



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

December 3, 2014 / KHRG #13-38-A1-I1

Hpapun Interview: Naw A---, January 2013

This Interview with Naw A--- describes events occurring in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, between November 2012 and January 2013, including forced labour, negative impacts of gold mining, and access to education and healthcare.

- *Naw A--- reports that Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #96 orders villagers close to their army camp to cut bamboo, porter goods and serve as messengers on a regular basis without compensation.*
 - *Although there is a school in her village, Naw A--- reports that it is severely under-staffed, with only 15 teachers for nearly 300 students.*
 - *There is no health clinic in Naw A---'s village and local residents rely on healthcare provided by members of their own community who have attended basic medical training. If this care is not sufficient, villagers call on the Tatmadaw to provide healthcare or travel to local towns to access other healthcare services. None of these services are free; those who cannot afford to pay have no means of accessing healthcare services.*
 - *Naw A--- describes the environmental destruction occurring as a result of gold mining projects by three companies in the river nearby her village.*
 - *She describes the destruction of wells, the lack of clean drinking water for villagers and their animals, as well as the death of several buffaloes and cows due to drinking contaminated water.*
 - *Naw A--- also describes how the Karen National Union (KNU) would sell area land in order to fund ammunition purchases. Area villages also have to provide the KNU with some rice and sesame paste each year.*
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Interview | Naw A---, (female, 36), B--- village, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (January 2013)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Hpapun District in January 2013 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 Hpapun District, including three other interviews.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Teacher

Position: Villager

I met and interviewed a female B--- villager in another person's house in B--- village, Waw Muh village tract.

What is your name?

My name is Naw A---.

You have only this name? Do you have any other names?

No, I do not.

How old are you?

I am 36 years old.

Where do you live?

I live in B--- village.

Which village tract is it in?

It is in Waw Muh village tract.

Which township is it in?

It is in Dwe Lo Township.

Which district is it in?

It is in Mu Traw [Hpapun] District.

What is your religion?

I am a Buddhist.

Are you Karen?

I am Karen.

¹ KHRG trains community members in 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 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.

What is your occupation?

I work on paddy fields and plantations.

Are you single or married?

I am married.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

How old is the eldest one?

Eleven years old.

How old is the youngest one?

Seven years old.

Do you have any responsibilities in the village? If so, can you tell us about it?

I am presently teaching in the nursery school.

Now, I want to interview you. Can you give us some information?

I will give you as much as I can.

Are there any Tatmadaw soldiers staying near your village?

Yes, there are. There is also an army camp.

Is it very far from the village?

[It is] not very far.

Is it to the east or west of the village?

It is at the source of the river.

How long have they lived there?

They have lived there since I was young.

So it has been for a long time.

Yes.

So how often do they change [rotate] their soldiers?

In the past, they changed once every four months. Now, I think they change once every four months, too.

Is the Tatmadaw [unit] that lives at the source of the river far from your village?

[It is] not very far. It is the lower part of the monastery of B--- village. It is very close to the village.

Which battalion is that?

It is Infantry Battalion (IB)³ #96.

Do you know the name of the commander?

I do not know the name of the commander.

As they live near your village, do they force the villagers to cut down trees and bamboo for them?

Yes, they do ask.

Can you tell me about it?

When they needed a pole of bamboo, they said: “*Sister, ask the messengers [people forced to work as messengers for the Tatmadaw] to cut down a pole of bamboo for bamboo slats.*” If they want even one pole of bamboo, they come and demand it from the messengers. Another time was on the full moon day of [the traditional Burma/Myanmar calendar month of] *Ta Saung Mon* [a religious festival which had last taken place in November 2012]. As it was a full moon day and we are Buddhists, we went to the monastery. They needed the people to send a sack for them without fail in the evening. Therefore, I had to go and send [the sack] by myself. Why didn’t they ask [me] to send it in the morning? No, it was not like that. It needed to be sent that evening to Meh Pree Hkee camp. Therefore, they asked for a lot [of forced labour].

