



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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Toungoo Situation Update: Tantabin and Than Daung Townships, September to December 2012

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in February 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Tantabin and Than Daung Townships in Toungoo District, during the period between September and December 2012. Specifically, it describes how over 40,000 acres of villagers plantations were flooded due to Toh Boh Dam operations in October 2012, and how the Shwe Swan Aye Company provided compensation to some, but not all, of the affected villagers. This report also describes how, on September 3rd 2012, Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalions #124, #546 and #084, based in Ba Yint Naung Camp, confiscated villagers' lands, forcing villagers in the Than Daung Gyi area to sell their lands to the battalion. The community member reported that the Tatmadaw battalions also continue to send rations, rotate troops and conduct training every four months; in one incident, heavy and small weapons were fired during a military exercise, landing in and damaging villagers' plantations. Villagers' livelihood problems caused by flooding of land from the dam, as well as villagers concerns about the ceasefire process in the context of ongoing Tatmadaw military operations, are also described.

Situation Update | Tantabin and Than Daung Townships, Toungoo District (September to December 2012)

The following situation update 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 five interviews, 80 photographs and four video clips.²

Introduction

¹ KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma 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 eastern Burma, 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. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Toungoo District can be found in the report, "Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011," KHRG, September 2012.

The situation update is about what the civilians have to face in Toungoo District. The situation update starts from September to December 2012. Issues that have occurred [during this period] are land confiscation, Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers' activities, civilians' suffering and livelihood, Toh Boh Dam and healthcare conditions.

Plantations were destroyed due to the Toh Boh Dam³

Starting from October 15th 2012, Shwe Swan Aye Company closed the Toh Boh Dam [gates], so water rose and it caused trouble for the local people. The local people, whose plantations were flooded, got compensation from Shwe Swan Aye Company, but not all of them got compensation. Some villagers from S--- and A--- got compensation for their plantations that have [been] lost. Some villagers are farming plantations, such as cardamom, betel nut and rubber plantations. Due to the Toh Boh Dam, the local people report that it causes problems for our livelihood. On December 17th 2012, in the P'Leh Wah area, the road already flooded for three curves [in the road] because of Toh Boh Dam. The water also rises above [the dam], like in H---, L--- and D---, so some villagers' plantations were flooded and destroyed. The local people whose plantations were flooded and destroyed, did not get any compensation. Moreover, they did not want to get compensation.⁴ There are over 40,000 acres of lands that flooded because of the dam. As a result, the local people have to deal with difficulties.



³ For more information on the impact and construction of the Toh Boh dam, see "Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011," KHRG, September 2012; see also "Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh Dam construction site in Toungoo," KHRG, August 2012. The Toh Boh dam is also a project under observation in an upcoming KHRG thematic report, which will be published in March 2013, and analyses the trends, collective responses, and consequences related to land confiscation and development issues in Karen areas.

⁴ Here, the community member means that the villagers did not want to be paid for the land, but wanted replacement land instead.



The above photos were taken on December 16th 2012, by a community member in Than Daung Township, Toungoo District. These photos show four different images of a rubber plantation in an area where many villagers' plantations have been damaged by flooding. As can be seen in the two photos on the right, the rubber latex is still able to be tapped from the trees in this plantation. According to the community member who took these photos, the flood damage directly impacts villagers' livelihoods. The villagers reported that they were given compensation for damage, unlike villagers in other nearby areas, but they also reported difficulties with purchasing new land. [Photos: KHRG]

Land confiscation

On September 3rd 2012, land confiscation happened in Than Daung Gyi area, Section (5). The Burmese army [Tatmadaw], which is LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #124 and is based in Ba Yint Naung Camp, confiscated the villagers' lands. Some purchased with force, even though the villagers did not intend [to sell]. Because the Burmese army purchased [the land] with force so they can [buy cheaply], [villagers can do] nothing and have to sell it to them. The Burmese army didn't give full compensation. For instance, if the land is worth 300,000 kyat (US \$350.47),⁵ they pay only 150,000 kyat (US \$175.23). The local people do not want to sell, because they worry that if they sell the land, it will cause problems for their livelihood. Due to the issue, some villagers have had to move to other places.

The Burmese army forcibly bought these lands with the purpose of rebuilding and widening their army camp. Land that they confiscated is near their Ba Yint Naung Camp. The Ba Yint Naung Camp has a place for training soldiers. If the soldiers have training, they fire heavy and small guns after the finish training; some of them [bullets or shells] landed on the local peoples' plantations and damaged the plantations.⁶ They fire guns once every four months, because they

⁵ As of February 4th 2012, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 856 kyat to the US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the Kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1.

