



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Field Report

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Nyaunglebin Field Report: Changes since ceasefire, the land conflicts and local civilians concerns with military activities, January to December 2014

This field report includes information submitted by KHRG community members describing events occurring in Nyaunglebin District between January 2014 and December 2014. It describes different human rights violations and other issues important to the local community, including landmine incidents, violent abuse, mining, land conflicts and the consequences, the Baw K'Hta dam project, civilians' concerns with current military activities, and fighting.

- *Previous and ongoing land confiscation had led to a big impact on villager's education, healthcare and livelihood conditions as well as causing relocation in Nyaunglebin District.*
 - *In response to land confiscation, in K'Moe Aaing village tract, Pat T'Lah village tract, Weh Lah Daw village tract, P'Deh village tract, Baw K'Hta village tract and Mah Pee village tract in Kyaukkyi Township, the village leaders and the KNU joined together to give five acres of land to each family to ease the villagers' living condition and to help them with their livelihood conditions.*
 - *The villagers' concern with Tatmadaw military activities since the ceasefire is on-going as there is still violent abuse by Tatmadaw soldiers and they continue their activities of military ration transportation, operation of checkpoints and setting troops along the roads that are used by the local villagers.*
 - *Landmines are still being used in Nyaunglebin District in 2014 by Karen National Liberation Army to protect themselves from Tatmadaw attacks as the Tatmadaw have not removed their soldiers from the frontline areas as Karen National Union requested.*
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Changes after the ceasefire

There have been some positive changes in Nyaunglebin District since the preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen National Union (KNU) was signed in 2012.¹ The ceasefire has led to fewer restrictions on freedom of movement and

¹ 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.

reduced attacks by the Tatmadaw, compared to previous years before the ceasefire. However, in some areas there are still ongoing military activities, such as the operation of checkpoints and stationing of troops along roads used by villagers, when the Tatmadaw are transporting their rations. In addition, the Tatmadaw question villagers when they travel through the checkpoints and army camps. The villagers from Moo [Mone] Township also have reported that they feel more freedom to carry out their agricultural livelihood activities due to the reduction in Tatmadaw military activities in Nyaunglebin District after the 2012 ceasefire.² However, in some areas, the villagers stated that since there is no certainty with the ceasefire they do not feel free to travel and work freely for their livelihoods as Tatmadaw military activities are still ongoing.³

A KHRG field researcher from Moo Township stated in a Situation Update that, “The situation in Moo Township has changed after the ceasefire. People can travel easily in the plain [agricultural] areas and the mountainous areas as well, but human right abuses are ongoing. We can say that we have not seen so much that both the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar governments have improved human rights. The civilians also grumble in many ways because the ceasefire is not stable”.⁴

However, some villagers have mixed opinions on freedom of movement. The villagers mentioned that although it has become less strict for them to work for their livelihoods they are still not allowed to travel everywhere freely yet. The villagers in some areas of Moo Township still need a permission letter from KNU’s Moo township office to travel. For example, according to a KNU officer in Moo Township, “Anyone who goes down to Ler Doh [Kyaukki] Town for any reason, such as to buy things or visit their relatives, has to get a permission letter [from the KNU]. If they do not get a permission letter they cannot go to the town.”⁵

Nowadays, even though the villagers can travel more freely and work more comfortably because of the KNU and Myanmar government peace talks, they still have limited confidence regarding the peace process. One KHRG community member commented that the trustworthiness of the peace process from leaders on both sides is not high, and they worry that armed conflict will happen again. One of the main reasons that the villagers have limited confidence in the peace process is because the Tatmadaw continues to carry out numerous military activities in remote areas of Nyaunglebin.⁶