Does the person who asked you for forced labour still live in the camp of IB #96?

Yes.

Is his name Saing Ko Ko?

It is probably him. I do not know.

When I asked another villager [his name], he said that he was an officer of Mon⁴ [ethnicity].

Yes.

So, when he asked people to cut down a pole of bamboo, did he ask you or your friends?

When he came to the village, he knew me and he asked me and other villagers.

If the villagers did not cut down a pole of bamboo when he asked them to, did he ever scold or punish them?

He did not disturb the villagers [physically] but he scolded the villagers and he used harsh words with the villagers. He said: “*Why can’t you cut down just one pole of bamboo?*”

What was he going to do with the pole of bamboo?

³ Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for garrison duty but sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁴ The Mon people are believed to be some of the oldest inhabitants of Southeast Asia. Most live in the central Myanmar government demarcated areas of Mon State, located in the south of Burma/Myanmar and bordering Kayin State, Bago Region (formerly Pegu Division) and Tanintharyi Region (formerly Tenasserim Division). These areas overlap to an extent with KHRG’s research areas, which follow a locally defined system of demarcation.

He said that he was going to fix his hut in the camp, so he needed a pole of bamboo. He also needed bamboo slats, wood, and shingles for building a store house.

When you said you had to send a sack to Meh Pree Hkee for them, what kind of sack was that? Can you tell us about it?

As it was in the full moon day of *Ta Saung Mon*, they asked me to send a sack of flowers similar to *Ka Thi Hpghaw* [the name of a type of flower in Karen] They said they needed them urgently. It was almost getting dark and if I had asked the [other] villagers, they would not have dared to send [the sack] as it was a full moon day. The other villagers would not go as [they believed that] there were ghosts on the way. I myself had to go and take it to Meh Pree Hkee.

Who did you go with?

I went with Naw C---'s mother.

How long did it take you to get there?

When we went there, we were [to be] sent by boat, and when we arrived at the source of the Meh Pree River, we saw a messenger by chance and we sent [the sack] through him. If we had not seen any chance messenger, we would have had to take it ourselves. It would have been a dark night and we would not have dared to come back [to our homes afterwards].

Is there an army camp at Meh Pree Hkee?

Their operations commander⁵ lives there.

Do you know the name of the operations commander?

No.

Is that the army [unit] that villagers told me was IB #44?

It might be.

So you had to send the sack to him [the operations commander]?

Yes. He is not patient.

Have you ever responded to him that you dared not go or you could not go when you were asked to send something?

I responded to him that two or three soldiers usually came and took the things that were supposed to be given to him. He said: *"Do not talk back to me with those kinds of words. I don't want to use aggressive words with you. If I do not use harsh words, it does not work. If I use soft words, the villagers do not respect me."*

So he still scolds the villagers?

Yes.

Has he forced the villagers to carry any things for him?

Yes, he asked recently.

⁵ Operations commander (G3) refers to a lieutenant colonel or colonel. In the Tatmadaw they are also known as strategic and/or tactical commanders.

Was it this month, January 2013?

Yes.

Which day was it?

I do not remember the day.

When you said he forced you to send the sack, was it on the full moon day of *Ta Saung Mon* which was two months ago?

Yes. You can check in the calendar later.

What about the other time?

Wait a minute. It was on Thursday, so it was five days ago.

So that would be January 24th 2013, right?

Yes.

So what did he actually ask the villagers? Can you tell me about it?

He asked to use the [villagers'] boats. Currently, since there is not much water in the river the villagers cannot travel with boats. He said that it needed to be done without fail. He asked the villagers to pull down all of the boats and the boat engines that were on the land into the river. Their rations were kept under the B--- monastery. The food had to be taken down to the river and sent to Meh Pree Hta and then to Meh Pree Hkee village. He first said that the villagers did not need to carry [anything], and that he would only use their boats. However, he asked ten of the villagers to carry rice sacks for them and some of them ran away and came back [to the village].