⁶ In an interview conducted by a KHRG staff member in January 2013 and received at the same time as this situation update, a villager describes how the firing of heavy and small weapons into villagers' plantations caused a fire, which spread and destroyed the plantations.

have training within four months and they fire guns after the training. The Ba Yint Naung training place is 'No. 2', of the Burma government military [Tatmadaw] training places. The Burmese soldiers' training place causes disturbances for the local villagers.



The above photos were taken on December 15th 2012 by a community member in Than Daung Township, Toungoo District. It shows two different angles of a Tatmadaw army camp in Than Daung area, which is called Ba Yint Naung Camp. According to the community member who took these photos, in this camp, the Tatmadaw run training programs that cycle every four months. At Ba Yint Naung, the Tatmadaw will train platoon, battalion and company commanders. The training involves the use of heavy artillery being fired into villagers' agricultural land. The land where the shells land is destroyed. In September 2012, the Tatmadaw forced villagers to sell this land at half-value. The community member reports that there is a plan to expand the base. [Photos: KHRG]

At the same time, on September 12th 2012, Burmese soldiers, LIBs #124, #546 and #084 confiscated some of the villagers' lands in Sections 5 and 3. They [Tatmadaw] marked the land that they confiscated relating to their work. They have not done anything yet for the land that they confiscated. The villagers cannot work on their land anymore. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] also have not done anything about building [on the land]. According to the issue, some villagers have to face livelihood difficulties.



The above photos were taken on December 15th 2012 by a community member in the Than Daung area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District. It shows the markers that the Tatmadaw LIBs #124, #546 and #084 placed in September 2012 on village land, which was under a plan to build military shelters. As of December 2012, the community member reports that no activity towards the construction has occurred. [Photos: KHRG]

Burmese soldiers' activities and situation

There are still Burmese soldiers' [Tatmadaw] activities in Toungoo District. If we look back, after the ceasefire between Burmese government and KNU,⁷ Burmese soldiers forced labour on villagers has reduced. In November, and until now, Burmese soldiers are sending their food and they are also sending more soldiers.⁸ Moreover, they are sending more machines and ammunition. One good thing is now the Burmese soldiers do not force villagers to carry food; they send it by themselves. For machines, they sent them to Bu Hsa Hkee Camp. We do not know yet what they are going to use the machines for. On October 28th 2012, the Burmese soldiers sent two bulldozers to repair the road. However, when the two bulldozers reached to E-- village, they drove on an old KNU landmine, so they went back. At the same time, the LID [Light Infantry Division] #66 Commander ordered village leaders to come and meet him on October 29th 2012. The village leaders went and they [soldiers] said: "*The landmine exploded because the KNU was not faithful with their compromise.*" Furthermore, they asked the villagers

⁷ The ceasefire agreement signed between the KNU and RUM officials on January 12th 2011 in Pa'an Town, was an agreement in principle on '11 key points', to be followed by more in-depth talks after 45 days. Senior KNU officials had since announced that the deadline of 45 days was unlikely to be met; see: "KNU ceasefire meeting with government behind schedule," Karen News, February 23rd 2012. Meanwhile, as-yet-unpublished KHRG information received on February 19th 2012, suggests that there have been clashes between government forces and non-state armed groups in Pa'an District in February 2012 and that recent re-supply operations carried out by Tatmadaw forces in Nyaunglebin District exceeded the amount of supplies usually sent, and included heavy artillery. Local media sources have also reported ongoing fighting in Pa'an and Nyaunglebin Districts since January 12th 2012; see: "Killings and attacks between DKBA and BGF drives villagers from their homes," Karen News, February 24th 2012; "Ceasefires, Continued Attacks and a Friendly Encounter Between Enemies," Free Burma Rangers, February 3rd 2012.

⁸ For more information on Tatmadaw resupply and troop deployment since the January 2012 ceasefire, see these KHRG reports: "Torture and killing in Thaton District," KHRG, October 2012; "Tatmadaw soldiers fire at four villagers carrying rice, order forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, July 2012; and "Sustained Tatmadaw resupply operations in Thaton, Nyaunglebin and Papun during ceasefire," KHRG, May 2012.

to tell “KNU soldiers and my soldiers to take out the old landmines.” According to the issue, the KNU leaders said that, “We cannot take out the old landmines because we also do not remember the place where we have placed them. The only advice is, if we not allow you to go so don’t go. If you go and an incident happens, we cannot take any responsibility.”

In the Than Daung area, they [Tatmadaw soldiers] also rebuilt many of their camps. Moreover, they confiscated villagers’ places and made them as their places. On December 17th 2012, the Burmese soldiers from LID #66 sent food, which was in 30 full trucks. Moreover, among the food there were also more soldiers. Now, they are free to send food, so they send it as much as they want. There are many Burmese soldiers’ activities, but, we cannot know all of them.

