



Interview

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Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, August 2017

This Interview with Naw A--- describes her perspective on local issues in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, including women's rights, development projects and refugee return.

- *The situation regarding women's rights in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District has improved compared to the past because of Karen Community Based Organisations [CBOs] conducting workshops on women's rights and human rights.*
- *The number of female participants in leadership roles at the village and area level has increased in B--- village, Kawkareik Township following increased awareness of the rights of women.*
- *CBOs support the villagers in B--- and other villages in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District by establishing a water supply project.*
- *Save the Children alongside a local partner organisation started an animal loaning scheme. They also loan rice and cash to villagers at low interest rates. According to Naw A---, these schemes are beneficial for the villagers' livelihoods and prosperity.*
- *There are no job opportunities in Kawkareik Township so if refugees return from the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, they may face serious livelihood challenges. According to Naw A---, returnees who do not own land will face significant livelihood challenges.*

Interview | Naw A--- (female, 35), B--- village, Kawkareik 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 22nd 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 six other interviews, one situation update and 53 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: N/A

Position: N/A

What is your name?

My name is Naw A---

How old are you?

I am 35 years old.

Are you married?

Yes, I am.

How many children do you have?

I have two children; a girl and a boy.

What is your religion?

I am Christian.

What is your ethnicity?

I am Karen.



This photo was taken on August 22nd 2017 in B--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. This photo shows the interviewee, Naw A---, talking about villagers from her village gaining knowledge about women's rights and describing how women are becoming involved in leading roles in the community. She also describes development projects in her village and the challenges that returning refugees may face. [Photo: KHRG]

I am working with the Karen Human Rights Group. Therefore, I would like to interview you about human rights. From your experiences as a woman, do you think women [in your community] have equal rights, with men?

No, they do not have [equal rights] yet.

How do they not have equal rights? Could you please describe this [situation]?

Nowadays, women have [more] rights. In the past, they [women] did not have equality because they had been looked down upon [by men]. We did not have knowledge about our rights so we did not have the idea that we have our own rights. From my understanding, women nowadays have the same height of their shoulders as men [can stand equally next to men]. Women are

weak, but they have to get 5,000 kyat [US \$ 3.67]³ per day for their daily labour [the same rate] as men. The government and presidents in the past were only men, but there are female presidents nowadays, now I understand a little bit about women's rights.

You have some knowledge about women's rights, so regarding your experiences and in your opinion, do you think women in your area have rights to participate in any job or role in the community, such as teaching?

In the past they [women] did not have access to it [rights to participate in leadership roles], but they can access these rights now because we have gained more knowledge about women's rights by attending workshops [about human rights and women's rights]. We did not dare to or feel safe to respond to anyone who abused us in the past because we [had not been made aware of our rights by attending workshops]. We are now aware [of these rights] due to workshops, so nowadays we know and we feel confident to respond to anyone who abuses us. We cannot [will not] accept that women will get 4,000 kyat [US \$2.93] and men will get 5,000 kyat [US \$3.67] for a day work, as a daily labourer. If we consider it carefully, women have to complete more jobs than men do. For example, men and women go out to work and do the same job, and then they come back to the house at the same time. However men do not have to do anything when they arrive home, but women have to cook in the kitchen and at the same time they have to look after their children. Therefore, they [women] are busier.

When villagers hold meetings and elect [village] leaders in your community, can women participate [in meetings and elections]? Do women face discrimination there?

Yes, they can [participate]. They were not discriminated against [by men] and now the number of females [present in meetings or serving in a leading role] is higher than males, but it was not like this in the past. In the past, the village administrator himself did not let women attend the meetings.

Which village administrator was that?

He is my village administrator. At that time, he did that [stopped women from attending meetings] because he did not know about women's rights and this was during the period when the Tatmadaw were committing violent abuse and torture so women could not attend any meetings [due to security concerns]. Now that women can participate in meetings sometimes there are only two or three men amongst the women in the meetings.

Do women participate in decision making during the meetings? Do the people accept the women's decisions?

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the November 9th 2017 official market rate of 1,361 kyat to US \$1.

Yes, women do it [participate] and their ideas are respected. I don't know how the other villages practice, but in B--- village, 90 percent [estimate] of village committee members are women, so male committee members only make up ten percent [of the committee], [this has happened] since B--- villagers received knowledge about women's rights.

So you feel confident to respond to any group who comes to your village and discriminates against women, correct?

Of course. Even if we say something incorrectly, people cannot punish us. From my understanding, if we never make a mistake then we will never become leaders [and be able to learn from our mistakes]. When we do something wrong, people [authorities] have to teach us [to ensure we will not do it again] but not punish us unexpectedly. Is it correct?

Yes, it is. Are there any security concerns for young women travelling to any concert, event and ceremony [in your area]?

No, not in my village.

