



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

June 18, 2015 / KHRG 14-34-A1-I1

Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, April 2014

This Interview with Saw A--- describes events which occurred in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District, during April 2014, including land confiscation due to road construction and stone mining, and arbitrary taxation. This report also provides an update on education.

- *A company has constructed the preliminary stage of the road between B--- village and Hpah Pra Town without consulting with villagers. As a result, many of the villagers' rubber plantations have been destroyed without compensation.*
 - *The land destruction issue was reported to Karen National Union (KNU) leaders, who spoke to the construction supervising committee regarding compensation, but no compensation has been paid as of yet.*
 - *The same company also conducted stone mining, destroying the villagers' rubber plantations and paddy fields. The villagers have not received any compensation for those damages, either.*
 - *KNU soldiers that are situated near B--- village request tax from villagers travelling through the checkpoint.*
 - *B--- has primary and post-primary school available but the school has not been completely built yet. The villagers have requested funding from the Burma/Myanmar government to finish building the school.*
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Interview | Saw A---, (male, 48), B--- village, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District (April 2014)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Dooplaya District in April 2014 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 eight other interviews, one situation update, one incident report, and 146 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

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 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, 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: Buddhist
Marital Status: Married
Occupation: Working on plantation
Position: *[censored for security]*

What is your name?

Saw A---.

How old are you?

48 [years old].

What is your ethnicity?

Karen.

What about your religion?

Buddhist.

Are you married?

I am married.

How many children do you have?

Six children.

How many boys and girls do you have?

They are all boys.

What is the name of the youngest one?

His name is Saw C---.

What is the name of the eldest one?

Saw D---.

How long have you lived in B--- village?

It has been about 22 years.

Did you live here since you were young?

No, I came to stay here since I got married [to a woman in the village].

What are you doing now?

I am *[censored for security]*.

How long have you been *[censored for security]*?

It has been almost two years.

What is the date [that you started]?

I do not remember.

What is your occupation?

I work on [my] plantation.

What kind of plantation?

It is a rubber plantation.

How many acres of rubber plantation do you own?

I have planted about 1,000 rubber trees. [Did not answer the question]

Are they old enough to be tapped?

No.

As the rubber trees are not old enough to be tapped, what are you doing now for your livelihood?

I am working as a day labourer.

How much do you get per day?

I get 3,000 kyat (US \$2.69)³ per day.

What do you have to do?

I have to clear the grass on the people's plantation.

Are you working as a day labourer every day?

No, I was not free to work these [past few] days as I also have to work for the villagers. My children are working for our livelihood and I have to depend on them.

How do you see the situation of education and healthcare in your village?

In terms of education, it has been improving very much compared to the past. In the past, we had to hire the teachers but now we do not have to hire the teachers. The teachers are sent into our village and it makes it easier [for] the villagers.

Where are the teachers from?

They are [Burma/Myanmar] government teachers.

How many government teachers are there in the school?

There are 12 government teachers.

How many teachers who are recognised by the government are there in the school?

All of them are recognised by the government.

Is there anyone who helps the school?

³ All kyat to US \$ conversions in this report are based on the June 12th 2015 official exchange of 1,115.85 kyat for US \$1.

[The] Burmese government funded the building of the school. The construction of the school has been finished, but we still need the desks for the students. We do not know whether or not they [Burma/Myanmar government] are going to fund that.

How many standards are there in the village?

We have a post-primary school in the village, but it is [only] till eighth standard⁴ in the school.

Where was the list of the students' names submitted to?

It was submitted to Hpah Pra Town.

Was it accepted?

Yes, it was accepted.

How many armed groups are there in the village?

There is only Kaw Thoo Lei⁵ armed group [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)] in the village.

Did you serve as *[censored for security]* after the ceasefire?⁶

Yes, I served as *[censored for security]* after the ceasefire.

Which armed group has continued its military activity in the village after the ceasefire?

I do not see any military activity that they [armed groups] have in the village.

Do the Tatmadaw currently pass through the village?

Yes, they do.

Have they ever disturbed the villagers in the village?

No, they have never disturbed the villagers since 2012. The KNU [Karen National Union] also met and shook hands with them [Tatmadaw] when they came to visit the village.