Were there ten messengers [porters] who had to carry the rice sacks?

Yes. Not all of the villagers went to carry the rice sacks; they were afraid as there were a lot of rice sacks that they would have had to carry. There were thousands of rice sacks.

Where did the villagers have to carry and send the rice sacks to?

They had to send them to Meh Pree Hta and then to Meh Pree Hkee.

How long does it take [to travel] from the village to Meh Pree Hkee?

It is a 45 minute walk.

Was it only rice sacks? What about other things?

It also included beans, milk, and oil. They had to send all of their food.

How many days did it take?

They had to send all of the food within a day.

Did they carry it with the boats?

Yes, the villagers and soldiers had to carry it with the boats. When the food arrived [at Meh Pree Hta], their soldiers had to carry it to their camp.

How many boats did they use?

As far as I know, they used three boats while sending their food.

Did he give any payment for the boats that they used?

No, he did not give any.

So he used the boats for free?

Yes, but he covered the cost of the fuel.

What about the villagers, did he pay them money?

No, he did not.

Did he scold the villagers while they were working?

The villagers did not say that he scolded them. They just said that they could not work for him and ran away to come back [to the village].

Is there any other kind of labour that he asks for?

Yes, he still asks the villagers for forced labour like messenger [duty].

How many villagers does he ask per day?

He asks two villagers per day, and [at least] one messenger has to be sent to him every day.

Do the messengers have to stay at the camp or in the village?

The messengers stay in the village. If he needs to ask something, he comes to ask the messenger to send the letter to Meh Pree Hkee. If he writes a letter to the village head, he asks the messenger to send the letter to the village head.

Is there any other labour that he asks for?

No, there is no other labour. He only asks for messengers and people to cut down bamboo and trees.

Do those kinds of labour still happen?

Yes.

Have they ever visited the village as they live close to the village?

Yes, they have come.

Did they engage in any sexual violence against female villagers?

No, they did not.

Have they ever forcibly taken the villagers' gold or money or looted the villagers' chickens?

No, they have not. However, the villagers have lost their chickens [possibly after being killed by dogs belonging to the Tatmadaw]. His [referring to Saing Ko Ko] dogs also bit the villagers' goats and the goats died. The villagers dared not report it to him.

Did they raise the dogs?

Yes, they raised many dogs.

Did they raise them in their camp?

Yes, they raised them in their camp. When their dogs came into the village, they bit the villagers' goats and the goats died. Some goats came back [to their owner's houses], having lost their legs.

When the goats died, did the owner of the goats report it to him [the operations commander]?

If the owners of the goats had gone and reported it to him, he would have said that it was not his dogs. However, people mostly didn't dare to report it to him. His dogs are clever. They have even bitten my pigs many times.

Like you said, at the moment, the villagers have to do forced labour for him, like carrying rice sacks for him and the villagers' boats were taken to send food to Meh Pree Hkee. Did you hear about these [incidents] or did you see these incidents with your own eyes?

I personally saw those incidents with my own eyes. They happened to me too. I had to call and organise the villagers [to do forced labour] for him at that time. A villager named Maung D--- had to organise the villagers' boats for him. The villagers came back and told me: *"You said that we just had to move the boats down into the river, but we also had to carry the rice sacks."*

Is there any other forced labour that they ask for?

No, there is not. There is only one thing, they asked for some things from us and they did not give them back to us.

What kind of material did they ask from the villagers?

They asked hoes [and other materials] from the villagers.

So they did not give them back after they had taken them?

No, they did not.

Did they lose them?

Yes, they lost them all, like a saw, knife and a hammer. They asked for them from the villagers and lost them all. Recently, they asked for one of my hoes and they have not given it [back] to me yet.

What about other forced labour? Do you have any other feelings or concerns?

No, I haven't recently. There are only these incidents [that I stated above].

Is there any school in the village?

Yes, there is.

Was the school built by the villagers, the KNU [Karen National Union] or the Burmese government?