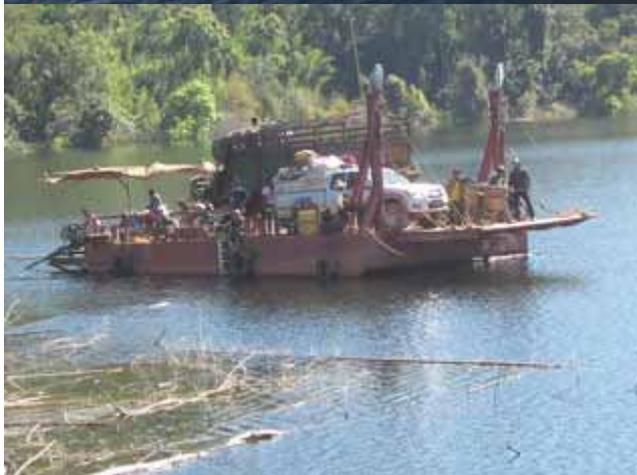


The two photos on top were taken on December 7th 2012 by a community member in W--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District. They show Tatmadaw LID #66 soldiers awaiting deployment to Bu Hsa Hkee and Th’Aye Hta camps on December 12th 2012. LID #66 also sent more rations, machines, and ammunition at in the convoy. The community member who took the photos estimated that there might have been 30 soldiers who were sent to Bu Hsa Hkee. The community member also reported that the Tatmadaw does not currently force villagers to porter rations, but arrange the transportation themselves. However, the community member also reported that villagers are concerned that the Tatmadaw is in the area and they wanted them to leave and withdraw back to their own area. The community member wrote: “If the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] stays in our area and even if we gain rights, we don’t want to stay with them because they [local people] are our people, so we don’t want them to stay in our area.” The two photos on the bottom were taken on December 16th 2012, between Hkler La and Taw Oo roads. They show the troop transport and resupply convoy on its return from delivering cargo. [Photos: KHRG]

Civilians' livelihood and suffering

Currently in our Toungoo District, the villagers can do their livelihood properly. Mostly, villagers in Toungoo District are farming plantations, [such as] betel nut and cardamom. However, some villagers are farming hill farms and flat farms. In November, the local people had to deal with issue that the Burmese soldiers sent more food and soldiers, so it worries the villagers. The villagers want all the Burmese army camps, which are in Toungoo District, to withdraw back to their own places. They have not gone back. Instead, they send more soldiers and it worries the villagers.

The local people also have to face [the dam] and, because of the dam, it causes problems for the local people. Currently, the Toh Boh Dam water rises, so it disturbs the villagers' travel. For this reason, if they want to go to town, they have to ride motor boats; the company has not constructed a bridge yet. Some [villagers] dare not ride motorboats, and some [villagers] plantations were destroyed due to the flooding. Some got compensation but some did not. The Toh Boh Dam causes disturbances and worries for the local people.



The two photos on the top were taken on December 10th 2012 by a community member on the P' Leh Wah River, above the Toh Boh hydroelectric dam, which was built in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District. Due to the dam, this river rose across three curves, which has created difficulties for villagers to travel along and across. One such problem is that no

bridge has been built yet and the only way to cross is to hire motorboats, which sometimes represent an additional cost for local people. The two photos on the bottom were taken on December 16th 2012, and show one such boat transporting people and vehicles across the river in P'Leh Wah. The community member reports that this particular boat is operated by a company that does not charge for transportation across the river, but that future practices are uncertain. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Conclusion

In the report above, it is what is happening currently in Toungoo District. So, the villagers have to deal with difficulties; some [villagers] land was confiscated; [and some] land was destroyed and lost due to the dam. I know the incidents that have been [discussed] above a little bit because I arrived there.

Future opinion

My opinion on the future is, if the ceasefire even lasts, is that there will be happiness for the villagers and citizens. However, if it is fake, it will cause concern and trouble to the local people. For this reason, most villagers currently do not want the Burmese soldiers [Tatmadaw] to stay in their areas. In the future, for the villagers to be stable, the KNU and the Burmese military government have to be faithful with each other. Currently, we can say that the local people have concerns because the Burmese soldiers send more food and soldiers. Moreover, about the dam, it caused worries for the villagers to travel to town. People from flat areas also worry that it will cause problems for them if they plant paddies in the rainy season. If the water floods, they will not be able plant paddy anymore.

Further background on the current situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011,” (September 2012)
- “Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh dam construction site in Toungoo,” (August 2012)
- “Tatmadaw soldiers fire at four villagers carrying rice, order forced labour in Toungoo District,” (July 2012)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Tantabin Township, January to March 2012,” (May 2012)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Received in November 2011,” (April 2012)
- “Toungoo Interview: Saw E---, September 2011,” (April 2012)