Does the government help the villagers in B--- village in any way?

I do not hear anything from the [Burma/Myanmar] government [that would suggest] that they are going to help the villagers.

The road that is currently in the village is better compared to the past. Did the villagers repair the road by themselves? Or did a company repair the road?

⁴ In Burma/Myanmar, 8th standard is equivalent to 9th grade. The post-primary system is out of a total of 11 grades (10 standards), after which a student may go on to attend university.

⁵ The term Kaw Thoo Lei refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU), but the exact meaning and etymology is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. True Love and Bartholomew: Rebels on the Burmese Border, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

⁶ 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.

The villagers repaired [part of] the road in the village themselves. However, the government budgeted to construct [part of] the road, from the village to [where] the high school is, so the students [could] travel to school.

Where do the children go to attend the high school?

They go to Hpah Pra high school.

Can people travel easily during the rainy season?

No, it is not easy. That is why we proposed it [road construction] to the government and they said that they are going to construct it. However, they have not started the construction process yet [they have only done the preliminary stage].

So, can you tell me what your opinion about the road is?

I do not know [enough about] how they [the Burma/Myanmar government] planned for it.

Are there any villagers' plantations and houses that were destroyed by the [preliminary stage of the] road construction?

Yes, there are. And I have noted down all of the plantations [destroyed] on the list. There are 32 plantations that were destroyed.

Are there any houses that were destroyed or had to be moved?

Yes, there were some houses which needed to be moved but I have not noted down all of them yet.

Did the company have a consultation with the villagers before the [preliminary stage] road construction?

No, they did not.

Did the KNU come and have a meeting with the villagers regarding the road construction?

Yes, they had a meeting with the villagers. They noted down all of the destroyed plantations and they said that they are going to request compensation for the destroyed plantations.

Has the price been set [for compensation] for each of the rubber trees?

They have not set it yet.

Have they said when they are going to give compensation?

They have not told us yet.

How many victims are there in the village?

The villagers do not feel good as their plantations are being destroyed. [He does not answer the question]

How is the situation of the company?

The company does not tell us anything. However, the KNU told us that they are going to ask for compensation for our destroyed plantations. The company said that they do not want to pay compensation. [The KNU] leader said to them that, "*We are trying to request*

compensation just for the [rubber] trees which have been destroyed. If we do not get compensation [for the destroyed rubber trees], we are [going to keep] demanding it from you, even though we are [getting] tired of it."

What is the name of the company that constructs the road?

It is the MGC Company.

What does MGC stand for?

I don't know what it stands for. I just know that it is the MGC Company.⁷

How many companies construct the road?

This company is under the [Burma/Myanmar] government construction [department]. The construction department asked the MGC Company to construct four miles of the road. The construction department has a total of 25 miles of road to construct. The construction department asked Mon⁸ [people] to construct eight miles of the road and the rest of the miles are constructed by the road construction department.

There is the main company that constructs the road, right? And there is also the small company that constructs the road. What are the names of the main company and the small company under the main company?

I don't know. I just ask them for the name of the company that constructs the road in our area and they said that their company's name is MGC.

What are the benefits that the villagers get in terms of constructing this road?

There is no benefit for the villagers in terms of constructing the road. There are only damages to the villagers' lands.

Did the villagers not report to the village head regarding the damage to their lands?

Yes, they had reported it and I also had reported and discussed it with the KNU.

What is the opinion of the villagers regarding road construction?

The villagers are not satisfied with the damage to their plantations. But they cannot do anything and they have to be satisfied.

What about the big villages, did the company have a consultation with the villagers?

No, they did not.

Did they have a meeting with the village leaders?

No, they did not.

⁷ "MGC" likely stands for Myanmar Golden Crown Co. Ltd, a large Myanmar-based construction and general trading corporation. For more information on the company structure, see: <http://www.mgcmyanmar.com/about.php>

⁸ 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.

So, there are 32 plantations that were destroyed by road construction, right? Do all of these plantations have land grants?

Yes, all of them do.

Did the company request to look at their land grants?

No, they did not. We also forgot to show them the land grants.

What do the villagers want?