For example, if there are a lot of men [in one place] women will not feel safe to travel in that area. Do you think women still have these kinds of [security] concerns? I want to say that if men know about women's rights, they will not dare to do something bad towards women.

Yes, there are some people who do not fully know about women's rights and who still have this kind of concern. They do not feel safe to let their female children travel [to somewhere far from their village].

What do you mean they do not fully know [about women's rights]?

They will have concerns that if anything [abuse] happens to their children, their children will suffer.

They have concerns because their children are women, correct?

Yes, that is correct.

As you previously mentioned, young women in your village know their rights, so do they use their rights [in a correct way]?

They use their rights in the right way. They do not over use their rights, but some of them do not understand their rights and [as a result] they do not dare to speak out [voice their opinion in front of other people].

How about men? For example, do they get drunk in the villages and say “We have our rights so it is ok to be drunk and make noise in the village”. Are there any issues like this?

There is no issue like this in B--- village, but I don't know about the other villages.

So they [villagers in B--- village] follow the rules of the village and the village leaders, correct?

Yes

Do young people in your village use the drug we call *yaba*?⁴

I think some of them might use it, this is what I think, but I cannot show you any evidence.

Were there any developments in your area between 2016 and 2017 that have made the situation better?

I feel like the current situation is better.

Could you please describe a little bit about how the situation is better?

I think village leaders in the past might not know [about women's rights or human rights] so they always spoke [gave orders to villagers] using their authority, not with love [fairness], so everybody had to follow their orders. They [village leaders] nowadays do not act like that anymore. They lead the village with love [fairness], if the villagers do not listen to them they [village leaders] just let it be.

Why did village leaders in the past manage the villages through use of their power [forcing villagers to do something] and why do they not force villagers anymore?

I think village leaders nowadays have received knowledge [about human rights] from the workshops and they learned from the experiences of former village leaders so they do not use their power.

Which system [of village leadership] do you think is good?

I think [leading villagers] with fairness is good.

⁴ *Yaba*, which means ‘crazy medicine’ in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, [Yaba, the 'crazy medicine' of East Asia](#), UNODC, May 2008; “[Woman raped and killed in Pa'an District, October 2012](#),” KHRG, December 2012; and Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014.

Which system do you think civilians agree with the most?

I think civilians agree with and follow the system of fairness because if the leaders give orders with their power, it might make villagers dissatisfied and angry with them. If the leaders talk to the villagers [and ask them to do something] in a fair manner, then the villagers can agree with them and the villagers can cooperate together.

Which method of leadership do the villagers follow and participate in?

[Villagers follow and participate in] a system of fairness, especially B---village.

As you mentioned above, the situation in your area has improved because villagers [leaders] attended workshops [on human rights], so do you need more workshops to be held in your village?

Of course, we [villagers] need every kind of workshop like social knowledge and awareness workshops to be held in my village. Mostly, we need social knowledge in my village because our social life is very important to us. If everyone understands each other [there will be peace in the community].

Do you think villagers are willing to attend the workshops?

From my understanding and experience gained from attending workshops, we [villagers] like to attend workshops because we require more knowledge, which we are able to gain from the workshops. However some people do not understand [the information in the workshops] so they do not like to attend them.

As villagers know about [human] rights and [their responsibilities] in cooperation with the village, do you think the community situation in your village has improved or not?

I think my village has improved.

Have there been any development projects in your village? For example, if you did not have any development projects, like water supply projects in the past, do you have them now? Are there any projects like this in your village?

There are development projects such as [improving] the water supply [by an unknown organisation] and paddy and money loaning schemes [run by Save the Children and a local partner organisation]. In the past, if we borrowed 10 baskets of paddy from other people then we had to pay back 20 baskets back to them [as interest] at the end of the year. After the loan paddy scheme started up in my village, we have been able to borrow 10 baskets of paddy from them [CBO] and then we have to give only 3 baskets of paddy back [as interest] at the end of

the year, meaning we do not have to borrow paddy from other places [with high rates of interest]. The organisation also loans money to the villagers with small rates of interest, if we borrow 100,000 kyat [US \$73.24] from them, we have to pay interest of only 3,000 kyat [US \$2.21] per month, but we have to pay at least 5,000 kyat [US \$3.66] if we loan money from other people. There is also an animal husbandry project; we can buy a pig with only 30,000 kyat [US \$21.97] from them and then when our pigs have piglets, we can give them one piglet or give them 35,000 kyat [US \$25.63] in total, with an interest payment of only 5,000 kyat [US \$3.66] per year. These development projects are very helpful for the villagers.⁵

What organisations supply these projects?

I don't know what to call them. Actually, I attended their meeting.

Which government, either the Karen National Union or Burma/Myanmar government, are these development projects from?

I think the projects are from the Burma/Myanmar government.

So there are many on-going development projects in your area which are beneficial for villagers. Are there any other beneficial development projects?

