Toungoo Township, Toungoo District by a KHRG researcher. Soldiers from Ba Yin Naung Army military army camp [Tatmadaw] confiscated the villagers' ancestral land and gardens. The villagers were trying to speak out to reclaim their lands during this meeting with U Myint Soe from the Independent Labour Union. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Development project

Road construction projects and electricity access projects were conducted in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC] provided a budget of 50,000,000 kyat [US \$37,000.00] for a villager-led road construction project to construct a three feet wide concrete road from C---village to D---village, in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District with permission from the Burma/Myanmar government. Local villagers are responsible for constructing this road but they lack experience and knowledge about road construction mechanisms and technology. Therefore, a Norwegian Refugee Council member at the local level made a contract [with villagers and government officials] to take responsibility for this road construction project. Villagers have to supply their energy and effort in order to construct this road. Some of the villages received daily wages but some of the villagers did not receive any payment.

Villagers requested for a meeting to discuss the budget in detail [before the project was implemented] but no meeting was held. Villagers were ordered by the Thandaunggyi Township administration office to construct the three feet wide concrete road which is 300 feet long at D---village and villagers had to accept the budget of the road construction project by the order of Township administration office. However, the cost of the road construction was greater than the amount of the money that villagers received in the budget. This has caused difficulties for villagers to pay for the road construction project.

YTY [Ye Thu Ya] Company is responsible for providing 24/7 access to electricity in Toungoo Town and Leik Tho Town, Thandaunggyi Township. The YTY Company constructed the electricity poles in local villagers' rubber plantations and betel nut plantations along the route from Toungoo Town and Leik Tho Town. Therefore, several villagers' plantations were cut down but those villagers do not know whether the company will arrange any compensation for them. In some villages, village heads have taken on the responsibility to construct the electricity poles. The YTY Company came to construct electricity poles in Sate Kone village, Than Moe Taung village tract, Thandaunggyi Township and brought electricity poles, electricity wires and power

transformers. However, villagers were not consulted when the electricity poles were constructed near their houses, which is very dangerous for villagers. The YTY Company's manager, Ko Thi Ha, only negotiated and informed the village administration committee about their activities. Besides, they [YTY Company] cut down villagers' coconut trees and dog fruit trees when they constructed the electricity poles. No compensation has been paid to villagers.



This photo was taken on August 10th 2017, in Kaw Bat Chan village and Than Moe Taung village, Than Moe Taung village tract, Leik Tho Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District by a KHRG researcher. In the route between Kaw Bat Chan village and Than Moe Taung village, many villagers' lands and garden were used for the construction of electricity poles. The villagers did not receive any compensation for the affected plants in their garden. Moreover, the villagers worried about the consequence or changes [caused by similar development initiatives] in the future. [Photo: KHRG]

Regarding development in Taw Pyar Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, local villagers requested the Burma/Myanmar government to provide them with access to electricity. The Ministry of Electricity from the Burma/Myanmar government provided electricity poles and electricity wires to local villagers but villagers have to buy power transformers as well as electricity poles and wires for small roads themselves. The power transformer costs 22,000,000 kyat [US \$16,280.00]. In order to be able to buy the power transformer, local villagers collected 100,000 kyat [US \$74.00] from each house in the village and raised 16,000,000 kyat [US \$11,840.00]. As there are only 160 households in the village the villagers did not raise enough money to buy the power transformer and thus, they borrowed 20,000,000 kyat [US \$14,800.00] from the Burma/Myanmar government at a rate of 5% interest.



This photo was taken on July 25th 2017 in Taw Pya Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District by a KHRG researcher. In order to be able to use electricity in the village, villagers collected the money from the community to buy a power transformer which can produce 200 watt and costs 22,000,000 kyats (US \$16,280.00). They started using it on July 17th 2017 but the electrical current short circuited the following day. The villagers reported this problem to the Department of Electric Power but they [Department of Electric Power] did not come to monitor what happened. The villagers also are unsure about the exact details of what actually happened. [Photo: KHRG]

Military activity

The camp leader of LIB #599 army camp from Military Operations Command¹⁶ [MOC], based in C---village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, set up frontline army camps in D---

¹⁶ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

village and Leik Pyar K'lay village as well as Bu Yin Naung military school. Infantry Battalion¹⁷ [IB] #19 have to take responsibility for security at frontline areas in Taw Pyar Gyi village, Shwe Nyaung Pin village, Set Chauk Mine and Thandaung Myo Thit.