They want to get the cost of the plantations that were destroyed when the road was constructed [refunded to them]. They will be happy if they were paid the cost. They will also be happy to use the road. If they are not paid for the cost, they need to go meet with the village head. If my land had been destroyed, I would have also had to go meet with the leader. We just report it to them.

So, it is not sure that the compensation is going to be given?

No, it is not sure. I heard from a KNU leader that it is not sure yet whether or not the government is going to pay the compensation. For us, we have noted down all of the destroyed plantations [in order] to get compensation.

Have all of the houses which have been destroyed by road construction been moved?

No, they have not moved [them] yet.

Did they say that they are going to pay money to rebuild their houses?

No, they did not say that.

Did they also say the date when the houses needed to be moved?

No, they did not say that.

What will be the advantages and disadvantages when the road has been completely constructed in the future?

I do not know for the future.

Is there any company that comes and helps the villagers in the village?

No, there is not. We cannot ask the company [which is constructing part of the road between the village and Hpah Pra Town] for anything, [not even] to help us carry stones in their trucks when we construct part of the road inside the village. We have to construct the road by ourselves using our own efforts. They always pass through the village carrying the stones.

Where do they get the stones from?

They get the stones from under the cliff [near the village].

Is there anything under the cliff?

There are people's paddy fields and plantations.

Is there any destruction of the land?

Yes, there is. I also have noted this down in a different document.

Does the company buy the stones and lands that they destroy?

No, they do not say that they are going to buy them. As I am *[censored for security]*, I was asked to show them the place where the cliff is. The villagers do not agree [to mining stone near their plantation]. Our organisation [KNU] leader also asked me to show them the place. I told them [KNU] to ask the company to pay for the cost of what they have destroyed in the land each day. If [they do] so, I will dare to show them the place.

Did the company have a meeting with the plantation owners before conducting the stone mining?

No, they did not.

Did the plantation owners inform the village head that the stone mining is going to be conducted and will destroy their plantation?

Yes, they informed us, but we [I] have to go [act] as I am directed by the organisation leader [KNU]. However, all of the people [who had their land destroyed] do not feel good.

Who did they inform?

They informed me. After they informed me, I talked to them and they said that they are going to give compensation. Nevertheless, they have not paid the compensation yet although it has been one year now.

Who said that they are going to give compensation? Are they the company?

No, they are not the company. They are the Road Construction Supervising Committee [appointed by the Burma/Myanmar government]. They said that they are going to pay the compensation when they have sold the stones.

Can they [the land owners] do farming in the rainy season?

Yes, regarding the paddy field, they can do farming. Stone mining mostly destroyed the rubber plantations.

Can the people work in their rubber plantation?

No, they cannot. All of the rubber trees have been destroyed and we cannot tap them.

What kind of difficulties do the people who had their rubber plantation destroyed have to face?

Yes, they have to face difficulties. The rubber trees were already mature enough to be tapped and we could have gotten money if we tapped them.

Since their rubber plantations are being destroyed, are their families being supported?

No, there is no one who is going to support them. The people who have destroyed their plantations do not support them either.

Did they [Road Construction Supervising Committee] inform the villagers of the time that they are going to pay the compensation [for their destroyed plantations]?

No, they did not mention the time. They just said that they are going to pay the compensation.

Did they do [start] stone mining after the villagers signed an agreement with them or did they just do [start] stone mining on their own, without getting the confirmation of the villagers?