Military activities

The preliminary ceasefire agreement signed in January 2012 has had a positive impact, leading to a reduction in attacks by the Tatmadaw, but military activity, such as the operating of checkpoints during the transportation of rations, and troop movements along roads used by villagers is still on-going in some areas. In one case, prior to the 2014 report period, Tatmadaw soldiers transported rations using four trucks with water proof canvas roofs, and two trucks carrying soldiers to Tha Boh army camp in Moo Township. According to a KHRG community member: “They did this in order to transport them [the rations and soldiers] to Htaw Moh Pleh Meh [army] camp [in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District] and [this will enable them to] be active in 2014 [during the reporting period] in the upper part of Lu Thaw Township, Mutraw [Hpapun] District”. In addition, on January 20th 2014, Tatmadaw soldiers were transporting their rations to Paw Khay Hkoh, close to Htaw Moh Pleh Meh [army camp] with 20 trucks and they had soldiers waiting along the road to make sure their convoy was secured. On the same day when they were transporting their rations, villagers from A--- village, who went to Ler Doh Town for a shopping trip, returned with the things that they bought from the town. On their way back, they encountered Tatmadaw soldiers that were waiting at Koh P’La Lay Hkoh, and one of the

² See “[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014](#),” KHRG, July 2014.

³ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

⁴ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

⁵ See “[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014](#)”, KHRG, July 2014.

⁶ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

Tatmadaw soldiers pointed a gun at the A--- villagers when he saw them. This information was reported by another villager in the group that witnessed the incident, who does not want to mention neither their name nor their village name.⁷

There was more Tatmadaw activity which started in July and August and, according to one KHRG Situation Update from October 2014, the Tatmadaw had not stopped their activities. When the Tatmadaw see people, they do not do anything to harm them. However, since they have their weapons, people are still afraid of them.⁸ According to a KHRG community member, in Ler Doh Township area, the Tatmadaw soldiers conduct many activities using their active battalions, rear battalions and support units. There are also some army camps that the Tatmadaw recently set up in Ler Doh Township such as (1) Muh Theh (2) Hkler Soe (3) Kaw Hplah Lay Hkoh (4) Maw Day Kleh Hkaw (5) Baw K'Hta (6) Ton T'dar (7) Paw Khay Hkoh (8) Nat Than Kwin and (9) Noh Ku Army camp.

Likewise, there is military presence in Moo Township; the military battalions are:

- (1) Military base IB⁹ (Infantry Battalion - 60). The battalion commander is Zarni Aung at Than Bo place.
- (2) LID¹⁰ (Light Infantry Division #351) at Sit Hsin Kon place. The lieutenant is Ye Htut Zaw.
- (3) LIB¹¹ (Light Infantry Battalion #599) in In To In Shay area. The lieutenant is Soe Tint Lin.
- (4) LIB #590. The lieutenant is Aung Than Htay in Yay Ao Sin area and the 15 army camps [in this area] are in Yay Gate, Thit Kyat Seik, Htee Toh Loh, Paw Pee Der, Myaung Oo, Kyo Pay Say, Nyaung Pin Thar, Aaw Law See, Mar Lar Daw, Ma Lwan Pon, Tha Pyay Nywunt, Hsaw Mee Loo, Htee Moo Htah, Kyaung Pyan and Aung Soe Moe army camps.

In Hsaw Htee Township there are five battalions that are active in military operations which are IB (Infantry Battalion #57) Shwe Kyin, LIB (#349), LIB (# 350) Shwe Kyin, LIB (# 598) Z'Lok Gyi and LIB (# 589) Do Seik area. The 15 army camps are in K'ser Hkaw Htee, Ler Htaw Thoh, Sa Loo Chaw, Kaw La Seh, Hkoh Hpeh Hta, Meh Teh Hta, Pa Hee Soe, Thay Hkay Meh Soe, Wah Hkoh Law Teh, Ler Kyoh Khoh, Moh Kyoh Hkoh, Htee Kay Hta Ter Ther Hkoh, Paw Loh Htah, Kyaw Ku and Aye K'nee. The military activities had increased in 2014. Therefore civilians worry that armed fighting will happen.¹²

On October 1st 2014, the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion #598's battalion commander Zaw Win Niang and his soldiers came into the KNU controlled-area in Moo Township and they were warned by local KNU not to enter to carry out their activities. The Tatmadaw ignored the warning and they went across the KNU territory to reach their Battalion #8. Therefore, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)/KNU headquarters from Nyaunglebin district gave a warning shot to Battalion #598. This frightened the villagers and made them lose their faith in the peace process as they experienced ongoing military confrontations.¹³

⁷ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014](#)", KHRG, July 2014.