It was built by both the KNU and the Burmese government. There are two types of teachers, which are Karen teachers and Burmese government teachers. There are four or five teachers that the government employs in the school. The KNU also employs some teachers who live in the village. They [Karen teachers] are selected and employed as teachers at the school.

How many standards [grades] are there in the school?

[There is tuition] up to seventh standard.

How many languages are taught at the school?

Burmese and English. Karen is not included. Karen has not been taught recently. It was not taught when Saw G--- left the school as there are no other teachers who can teach Karen. The teachers also do not receive any Karen textbooks.

Is the reason they cannot teach Karen at school that the teachers cannot read and write Karen or because the Burmese government does not allow them to teach Karen?

No, when I was a student, the Karen textbooks came from above [the KNU]. Now, the Karen textbooks do not come from above and the teachers here also cannot teach [do not know how to make up the lesson plans by themselves].

So, it is not because the Burmese government does not give permission; it is because the teachers do not have Karen textbooks and they cannot teach?

Yes.

As you do not have Karen textbooks, don't you ask for help from the Karen Education Department (KED) who work around here so that you can get Karen textbooks?

They [school headmasters or headmistresses] might have asked for help but the textbooks might not have arrived yet.

How many students are there at the school?

There might be about 1,000 students⁶. The school is full of students.

How many teachers are there at the school?

There are 15 teachers at the school.

Do the students have to pay the salary of the teachers that the Burmese government sends?

No, they do not have to.

What about their [government teachers'] food? Do the villagers have to take responsibility for that?

Yes, the villagers have to.

What about the [Karen] teachers who are from the village?

The KNU pays some money for their salary and the students' parents pay some money for their salary.

Can you tell me what the school fees are for the students, like how much money the students have to pay if they are in the first standard, second standard or third standard, etc?

Each kindergarten student has to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$5.03)⁷[annually]. Each student who is in the first standard, second standard and third standard has to pay 7,000 kyat

⁶ This was an overestimation by Naw A---, the actual number of students at the school is between 270-280.

(US \$7.04), and each student who is in the fourth to seventh standards has to pay 35,000 kyat (US \$35.21).

So, can the students go to school and study peacefully? Are there any disturbances for them? Are the students asked to do labour if there are any [demands for] forced labour by the Burmese government?

No, there aren't.

So, everything is going smoothly with the students?

Yes.

You teach in a nursery school; was the school built by the villagers? Who built it?

The school was built by the villagers. The logs and bamboo came from the villagers. We did not get any support [from the government or the KNU] to build it. However, the teachers' salaries, pocket money for the children, money for cooking and money for buying toys for the children are provided by the Karen Women Organization (KWO).

So it is not connected to the Tatmadaw?

No, it is not.

As a teacher in a nursery school, do you have any difficulties with school materials?

We actually do not have enough school materials. Some children are naughty and some children are clever. As the school was built by the villagers, if anything is broken, the villagers have to repair it themselves. The nursery school is not well built, but we have to use it and teach in it.

Has the Tatmadaw ever come and given any money to the nursery school or middle school in your village?

No, they do not support the nursery school. They don't support the middleschool either. They have built only one [middle] school in the village.

So is there a clinic in the village?

No, there isn't.

If there is no clinic, where do the villagers go to get medicine or medical treatment if they are sick?

There is no place to go. We have to call the villagers who have attended basic health training and have some knowledge about health. If they cannot cure [the illness], we have to call the Tatmadaw's health workers. If the Tatmadaw's health workers cannot cure it, we have to go to the hospital in the town. If we do not go to the town, we will die.

How much do you have to pay if you take medicine from the villager's health workers or the Tatmadaw's health workers?

We have to pay the cost of the medicine to the villager's health workers, but we have to pay less money to the Tatmadaw's health workers [than the villager's health workers].

⁷ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the October 16th 2014 official market rate of 994 kyat to the US \$1.

If the villagers get serious diseases and go to the hospital in the town, do you have to pay the cost?

Yes, we have to.