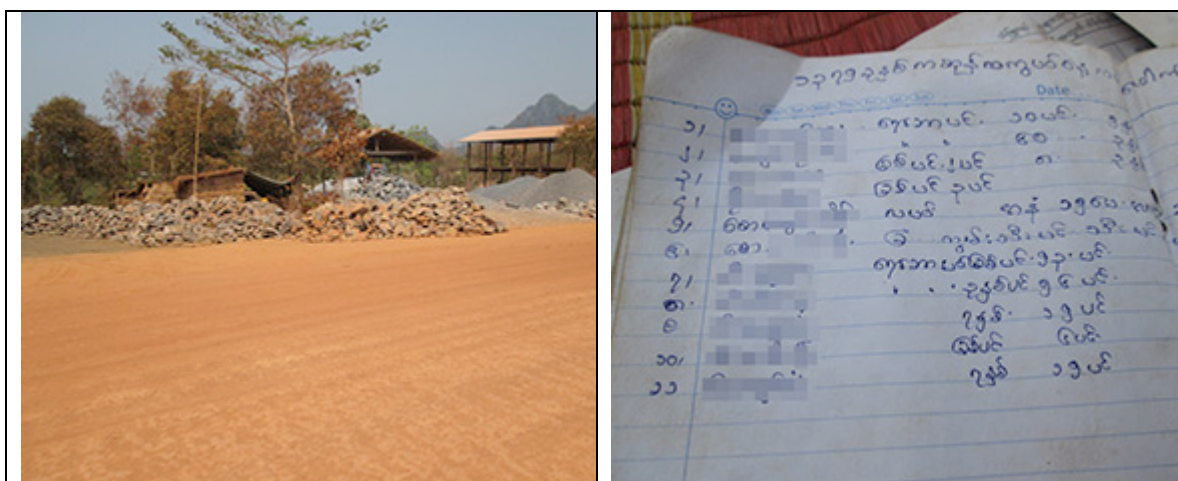
No, they did not sign an agreement with the villagers. The villagers wanted them to sign an agreement with them for stone mining. After signing the agreement, the villagers would have let them do stone mining. But they did not sign the agreement; they just started stone mining right away after having the discussion [with the villagers].

So they did not sign the agreement?

No, they did not.

How do they [the company] think to continue working on stone mining? Are the villagers going to get paid?

I do not know whether or not they are going to pay the compensation. They should pay the compensation.



These photos were taken on April 6th 2014. The photo on the left shows the stone grinding machines in the background which break stones into smaller pieces for use in the construction of the road. One of the villagers from B--- village said that villagers will get compensation for the destruction of their paddy fields and lands when all of these stones have been sold. The photo on the right shows the list of the villagers in B--- village whose paddy fields and rubber plantations had been damaged as part of the stone mining operation. The villagers have not yet received any compensation. [Photos: KHRG]

How many years will it take [for them] to be finished with their road construction project?

They said that they will finish constructing the road in 2015.

If the road is done, what are the business opportunities that would open for the villagers?

If the road is done, it will be easier for the villagers to travel, by using the road. It will be good for some of the villagers' businesses and their lives will improve. For some of those who cannot do business, their lives will not improve.

How many households are there in the village?

There are [censored for security] in the village.

How many people are there in the village?

There are about [censored for security] in the village.

How many people are poor?

That'll be about half of the villagers. [Half of them] are poor.

How many children who go to school and do not go to school are there in the village?

Most of the children go to school. There are only a few children who do not go to school.

Is Karen language taught at school?

Both S'gaw Karen and Pwo Karen languages are taught at school.

How is the living standard of the villagers? Is it the same as before or different?

It is improving because the villagers' businesses are going a little bit better compared to the past.

Since half of the villagers are poor as you have mentioned, what are they doing?

Some are working as day labourers, cutting down the grass for other people's plantations. Some are working at cutting down bamboo and selling it.

Are the villagers called to construct the road?

No.

Did they call for *loh ah pay* [forced labour]⁹ from the villagers to get the stones for the road construction?

No, they did not. They have their own people to construct the road.

How much does a female day labourer get per day?

2,500 kyat (US \$2.24).

What about a male day labourer?

3,000 kyat (US \$2.69).

Are there any children who do not go to school to work as day labourers?

No, there are none. They are young and they are not called [to do so].

Are there any armed groups, like Yellow Scarves¹⁰ [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)]¹¹ that are staying near the village?

⁹ *Loh ah pay* is a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

¹⁰ "Yellow Scarves" is a term commonly used by villagers to denote the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), in reference to the yellow scarves that form part of their uniform.

No, there is no armed group that is staying near the village.

Is there any other armed group, like the BGF [Border Guard Force]¹² that comes through the village?

Yes, they come through the village but they do not disturb the villagers.

Do the Tatmadaw sometimes order the villagers to come have a meeting [with them]?

They ordered once, last year.

Where did they [make the] order from?

They ordered from Noh Choh Neh village.