⁸ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

⁹ Infantry Battalion (IB) (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily purposed for garrison duty but sometimes used in offensive operations.

¹⁰ Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

¹¹ A Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

¹² This information is taken from an unpublished report.

¹³ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

Land confiscation

Many villagers are not aware of how they can own their property and secure their land rights. The Burma/Myanmar government formed many levels of land management at the village head level in village tract areas but these levels are still not helpful for the villagers as they have not raised awareness about the land confiscation or land ownership. In Ler Doh Township, the villagers had to flee to several places and had to leave many lands and their villages during the conflict time and the lands that they inherited from their parents was sold to the wealthy individuals by the government as it was considered uncultivated land. Therefore, it has become difficult for the local villagers to do their livelihood. The villagers' lands in some areas of Nyaunglebin District are being sold to wealthy individuals under the Burma/Myanmar government's permission, for business activity. For example, according to one KHRG field researcher in Ler Doh Township, "In Ler Doh [Kyaukkyi] Township, U¹⁴ Htar Nar Hsway Win (member of Kyaukkyi State Parliament) applied for permission to be able to set up a 200 acre rubber plantation and his application was accepted in 2014". Likewise, U Tin Htun (Shwegyin State parliament) [also applied for] 200 acres along Shwegyin – Kyaukkyi roadside. This place belongs to the B--- villagers, C--- villagers and D--- villagers and the villagers use this land for their livelihoods. KNU [Karen National Union] did not give permission to [U Tin Htun] to use the land so he cannot do anything yet.¹⁵

In 2014, the KNU and village leaders cooperated together and distributed five acres of land for each household in some areas in K'moe Aaing village tract, Pat T'Lah village tract, Weh Lah Daw village tract, P'Deh village tract, Baw K'Hta village tract and Mah Pee village tract in Ler Doh Township in order to help the local civilians improve their living conditions. The purpose of the arrangement was also to balance the living standards and well-being of the villagers for the future and support villagers' livelihoods. The apportionment of five acres of land to each household was from the lands which were reclaimed by local village leaders and the KNU that had previously been sold by the Burma/Myanmar government to wealthy individuals. According to a KHRG community member, "There is no other way to take action and protect their [villagers'] land that had been confiscated and villagers [because of land confiscation fears] have to live as [they did] in the past and always have to worry and be frightened."¹⁶



¹⁴ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

¹⁵ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi, Mone and Shwegyin townships, October to November 2014](#)", KHRG, September 2015.

¹⁶ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi, Mone and Shwegyin townships, October to November 2014](#)", KHRG, September 2015.

These two photos were taken on September 14th 2014, at Ler Doh [Kyaukkyi] Town, E--- village, beside the vehicle road. This land was distributed to villagers by KNU to improve the villagers' livelihood and to make sure that the villagers have ownership of lands to protect them from the effects of land confiscation by wealthy individuals and the Burma/Myanmar government. Villagers got five acres of land per household. [Photos KHRG]

Cases of land confiscation reported in 2014 included villagers' asking for the return of their lands which had been confiscated in previous years. For example, in 1999, the Tatmadaw government forcibly relocated many villagers from an unknown area to Noh Koo pasture and they named the new land Yan Myo Aung village. As there was no action taken against the perpetrators who confiscated the original land, Noh Koo villagers have now started asking for the return of their lands. Regarding this case, it has already been reported to the national parliament and other relevant authorities, yet there has been no response to the villagers' request at the time of reporting.