What about the villagers who do not have money?

They do not go [to the hospital in town] and they just stay like that until they die.

So there is no way for them to get support and get to the hospital?

No, there isn't.

Is there any gold or stone mining in your village?

Yes, there is.

Could you tell me whether there are any benefits from the gold or stone mining for the villagers?

I cannot tell you very much about it.

Can you tell us your opinions or your feelings?

I do not see any benefits for the villagers. There might be benefits for some villagers. As I am a poor person, they [the company engaging in mining] would not allow me to work with them. I cannot go and sell food to them as they buy their own food from the town. We cannot work with them as day labourers as they hire their own workers when they come. I do not see any benefits for the villagers.

Since you mentioned that there are some villagers who benefit and some villagers who do not benefit from gold mining, what percentage of the villagers get some benefit?

There are more villagers who receive no benefit than villagers who do benefit.

So 10% of the villagers benefit and 90% of the villagers don't [receive any] benefit? There are significantly more villagers who are [not benefiting]?

Yes.

Do people conduct gold mining around your village?

Yes, they conduct gold mining near my house.

Is it very far from your house?

Not far away. Walking would take less than ten minutes.

So, it is not very far. So, do they destroy any of the villagers' land when they conduct gold mining here?

The villagers sell the land to them, so there is no destruction of land [which belongs to villagers].

What about the destruction of other things like plants or water?

There is some destruction of the wells.

What did you [the villagers] do then?

They [the mining company] said they were going to dig wells for the villagers whose wells were destroyed. They did not dig wells for some of the villagers [but did for others] and they went back [left the area after they had conducted the gold mining].

How long has there been gold mining here?

It started in 2010.

So it is after the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]⁸ [started conducting gold mining] and [it has continued] until now?

Yes.

Are the people who conduct the gold mining Karen people or people from the town?

Actually, the [Karen] people from here started this first. They went and called the people from the city to come and conduct gold mining, so they are like brokers.

So, they [local villagers] organised that?

Yes.

Do you know any names of the leaders of the people who came to conduct gold mining from the town?

I do not know exactly. I heard that the organisation who conducted it in Baw Baw River is U Mya Phu [from Shwe Pu company]. This is one group and another group that conducted the gold mining [in Baw Baw River] is called the Chit Lin Myaing [company] and the DKBA stayed there and did security for them. There is also Pok Ka La [an individual person] who came [and conducted gold mining in Baw Baw River] but he represented the [unknown] company. Some people came and conducted gold mining but they represent the companies.

Does the water get murky [polluted] when they conduct gold mining?

Yes, it does.

How do the villagers deal with the water problems like when they cannot drink clean water and the cows or buffalos drink unclean water since the water is murky?

Yes, there is the problem that the animals have to drink unclean water. There are also some animals that died because of drinking unclean water. My female buffalo [drank unclean water and] died with a lump of mud inside her stomach. She could not endure it. Two of my female buffalos have died.

When did it happen?

One female buffalo died in 2011 and another one died in 2012.

⁸ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "[Inside the DKBA](#)," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

Was it because they drank murky water?

Yes, they drank unclean water which was bad because of the gold mining. The buffalo also went to pasture in the forest and they ate something [poisonous] made by the company. That was my own buffalo.

Have any of your friends' animals had to face the same problems as yours?

Yes, they have.

As the river water is murky, where do the villagers go to find clean water to drink?

Currently the villagers are provided with some water pipes.

Do they get enough water from the water pipes?

They take it from the water pipes but they do not get enough water.

So where do the buffalos drink clean water so that they will not have to drink murky water and die?

They do not have clean water and they have to drink the murky water.

So do the animals die often?

They die. If they know that the buffalos are not healthy, the villagers sell them.

So, there are a lot of animals that have died? How many have died?

A lot of animals died. I do not know exactly [how many]. About 10 or 20 died.

Are there any benefits for the villagers, like could they build a nice house after they conducted the gold mining from 2010 to 2013? Did they [the company] help the villagers to build their buildings or any development?

