



Interview

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Dooplaya Interview: Saw F---, August 2017

This Interview with Saw F--- describes events occurring in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District since 2015 that are still on-going, including education, healthcare, road construction, women's roles in the community and development projects.

- *Children in Y--- village, Than Pa Ya village tract, Win Yay Township, have limited learning opportunities because there is only a middle school in their village. Often, their parents cannot afford to send them to continue their education elsewhere after they graduate middle school. Therefore, many children from poor families have to quit school and work on plantations or as casual daily labourers.*
 - *Female casual daily workers in Y--- village, Than Pa Ya village tract, Win Yay Township, receive less payment than men. Male labourers are paid 5,000 kyats [\$3.75 USD] per day while female labourers are paid 3,000 [\$2.25 USD] kyats per day.*
 - *Many villagers' plants and plantations were damaged by road construction in Win Yay Township. Roads were constructed by Man Pyi Takun Company and Dragon Power Company, which did not provide any compensation for villagers' damaged lands.*
 - *The Asia Falcon Company is proposing a cement factory project in Khokhan Mountain, which is located in Than Pa Ya Chaung Hpya village. The villagers founded a group of Environmental Maintenance Department and confronted the company about the cement factory in order to protect their plantations and the surrounding environment.*
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Interview | Saw F--- (male, 38), Y--- village, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya 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 Dooplaya District on August 10th 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 Dooplaya District, including five other interviews, one situation update and 180 photographs.²

¹ KHRG trains community members in south eastern 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 south eastern 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.

Ethnicity: Karen
Religion: Buddhist
Marital Status: Married
Occupation: Farmer
Position: Villager

What is your name?

My name is Saw F---

How old are you?

I am 38 years old.

Where do you live?

I live in Y--- village.

Can you tell me the full address of your village, including your village tract, township and district?

Y--- village, Than Pa Ya village tract, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District.

Do you have family?

Yes, I have.

How many family members live with you?

I have five family members.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

How old is your youngest child?

My youngest child is eight years old.

What is your livelihood?

I farm in the field.

What is your religion?

I am Buddhist.

What is your responsibility in your village?

I am just an ordinary villager with no special responsibility.

Please tell me, when did you first come to this village and how long have you stayed here?

I have stayed here since I was born, as this is my birth place.

Can you tell me about your experience in this village?

When I was young, this area was a Black Area.³ Compared with the past, the situation has changed due to the ceasefire.⁴

Do you know the exact date when the ceasefire process started?

I am not sure the exact date, but it was about three years ago.

What kinds of challenges do you have at the present time?

There are many problems such as education, healthcare and transportation.

Can you tell me what problems have arisen in education?

In regards to education, we now have a middle school in our village, while in the past, we only had a primary school. The students and parents face financial challenges, however, and thus, students cannot continue their studies in other places after they graduate from the middle school in the village. Therefore, many children stop their studies rather than continue with their education.

For children who stop their studies, how do they continue to survive and what are their livelihoods?

³ Tatmadaw expert Maung Aung Myoe explains that the three-phased Tatmadaw counter-insurgency plan, developed in the 1960s, designates a territory as black, brown or white according to the extent of ethnic armed group (EAG) activity. Phase one transforms a 'black area' into a 'brown area,' meaning it transforms from an area controlled by EAGs where the Tatmadaw operates, to a Tatmadaw-controlled area where EAGs operate. The second phase is to transform the area from a 'brown area' into a 'white area,' where the area is cleared of insurgent activities. The final phase is to transform a white area into a 'hard-core area,' during which more organisational works are necessary and the government forms pro-government military units for overall national defence. See Maung Aung Myo, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces Since 1948*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009, p. 31-32; see also *Neither Friend Nor Foe: Myanmar's Relations with Thailand Since 1988*, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Nanyang Technological University, 2002, p.71.