Likewise, in other areas in Ler Doh, Hsaw Htee and Moo Townships, the Tatmadaw LIB #351 and IB #60 confiscated over 1,000 acres of land including field and farmland in 1995. The villagers have reported about it to the parliament but the lands continue to be controlled by the Tatmadaw. The villagers who requested to work on their land have had to pay a fee every year starting from 1995 to the Tatmadaw in order to work on their land. The villagers have also been threatened by the Tatmadaw in many ways when they try to get back their lands that are controlled by the Tatmadaw. However, in 2014, village leaders collaborated with the local Karen National Union (KNU) to give villagers in F---, G---, H---, I---, J--- and K--- village tracts in Ler Doh Township five acres of land each, from lands that were previously sold off by the Burma/Myanmar government to wealthy individuals.¹⁷

Landmines

In Nyaunglebin District, Moo Township, landmines are still being used in 2014 by the KNLA to protect themselves from Tatmadaw attacks. The Tatmadaw were requested by the KNU to withdraw their troops from their frontline. There is a ceasefire between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government but they still do not have complete trust in the ceasefire. As the KNLA uses landmines in this way to protect themselves, the villagers step on landmines while they travel resulting in injury, disability or death. Landmines cause a big problem for the villagers to travel around and they are frightened about finding vegetables, cutting wood and collecting wood in forest areas. Therefore, one KHRG community member mentioned that although the human rights situation has improved after the ceasefire, human right abuses and concerns are still ongoing in this district. Furthermore, one KHRG community member also has reported that there are 29 people in Moo Township who have stepped on landmines since the 2012 ceasefire. However, the KHRG community member also reported that landmines are one of the things that local people use for maintaining the forest against deforestation and protecting themselves from potential attack by placing landmines around their own village.¹⁸

According to a Situation Update received on July 10th 2014 from a KHRG community member, the landmine incidents that had occurred in the first half of 2014 were:

1. Two villagers from L--- village were affected by landmines. Saw M--- stepped on a landmine on March 22nd 2014 at Htoh Kyah Kyi place. Another villager named Saw N--- also stepped on a landmine at Htoh Kyah Kyi on an unknown date and died immediately after the landmine accident.
2. Three villagers stepped on a landmine on April 3rd 2014 at Theh Phyu Chaw place. One villager died from the accident.

¹⁷ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi, Mone and Shwegyin townships, October to November 2014](#)", KHRG, September 2015.

¹⁸ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

3. Two villagers stepped on a landmine on April 5th 2014 at Paw Pi Der place. One villager died from the injury and the other villager sustained injuries.
4. A villager from O--- village stepped on a landmine on April 10th 2014.
5. A P--- villager stepped on a landmine at Kyoh Hkay place on May 28th 2014.¹⁹

Healthcare

In Nyaunglebin District, Hsaw Htee [Shwegyin] Township area, there is no sickness that leads to critical conditions or serious concerns for the villagers. There are four hospitals in Hsaw Htee Township area. They are called the District Hospital, the Brigade Hospital, the Shwegyin Township Hospital and the KNLA Battalion #9's Hospital. Fever is the most frequent sickness that happens to the villagers. Related to health, one community member from Hsaw Htee Township, stated in July 2014, "However, there is one problem: [business] people coming into the area to do mining and destroying the river which causes problems [for local people] who use [consume] the water for their health and for their daily needs [washing]."²⁰

In Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township, there is no clinic for the villagers' healthcare and it is difficult to find medical treatment so the villagers have to go and buy medicine in Ler Doh Town. Sometimes, the villagers go to Q--- village to buy medicine and sometimes the villagers buy the medicine from the people who come and sell medicine in the village for profit.²¹ There is no other hospital in the mountainous areas in Nyaunglebin District. However, there is one hospital in R--- village. One KHRG community member from Moo Township witnessed common illnesses such as runny nose, fever and diarrhoea that happened to the children in early 2014 in S--- village, Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township. The parents typically give medicine to the children but they do not recover quickly. If the children are sick for a long time and become weak, they give them the medicine through a drip for energy that costs 4,500 kyat for each drip. Sometimes it is difficult for the villagers to get the medicine and energy drips if there is no one who brings medicine for sale to the village for a long period of time. The villagers prefer to buy medicine from Thailand as they have experienced that it is better than the medicine that is produced in Burma/Myanmar. However, the villagers normally go either to Ler Doh Hospital or R--- Hospital in Nyaunglebin District for serious diseases. One KHRG community member also mentioned in a Situation Update that "S--- villagers are united and help each other as much as they can whenever they [someone is] having a difficult time [with sickness]."²²

In Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin district, there is a clinic that was recently built by Burma/Myanmar Boundary Minister U That Tun but there is an insufficient medicine supply in the clinic, with certain types of medicines not available at all. The villagers were also told that this new clinic will benefit the villagers' health. Sometimes when the villagers are sick, they sell their produce from their farm such as dog fruits and cardamom and save the money for buying medicines that they cannot get from the clinic.²³

Education

In Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township, it is poor regarding education. The Tatmadaw used to be active in carrying out the military activities for more than ten years before the reporting period and the villagers were displaced to different places. Consequently they could not set up a permanent school. The children were not able to study due to the displacement. But in 2013, church members and students from S--- village established a primary school by promising to provide 250,000 kyats [US \$212.19]²⁴ and ten big tins²⁵ of rice to the school teachers each year.

¹⁹ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

²⁰ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Shwegyin Township, March to June 2014](#)", KHRG, January 2015.

²¹ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014](#)", KHRG, July 2014.

²² See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014](#)", KHRG, July 2014.

²³ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi Township, July 2014](#)", KHRG, October 2014.

²⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 15th 2016 official market rate of 1178 kyats to US \$1.

At that time there were 25 students and two female teachers. The school is self-reliant and KED [Karen Education Department] supports the school but it is not enough funding. The students will have to move to other places when they complete the school in the village.²⁶ Some students in the village moved to Thailand to a refugee camp to continue their education, some students have to drop out of school after they finish at the primary school in the village to help their parents with general work and some students move to other places to continue their education. But for those who move to other places to continue their education, they have to stay away from their parents and their parents cannot take care of them closely; their parents have concerns about their children becoming bad people as they might be prone to bad influence from people in town and cities.²⁷

In Hsaw Htee [Shwegyin] Township, in the hill area, there are eight village tracts that are called Loh Hkee village tract, Ler Wah village tract, Saw Theh Hkee village tract, Htee Wa Byay village tract, Blaw Hkoh village tract, Meh Yeh Hkee village tract, Meh K'Tee village tract and Htee Bwah Loh village tract. In Hsaw Htee Township, there are 31 schools including five nursery schools, 16 primary schools, one college school, two high schools and seven middle schools. One KHRG community member from Hsaw Htee Township stated in a Situation Update that, "The [number of] students are decreasing because they have gone to other [neighbouring] countries. Some left school and now work in labour, some students moved to the flat land areas for further study, whilst others went to the refugee camps [for study]."²⁸

The KHRG community member also reported that in T--- village, Hsaw Htee Township, there was road construction with women and men working as labourers on March 9th 2014, led by the construction foreman Kaw Ghay Htoo. The labourers also included school age children who should be studying. They were doing things such as digging soil and carrying rocks for the road. The KHRG community commented that "they [the employers] do not explain to the children that they should not be doing this kind of job due to their age, [instead they] employ them anyway. This is a violation of children's rights; they should be receiving an education but we have seen that they are working instead."²⁹