[Regarding the benefits] I have only seen the water [that they provided for the villagers]. I have not seen anything else as I am a poor person. There might have been some benefits for the rich villagers.

Did they ask permission from the Tatmadaw or the KNU when they conducted the gold mining.

I do not know. They might [have asked for permission] from KNU leaders. They might have also asked for permission from the Tatmadaw. I do not know. In Brigade #1 [Thaton District], only the Tatmadaw conduct gold mining like the [Tatmadaw] battalion commander and the [Tatmadaw] operations commander. They bought the land from the villagers and they conducted gold mining and they got a lot of gold.

So, there is no one who disturbs them?

There is no one.

The [KNU] 1st Brigade leader might have given them permission. So, are there any other benefits for the villages from gold mining when we look at all of the villages?

If we look at all of the villagers, there are no benefits.

So it only benefits the people who are brokers?

Yes. I was asked to collect the rice from the villagers for the KNU district leader. When I asked for rice from the villagers, the villagers said that they [the KNU] sell the gold and buy their bullets. As the villages are poor, they complained to me: *"Are you coming and asking for rice again? As the water is murky, the paddy that we grow does not grow well enough."* They complained because they are poor, married women. Those who were not poor did not complain.

Does gold mining destroy the pasture for the cattle?

No, it does not. It only destroys the water.

Is there any other destruction of the trees, bamboo and the environment?

There might be some destruction of the trees and bamboo as they are conducting a huge gold mining [operation].

Do you think that the [KNU] leaders should stop them or allow them to conduct gold mining? What is your personal opinion?

I think the leaders have more knowledge than us. It is up to the leaders.

What about your personal opinion?

In my opinion, I cannot do anything about whether the gold mining is going to be allowed or stopped.

If the gold mining was stopped, would you be happy or sad?

If the gold mining was stopped, we, the villagers could go and pan for gold to get a little. If it is ongoing, we will not have the chance to pan for gold.

So, they do not allow you to pan for gold with them [while they are conducting gold mining]?

No, they do not allow us to pan for gold with them, as they have already bought the land to conduct it [gold mining].

So, it causes a big problem for the villagers' livelihoods that the villagers are not allowed to pan for gold together with them?

Yes.

In the past you could take your pans and pan for gold any time you liked?

Yes. We went to pan for gold for half a day in the morning or evening and we came back and we sold the gold that we had panned. We could drink clean water, plus the cattle could also drink clean water. Now, they are doing gold mining and it does not matter if they allow us to pan for gold together with them. They said that they have bought the land, so we have to face that problem.

Was there anything else that you personally had to face when the company came to do gold mining?

There was nothing else, I just can't work on anything [do gold mining or panning for gold].

Where is your village located? Is it located beside the Buh Law River or at the bottom of the mountain?

I live next to the monastery.

I mean the location of the whole of your village.

The whole village is located between the Meh Kleh Law River and the Buh Law River.

What villages are there to the east of the village?

Meh Pu Hta village is to the east of the village.

Is the Buh Law River between your village and H--- village?

Yes.

What about to the west of your village?

I--- village is the closest village to the west of our village. The Meh Kleh River is between our village and I--- village.

What about at the source of the river?

Hpoh Kheh Hta [village] is there.

What about the mouth of the river?

Wah Lay village is there. And there is a Tatmadaw army camp at Wah Lay village.

How long has this village been located here?

This village has been here since I was very young.

How many households are there in the village?

There might be about [censored for security] households in the village.

What do the villagers mostly work on for their livelihoods?

They mostly work on the paddy fields and hill fields.

Do they all have enough food?

No, not all of them have enough food.

Do the villagers who have enough food help the other villagers who do not have enough food?

No, they do not.

How do the villagers who do not have enough food manage?

They have to borrow food from the others and later they have to pay them back. No one says, "*Here is one big tin⁹ of rice, take it and you do not need to give it back.*" If someone borrows a big tin of rice, someone has to give back one big tin and four bowls¹⁰ as interest.