What was the subject [of the meeting] that they ordered [villagers to come] for?

The subject was conducting development of the villages such as [improving] access to schools, electricity, and water. They asked, "*Do you have problem with access to water?*" and we said that we had. Then they asked, "*What about access to electricity?*" We said, "*We also have [a problem with electricity].*" Then [they asked], "*What about school?*" We said, "*We have problem regarding school. The primary school as well as the post-primary school has not been built [well] yet.*" I said to them, "*We want support for the school [construction] so you can help us.*"

How did they reply to you?

They replied that they are going to help us. They said that it is not their delegated responsibility. It is more related to the [Burma/Myanmar] government. But they said that they are going to inform the government and ask the government to do that.

Have they ever requested thatches and bamboos from the villagers for building their army camp?

No, they did not currently. They requested them a very long time ago.

Regarding travelling, can the villagers travel freely?

They can go freely.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force" Democratic Voice of Burma, August 2010, and, "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009.

Do the villagers have to pay tax at the gate?

There is only this group [KNU based near their village] that villagers have to pay tax to [when travelling].

What about the other armed groups?

I do not know in other areas [whether or not villager have to pay tax when travelling]. I just know in my area.

What about this year, did the Tatmadaw order the villagers [to have a meeting with them]?

No, they didn't this year. They did once last year.

You didn't have any meeting [with the Tatmadaw] this year?

I did a couple days ago when the teachers celebrated the closing ceremony for [their] census training. The teachers asked us to go together with them.

Did they [the government] distribute pamphlets before conducting the census?

They asked the teachers to attend the [census] training and then the teachers had a meeting with the villagers about that. They just did it like that. [They did not distribute the pamphlets about the census]

Did the teachers explain all about the [census] information to the villagers?

Yes. The teachers said that they are collecting the census for the population of the country. They explained what they have learnt and they collected the [census] information the way they were trained. They said, *"If we [teachers] go to ask your name, use the titles 'Saw'¹³ or 'Naw'¹⁴ in front of your names if you are S'gaw Karen and use the titles 'Man'¹⁵ or 'Sa'¹⁶ in front of your name if you are Pwo Karen. Then we will know which Karen ethnicity you are."*

One thing that I want to know is why the villagers do not dare to report, in terms of their land destruction due to road construction?

Most Karen people including me do not dare to talk [about land destruction].

What do you mean by you do not dare to talk?

They [villagers] came and reported to us and then I reported to them [KNU] but they did not listen to our words. People [construction companies] also do not have consultations with us.

So the company did not come and meet with the village head?

No, they did not when they were going to construct the road. They did [constructed the road] as they wanted. When [KNU] had a meeting with us, they have noted down [the destroyed plantations] and they said that they are going to request compensation for us. But as of now, they did not give us the compensation yet.

¹³ *Saw* is a S'gaw Karen title used for men, before their name.

¹⁴ *Naw* is a S'gaw Karen title used for women, before their name.

¹⁵ *Man* is a Pwo Karen titled used for men, before their name.

¹⁶ *Sa* is a Pwo Karen title used for young boys, before their name.

Can you help me if I need help?

Yes, we can work together.

Is there anything else you want to talk about?

I would like to ask for a suggestion for what we should do in order to get compensation for our destroyed plantations. If we get our compensation, that will be great.

If there is nothing else, thank you.



The above photos were taken in B--- village, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District on April 6th 2014. The top two photos are of B--- village head and his rubber plantation which has been covered with rubble and destroyed due to road construction. The bottom-left photo depicts U T---'s rubber plantation where the road is being constructed through the middle of his plantation, damaging it in the process. The bottom-right photo shows the first page of the list of villager names whose lands have been destroyed because of the road construction. There are a total of 32 households whose lands were destroyed. The company did not say anything regarding compensation and the villagers are worried about their lands. [Photos: KHRG]

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

- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, December 2014 to February 2015," (June 2015)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, December 2014," (June 2015)
- "Dooplaya Photo Set: Tatmadaw conduct heavy weapons target practice in Win Yay Township, January 2015," (June 2015)

- “Two separate clashes between armed actors in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, February 2015,” (May 2015)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, March 2015,” (April 2015)

Dooطلا District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)