Fighting

In information received by KHRG, on October 5th 2014 20 Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion [LIB] #759 entered onto villagers' paddy fields in U--- village, Hkeh Der village tract in Ler Doh Township area. According to the agreement between the KNU and Tatmadaw, the area has been prohibited from trespassing.³⁰ The territory is under the control of KNLA Company #3 which is under the control of KNLA Battalion #8. LIB #759 were warned by the KNLA but that did not stop them coming into the area. Later on that day, the KNLA soldiers attacked the Tatmadaw soldiers. Likewise, Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion #361 under the control of Military Operations Command #10 entered the KNU territory area which is 3,000 yards [2.7 kilometers] away from the road. On the same day, the Karen National Defense Organisation [KNDO] went there to check out the situation. However, they were attacked by the Tatmadaw on the way. As a result, one KNDO soldier died and one was injured during the fight.³¹ The

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ It is likely that this village school runs from Standards 1 to 4 which are the typical standards (grades) for primary schools in KED areas.

²⁷ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014](#)", KHRG, July 2014.

²⁸ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Shwegyin Township, March to June 2014](#)", KHRG, January 2015.

²⁹ See "[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Shwegyin Township, March to June 2014](#)", KHRG, January 2015.

³⁰ As per the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw are only allowed to operate and travel up to 50 yards from either side of roads that connect their army camps through KNLA territory, and only within a 150 yard radius around their own army camp.

³¹ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

villagers also have concerns with military activities in their area even though the ceasefire has been signed between the fighting groups.³²

Violent abuse

In Moo Township, restriction on freedom of movement is still ongoing in some places as there is no certainty with the ceasefire between KNU-KNLA soldiers and Tatmadaw soldiers. According to a Situation Update from a KHRG community member from Moo Township, on July 13th 2014, a Tatmadaw Sergeant Myo Naing Htun and his two soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion #590 encountered villager Saw V--- who is 37 years old from W--- village. Saw V--- was on his way back from his paddy field to get some of his friends to help him with his work in the field. On his way, near the monastery on the road in AB--- village, he encountered the Tatmadaw soldiers. They called to him and said that he was travelling in the night time.³³ They arrested him for travelling at night time and violently abused him. As a result, Saw V--- was severely injured from the violent abuse.³⁴

KHRG also received a phone call from a community member from Moo Township on October 21st 2014, saying that a woman was found dead on October 12th 2014 at night time in a field. The incident place is about six furlong³⁵ away from Zee Gone Village and it was in a field owned by Saw Y--- who is from Z--- Village. The victim's name is Sandar Win and her father's name is Saw X---. They are from AA--- village in Moo Township, Nyaunglebin District. She was found with bruises on her neck and according to local people, it was likely she was choked to death. There was no clarification of who was the murderer and a police investigation had begun.³⁶

Baw K'Hta Dam Project

In Ler Doh Township, in Baw K'Hta River area, there has been a Burma/Myanmar government plan for dam construction for a long time but it has always been forbidden by the KNU. But nowadays as the KNU has started peace talks with the Burma/Myanmar government, the Burma/Myanmar government has scheduled to build the dam at Baw K'Hta River. On October 18th 2014, there was a community meeting about the Baw K'Hta hydroelectric dam project held in Hkoh Poe area, Ler Doh Township. The program was held as a discussion with community based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) on whether the dam should be built or not. The villagers brought up many questions and their ideas about the dam during the discussion and the responsible persons failed to answer all the questions from the villagers. In this meeting, there were over twenty villages' representatives and community religious leaders who participated. There were over two hundred people altogether including foreign country representatives: Norwegian Embassy representative (Mattal), MPSI (Myanmar Peace Support Initiative) representative (Ashley), other Norway professionals, and KNU (Karen National Union) representatives from Thaton and Nyaunglebin districts. KNU headquarter leader Pa Doh³⁷ Saw³⁸ Tah Doh Moo led the program and held the meeting. One KHRG community member mentioned that the representatives from Norway who came to get information about the dam were not the people who are going to carry out the dam construction plan, they were coming just to question in order to examine and confirm whether the dam should be constructed or not. They came to meet directly with local people and establish the laws or rules together with local civilians for the dam construction. During the meeting, Pa Doh Saw Tah Doh Moo from

³² This information is taken from an unpublished report.