As the villagers work on paddy fields and hill fields, do they have any other businesses to earn money?

⁹ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb. of paddy, and 16 kg. or 35.2 lb. of milled rice.

¹⁰ A bowl is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One bowl is equivalent to 1.28 kg. or 2.88 lb. of paddy, and 2 kg. or 4.4 lb. of milled rice. A bowl is also equivalent to 1/8 of a big tin.

There are no other ways [to earn money]. There is only work on the paddy fields and hill fields plus panning for gold and cutting down trees and bamboo to sell. There are no other business [opportunities].

In this interview, do you have any other things you would like to mention which I have not asked you about?

Some villagers are poor and some villagers are rich. The poor villagers are extremely poor and do not have enough food to eat. The rich people are extremely rich. The poor villagers have to borrow money from them and have to pay them back with interest. If the villagers do not have money, they have to work on the paddy fields and pan for gold and cut down trees and bamboo and sell them to get money.

How are the rich villagers getting rich?

The rich villagers are getting rich because they inherit [wealth] from their parents and they meet with good friends who have a relationship with the Tatmadaw and the KNU and their work is going well. As for the poor people, they do not even have capital and they do not have their own paddy fields or plantations. Therefore, they have to do hill farming. They do not get anything if the buffalos eat their paddy or there is a lot of rain.

What about the villagers who do not have enough food; is it because they are lazy or because their work does not go well even though they work?

Their work does not go well even though they work very hard on the paddy fields and hill fields. It is because the mice eat their paddy and there is a lot of rain.

Do the Tatmadaw or KNU support the villagers whose work does not go well with money or food?

Last year, KORD [Karen Office of Relief and Development] came and supported the villagers with money. I do not see anyone supporting [the villagers by giving them] money this year.

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

The KNU mentioned that they would sell the land and would buy bullets. We cannot buy bullets for them as we are poor. They sell the land and buy bullets. We cannot stop them from selling the land as we cannot help them. Although the Tatmadaw said that they are engaging in the ceasefire,¹¹ we do not know what is on their mind. They might have many different plans. We cannot stop the KNU selling the land. We cannot say; “KNU, can you stop [selling the land]?” And if something [fighting] happens with them, they do not have any place to get bullets. As they are KNU soldiers, they do not have money to buy bullets. If we look at the villagers’ side, the villagers also cannot buy bullets for them. The villages just provide them with some rice and some sesame paste each year. They also do not have enough [rice and sesame paste provided by us]. Therefore, we cannot stop them [from selling the land] as their leaders may think that it is the right way.

When you said the KNU sells the land, does the KNU sell the land of the villagers to the people who are conducting the gold mining?

No, I do not see anything like the forcible confiscation of the villagers’ land.

¹¹ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG’s analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [*Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire*](#), KHRG, May 2014.

So they are going to demand tax from the villagers and buy bullets?

Yes, they said that when I went to a meeting in Hpoh Kheh Hta village. They said they would sell the land and then they were going to buy the bullets.

Who said that?

Officer Nay Toe said that. He said it in front of Ma E---s house. Teacher F--- who is from our village said *"You [the KNU] opened the gold mining and it is true that you are going to buy bullets. So, are there any benefits for the villagers?"* He asked like that. I did not hear that there would be benefits for the villagers in the meeting. I only heard him [Nay Toe] say *"I sell the land, and the logs because I have to buy bullets. The villagers cannot buy bullets for us. I have to buy them."* When I listened to him, [I understood that] it is true that we cannot buy the bullets for them. Although the gold mining does not benefit us, it does not matter if we can live without debts.

Is there anything else?

No, there is not.

Thank you very much for [letting us] get this information from you.

Thank you.

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

- "Hpapun Interview: Ma A---, October 2013," (October 2014)
- "Hpapun Interview: U A---, January 2014," (October 2014)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, October 2013," (October 2014)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014," (September 2014)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, February to July 2014," (September 2014)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)