⁴ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement \(NCA\)](#) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see "[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#)," Reuters, October 15th 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014, "[Ongoing militarisation in southeast Myanmar](#)," KHRG, October 2016 and "[Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016](#)," KHRG, September 2017.

Most of the children who have to quit studying go to work on plantations with their parents. Children from poor families who do not own plantations work as casual daily labourers to survive. Casual daily labourers often face financial challenges, as they do not have a permanent work place. Moreover, some of the work places are not safe for workers.

What is the payment for casual daily workers and is there any gender discrimination in payment?

Honestly, there are different salaries based on gender. The men are paid 5,000 kyats [\$3.75 USD]⁵ but women get 3,000 kyats [\$2.25 USD] per day.

What do you think of the different payments based on gender?

Considering that most of the work here is rough, weary, and more appropriate for strong men, and women are not strong enough to handle this kind of work, I think this is why women are paid less than men.

What about the leadership system of the village? Who are the top leaders in the departments?

The majority of leaders in my village are women. They participate and dedicate themselves to many departments, such as the women's department and religious services.

Can you tell me about challenges in healthcare?

Healthcare facilities are distant from the town, which is a barrier to rural villagers' access to healthcare services, especially because the road is damaged.

Can you describe the problem concerning transportation?

There are more transportation challenges in the rainy season since vehicles cannot travel properly, even on the highway. The small streets are even worse than the highway; we cannot use them in the rainy season.

Do you know which company is responsible for road construction and when this highway was constructed?

From what I know, the companies responsible for road construction in Y--- village are the Man Pyi Takun Company and the Dragon Power Company.

Are they still working in this area or did they leave after road construction was completed? When did they leave?

They left the local area once the road construction was finished.

⁵ All conversion estimates for Myanmar kyat in this report are based on the January 29th 2018 official market rate of 1,333 kyats to US \$1.

Currently, who takes responsibility for road construction?

I am not sure about this.

What kinds of problems arise for the villagers due to the damaged roads?

Due to changes in the weather, villagers are faced with transportation challenges, especially when traveling to town to buy food.

Do you know when the road construction started and the impact [of the road construction]?

The impact depends on the road quality and the weather. Good quality roads are beneficial for transportation, but damaged roads are not.

How long does it take to get to the hospital [from Y--- village] by foot when you cannot go by car in the rainy season?

The distance is approximately three miles. Nowadays, most villagers travel by motorbike when the weather damages the road in the rainy season.

What are the impacts of the road construction project?

The road construction project damaged many of the villagers' plants and plantations.

Did the road constructors notify the villagers before starting construction?

The road constructors recorded and documented the damaged lands. Then, they asked the land owners to sign a document [to provide compensation] but there has been no response [from the road constructors] since then.

Who or what company documented the damaged land of villagers?

The people and companies in charge of road construction that documented the damaged lands were Htun Ya Za from Dragon Power Company and Ko Hpo Htaung from Man Pyi Takun Company.

Do you know why they documented the damaged land and asked for the signatures of land owners? Did they have any insurance for the land owners?

They did not discuss with us about any information or insurance regarding the damaged land.

What are the prevalent sicknesses and diseases in this area and how have they affected the villagers?

There are many sicknesses, but I do not know exactly which are the most prevalent.

As a villager, what do you think about the case regarding Khonkhan Mountain?

The Asia Falcon Company⁶ has a project to produce cement from Khonkhan Mountain. Regarding this project, I disagree.

Why do you disagree?

I disagree with the cement project because it can damage many villagers' plantations at the bottom of the mountain. If the Khonkhan Mountain is damaged, the plantations, lands and plants, which rely on the shade of mountain, will be damaged as well. Similarly, it would be a challenge for villagers to build houses, as they used to take bamboo and wood from the mountain to build their houses. In addition, the animals that live on the mountain will disappear.

What do you know about the cement factory project on Khonkhan Mountain?

I only know that the Asia Falcon Company examined the mountain.

Where did the Asia Falcon Company get permission for the cement factory?