On June 21st 2017, 300 military trainees and the military vice trainer from Bu Yin Naung military school fired heavy weapons as practice in E---village, Doe Thoung village tract, Toungoo Township. The lands that they use as their military target practicing area are local villagers' lands. They [Tatmadaw] did their military trainings on June 22nd and June 23rd 2017. On June 26th 2017, Tatmadaw from Southern Command Headquarters used two military helicopters for practice and fired from the helicopters into villagers' plantations in E---village. Some villagers' animals were hit by the helicopter gunfire. The firing practice from the helicopters took two days to complete. On June 29th 2017, the Tatmadaw transported rations with ten military cars from Toungoo to Thandaungyi and transported rations once a week or bi-monthly afterwards.

On July 7th 2017, Tatmadaw from Bu Yin Naung military school fired their artillery weapons in F--village, Sauk Pin Chaung village tract, Toungoo Township. When they [Tatmadaw] were practicing, the Tank Battalion brought military cars with machine guns to the target practicing area. The area where they were firing weapons is located on villagers' rubber plantations. Therefore, [some] villagers' rubber plantations were cut down [cleared and damaged] by the Tatmadaw. Villagers' gardens were also damaged as a result of the target practice.

On July 13th 2017, 250 military trainees from Bu Yin Naung military school came to F---village, Sauk Pin Chaung village tract, Toungoo Township and practiced firing their artillery weapons. However, villagers were not informed in advance and people from the neighbouring villages did not inform F--- villagers on time. Consequently, some of the villagers working in their plantations were afraid that they would be shot so they left their animals and returned to their home villages.



These photos were taken [of a villager's pictures] on August 2nd 2017 in F--- village, G---village, H---village, Sauk Pin Chaung village tract, Toungoo District. [The photo on the left shows an unexploded mortar left on villagers' land. The photo on the right shows the rubber plantation where trees were cut and damaged during the training]. Ba Yin Naung military troops confiscated villagers' lands to use as a military training ground for heavy weapons shooting [training]. From July 12th 2017 to July 15th 2017, the military training soldiers started shooting in the plantations [on the confiscated land]. Moreover, they also cut the rubber trees. The mortar shells and unexploded mortars were left [on the ground] and not collected. Therefore, many villagers were frightened and scared. Many rubbers trees were also cut without providing any compensation. Many villagers have lost many of their rubber plantations. [Photos: KHRG]

¹⁷ An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up to date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

After Lance Corporal Aung Min Naing from Bu Yin Naing military school in Bu Yin Naing camp town let one of his soldiers borrow his car, the soldier drove his car and caused a car accident and hit a villager. However, the soldier did not negotiate with villagers about the compensation and indeed, used his power to threaten the villagers.

Incidents such as this cause many villagers (including this KHRG researcher) to believe that the Tatmadaw do not care about villagers and civilians. If they violate villagers' rights, they do not take any accountability for what they have done. Villagers are not satisfied with what they did to villagers.



This photo was taken on July 22nd 2017 in Thandaung Myo Thit town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District by a local villager. The car accident occurred in Taw Pya Gyi village, when the private car of a Tatmadaw soldier (part of the Bu Yin Naing military army) crashed into villagers, houses, bikes and cars. [Photo: KHRG]

Researcher's analysis

Villagers in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District mainly work on plantations and gardens to support their livelihood. They do not have any legal land documents. When their lands were confiscated, it was a challenge for villagers to reclaim their land because the Burma/Myanmar government did not come and provide land awareness workshops, effectively communicate the details of the land law policy, or clearly recognise or register villagers' lands.

Regarding development projects, although development projects directly affect local villages, villagers were not consulted. [Anyone who implements development projects] only needs permission from the Burma/Myanmar government to begin conducting development projects in local villages. This has caused many challenges for villagers. Positive development projects should be implemented instead of negative development projects.

Villagers require access to education, access to healthcare and community development. However, the Burma/Myanmar government, individual companies and local authorities should first study [what would be beneficial for villagers] and then discuss with villagers what to do according to villagers' needs.

Moreover, the Tatmadaw continued to confiscate villagers' lands. As a result, villagers have faced many livelihood issues. Villagers lack trust and support in Tatmadaw. I [KHRG researcher] want to conclude that villagers will only support and trust the Tatmadaw if Tatmadaw are held accountable and take responsibility for what they have done.

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 Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, November 2016 to March 2017," (November 2017)

- “Toungoo Interview: Naw Ka---, October 2016,” (June 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, January 2016,” (February 2017)
“Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, November 2015,” (February 2017)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)