I think the most helpful project for the villagers in my village is the water supply project.

Who provides the support for the water supply project?

I only know that the people who supported the water supply project are from a Community Based Organisation [CBO].

Does every household in your village currently have access to the water supply?

No, some households do not have access to the water supply yet because some people live in the higher areas so the water supply cannot reach them. After the Kyaw Hta village tract administrator attended the CBO's meeting he said the CBO will continue the water supply project and will build a water [storage] pond for the project to enable every household to access water for the coming summer.

How many years have they [CBO] been working on this project for?

They have been working on this project for two years.

⁵ There has been an increasing amount of farmers being unable to repay their debts and defaults on loans have become more common. For more information see, '[Defaults up on the back of rising loans disbursed to farmers,](#)' October 2017, Myanmar Times, and '[Rescuing Myanmar's farmers from the debt trap,](#)' April 2017, The Economist.

So 2016 and 2017, correct?

Yes, because this [water supply] project will take four years [to complete] so two more years are needed to work on it.

How much do they [CBO] provide in financial support for this project?

The amount of financial aid that they provide depends upon the number of villagers in each village tract. If the number of villagers is less than 100,000, they give 20,000,000 kyat [US \$14,730.72] [per village tract]. They conduct the [water supply] project in one village each year, but some villages are small, so in that case they conduct the project in two villages each year. Last year, Meh K' Tee, Htee Yo Khee and Htaw Th' Naw Khee villages received access to the water supply and then this year, Kho Toe and K'Ma Kler villagers received access to the water supply project.

Are there any other development projects?

No, there are only these development projects that are very helpful to the villagers so villagers' livelihoods nowadays have improved.

What do you need for your village to develop further in the future?

We still need a lot of development projects [to be conducted] for the improvement of our village such as road development, electricity and other [developments]. B--- villagers are smart, but some of them do not participate in working [for the village development]. After we accepted the development projects in the village, people [project workers] gave us responsibilities for what we [villagers] have to do. Maybe they [certain villagers] do not know their responsibilities [their contribution to the developments projects] or they don't understand the process so the process did not go very well. Some of them know [their responsibilities] and they work very hard on the project, however some do not understand the process and therefore they do not participate [in the responsibilities assigned for the community development project].

So some people work, but others do not work [for village development]. So [village development] progresses slowly?

Yes, I think if we [B--- villagers] do work towards our village development project, there will be many development projects [organisations] that will come to our village. This is what I think. Some villagers work very hard [for village development], but some villagers do not work for it so they [villages leaders] do not feel confident to accept more development projects into the village. They [villagers] do not work in harmony so people who work hard have to face more challenges [to support village development].

As you mentioned, the situation in your area is gradually getting better so if the refugees from the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border want to return to their area [in Burma/Myanmar], do you think they will be able to come back and live in the village like local people?

I think if they have their own land then they can come back and live in this area. The people [refugees] who do not have their own land will face more livelihood challenges.

Do you know any refugees from the camps [on Thai-Burma/Myanmar border] who have returned to your area or close to your village?

Yes, there are some people from Noh Poe refugee camp like Saw Cha Ma Chu and Saw Hpa Nor Kya who have already returned because they have their own land.

Do you think they have to face livelihoods challenges like food shortages and not having prosperity like local villagers?

No, they are not [facing these challenges], because they [returning refugees] have their own land so there are no problems for them to face. However if they do not have their own land to farm [on return], they will face some challenges.

So, the refugees who returned have their own land to farm therefore they do not have any concerns regarding their livelihoods. Yet if the people [refugees] who do not have land come back with only one [cooking] pot with them, could you imagine what challenges will they face?

They will face many difficult livelihoods challenges. Even when I first arrived to this village, I had to overcome many livelihood difficulties in starting my new life. In the current situation, the price of everything is expensive so I think they may face a lot of difficulties in securing their [economic] livelihood.

Are there any job opportunities in your area for the refugees who are hoping to return, such as daily labour to earn income for a family?

There are no [job opportunities] in my area because everyone works on their own farm and they cannot afford to pay daily workers to work on their farms.

So there are no job opportunities in your area for the returning refugees. What support do you think the returning refugees will need in order to be able to live [in prosperity] like local people?

According to my own [experience], they may need many kinds of support so they will be able to start their new life. If they do not have access to any support, they might not be able to return.

These are all the issues I would like to ask you about. Do you have any questions for me?

I don't know what to ask.

If you do not have any questions, then I would like to thank your very much for providing very useful information. Can the organisation [KHRG] use your information and publish it?

Of course they can use it.

Thank you very much.

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

- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, September 2016,”(May 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Noh T’Kaw Township, April to May 2016,” (March 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, June to July 2015,” (March 2017)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, August 2015,” (February 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, April 2016 to July 2016,” (February 2017)

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)