They got a recommendation letter from Win Yay Township and examined the mountain.

Who are the responsible leaders from the Asia Falcon Company concerning the cement factory project?

The geologist, Ko Than Htun.

When did they examine the mountain and how many times did they come?

They came many times, but I do not know exactly how many times.

How did the local people respond to the geologist and cement factory workers?

At first, the villagers did not take it seriously, but later, they realised that the cement project would cause many problems for them. Therefore, they actively participated in protecting themselves against the cement factory project.

How did the villagers defend against the cement factory project?

The villagers participated with the village heads, village tract leaders and the township leaders. They organised a meeting and expressed their concerns, then they reported the information to Win Yay Township.

How did the township [Win Yay] leaders respond to the villagers?

⁶ The Asian Falcon Company is also translated as the Asia Eagle Company. For previous KHRG reports regarding the company's involvement in stone mining in Dooplaya District, see "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Win Yay Township, November 2016 to January 2017](#)," August 2017 and "[Villagers raise concerns regarding proposed stone mining and cement production in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District](#)," January 2018.

From what I know, the township leaders reported the information again to the district leaders.

Have district leaders taken action on this and discussed anything with the villagers?

No, I have never heard about it.

How many nearby villages could be damaged if the Khonkhan Mountain is destroyed?

There are Than Pa Ya Chaung Hpya village, Khonkhan village, Taung Sun village, Kyauk P'Lu village and Wa Maw Lay village surrounding the Khonkhan Mountain. All of these villages have a high population, except Wa Maw Lay village.

Can you tell me about the livelihoods of the local people in these areas?

Most people farm and plant betel nut trees and rubber trees.

Do you want to express your thoughts about the cement factory project?

Problems can arise in many ways. To illustrate, the cement factory can affect the livelihoods of the villagers when the plantations and the lands are damaged. Similarly, the factory can also be harmful to the health of the local people. When the problems get worse, the local people would have to move to another place.

The authorities are also involved in the cement factory project. In this case, how do the villagers plan to confront authorities when the project starts?

The villagers have not planned to deal with this yet.

How many single parents are in this village?

There are probably about 20 single parents.

How many children are there who cannot access school?

There are many children who cannot access school due to financial challenges. The poor parents cannot afford school fees and other necessary costs. Therefore, poor children have limited learning opportunities.

Who supports education in your local area and what are the school fees?

I do not know much about education and school processes.

Do other villages plan to deal with [take action against] the cement factory [Khonkhan] project?

Others nearby villages have the same desire to prevent the cement factory project [from happening]. As far as I know, they have organised an Environmental Maintenance Department to protect the Khonkhan Mountain environment.

Could you tell me how this Environmental Maintenance Department was founded? Does it have any permission from authorities? Are they active in the current situation?

As far as I know, this department was founded by the local people with no relation to the authorities.

How many military bases are settled around this area and which one is the nearest?

There are two military groups that stay near this area, which are the KNU [Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army] and Tatmadaw.

How are the military groups helping the local people?

The military groups do not do anything that benefits the local people.

Would you like to share any information that I have not asked?

I have no more information.

Will you allow me to take your photos and use it in the publication, including the interview information?

If you take into account my personal security when using the photos and information, I have no problems with it.

Do you have any suggestions for our organisation, KHRG?

I see that KHRG's activities are beneficial to citizens. Therefore, I would like to encourage you [KHRG] to continue your work.



This photo was taken on August 30, 2017 in Y--- village, Than Pa Yar village tract, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows a Y--- villager, Saw F---, who was interviewed by KHRG about a local (proposed) cement factory project. [Photo: KHRG]

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

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay and Kyainseikgyi Townships, June and August 2017,” (February 2018)
- “Villagers raise concerns regarding proposed stone mining and cement production in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District,” (January 2018)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, July to August 2017,” (December 2017)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, May 2017,” (October 2017)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, September 2016,” (May 2017)

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)