³³ Whilst sometimes curfews have been imposed on villagers by Tatmadaw which restrict them from travelling at night time, a curfew was not officially reported at this time in this area. The reason for the restrictions on the villager against travelling at night time in this incident are not clear.

³⁴ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

³⁵ A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.2 km or 0.125 miles.

³⁶ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

³⁷ Pa Doh is a S'gaw Karen title meaning governor.

³⁸ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

KNU stated that, “The person who comes and supports the dam construction has to listen to the local voice and follow the rules of the community”.³⁹

Mining

In Hsaw Htee Township area, Nyaunglebin District, there are problems with river pollution from mining that has been on-going for two or three years. According to the KHRG community member in Hsaw Htee Township area, the people who are in charge of mining in the area cooperate with the KNLA and KNU and the community members also mentioned that there has been no big collective action by the local villagers to stop the mining operation in the area. It has been unclear or unknown for villagers what KNU and KNLA have planned in order to solve the pollution problem that is happening between the mining operation and the local villagers. However, the local villagers have seen that the mining machines and materials that are used for mining in the area have decreased but the rivers and the streams near the mining operation area are still being polluted as an ongoing consequence of the mining.⁴⁰

Livelihood situation

In Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District, people mostly do farming and specifically flat land farming or hill farming depending on where they live. They also grow vegetables and spices such as mustard leaf, long bean, pumpkin, cucumber, lufah gourd, taro, yam, dog fruit and turmeric for daily subsistence. After the paddy harvesting, the villagers start to plough their land ready for growing vegetables and other foods. They buy ingredients such as fish paste and salt and support their children to go to school with the money that they make from their fields. There are also the other villagers who work on trees in plantations such as betel nut trees, durian trees, betel leaf trees, pomelo trees and mangosteen trees for their livelihood. For the people who grow these kinds of fruits, they sell their produce to the nearby city and they buy rice, salt and fish paste for their household. According to the KHRG community member from Ler Doh Township; “In mountain areas, there are only about 30% of villagers who are literate and the rest of the percentage [70%] will be the villagers who are working on cultivation and hill farming.”⁴¹



The above two photos were taken on May 6th 2014 in Nyaunglebin District. These photos show a father and his son who were making cement blocks for their livelihoods. He [the father] sends his son to school [by making money from cement blocks]. [Photos KHRG]

Conclusion

³⁹ This information is taken from an unpublished report.

⁴⁰ See “[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Shwegyin Township, March to June 2014](#),” KHRG, January 2015.

⁴¹ See “[Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi Township, July 2014](#),” KHRG, October 2014.

The above information was collected in Hsaw Htee Township, Ler Doh Township and Moo Township, in Nyaunglebin District between the period of January and December 2014. As Burma/Myanmar is opening up gradually, the country government has started doing development projects such as building new schools or repairing existing schools, building clinics, constructing roads and other projects throughout the country. With the situations mentioned in this Field Report, there are still human rights violations such as restrictions on villagers' with their right to access healthcare, right to education and their freedom of movement. In addition, with Burma/Myanmar government activities in Nyaunglebin area such as land confiscation for military purpose in the past, the confiscated lands are still controlled by the Tatmadaw. This is one of the main things that severely impacts on the villager's livelihood in Nyaunglebin District. Finally, there have notable changes since the ceasefire between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government such as stopping attacks in remote areas in Nyaunglebin District and decreasing the operation of the checkpoints during the transportation of the rations for the military but many of the villagers still have concerns with the ceasefire based of what they have seen or experienced since the ceasefire in 2012 until the end of 2014.

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

- "The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar," (February 2016)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi, Mone and Shwegyin Townships, October to November 2014," (January 2015)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Shwegyin Township, October 2014 to January 2015," (September 2015)
- "'With only our voices, what can we do?': Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar," (June 2015)
- "Ongoing militarisation of southeastern Burma/Myanmar, since the January 2012 ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government," (February 2015)

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)