



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

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Dooplaya Interview: Daw A---, October 2015

This Interview with Daw A--- describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, in October 2015, including land confiscation and forced relocation.

- Daw A--- reported that in 2013, Thai people came into her area, section B---, D---zone, Kawkareik Town, Kawkareik Township, and measured the land. Later they proceeded to construct a road, a part of the Asian Highway, without consulting the villagers living there. Because of the road construction, one-third of Daw A---'s land was confiscated and she had to demolish one of her houses. She was given only 1,080,000 kyat (US \$846.08) in compensation.
 - Daw A--- also states that in 2015, Burma/Myanmar government land administration officers came and demarcated more land in her village as the road construction area, in order to prevent villagers from building more shops beside the road. The land administration officers then ordered the villagers to dismantle the shops that they have already built by October 29th 2015, claiming that they are encroaching on the road construction area.
 - In addition, they ordered the villagers to dismantle their houses. Even though they gave each villager 2,500,000 kyat (US \$1,958.51) in compensation, villagers feel that it is an unfair amount, as they already spent more than that to rebuild their houses.
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Interview | Daw A---, (female, 52), Section B---, D---Zone, Kawkareik Town, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. (October 2015)

The following Interview was conducted by a KHRG member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Dooplaya District on October 24th 2015 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

Ethnicity: Burmese

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Vendor

Position: Villager

What is your name?

Daw A---.

How old are you?

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast 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.

52 years [old].

What is your ethnicity?

Burmese, Buddhist.

Are you married?

Yes, I was, but I am [now] divorced.

What is your birthplace?

C--- [village].

Where do you currently live?

Section B---, D---zone, Kawkareik Town [in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District].

How long have you been living here?

I have been living here almost ten years.

Do you own any land?

I have my own land and yard,² but one-third of my land was confiscated when the road [Asian Highway 1 from Myawaddy to Kawkareik Town] was constructed.

How did you [come to] own your land? For example, [did] you inherit it, or [did] you buy it?

I bought it. I moved from my village [and bought this land] because here it's easy for the children to go to school, [it's] close to the clinic, and it will be easy to live here when we get old. That is why we sold what we had [in our village] and bought [this] land and [came to] live here. But I had to give up one-third of the land when the road was built.

How much did you buy the land for?

It wasn't very expensive like [it is] now. A plot of land was 300,000 kyat (US \$235.39)³ or 400,000 kyat (US \$313.95) in the past.

Yes, 300,000 kyat (US \$235.39) or 400,000 kyat (US \$313.95) was worth a lot [more] at that time.

Of course.

When did you buy it?

I don't remember.

Does your land have a land title?

² In Burma/Myanmar, a "yard" or "house compound" refers to an urban or rural residential plot, which can be bought privately. These plots differ from plots of farmland, which are owned by the government and can only be leased from the Burma/Myanmar government for the purposes of agricultural production.

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the November 3rd 2015 official market rate of 1274.10 kyat to the US \$1.

Yes, I have it. This is a yard, so we have it. Actually, this is the land that the [Burma/Myanmar] government staff got from the government, and they sold it to us.

Did they give you the land title?

Yes.

Did they give you [the Land Sale Agreement] contract?

Yes.

What did you grow in your yard?

I planted lemon, guava, and mango [trees] in the past.

How big is your land?

60 [feet] long and 40 [feet] wide.

How much of your land was included in the road construction?

I don't know because we did not measure it.

How much of it was included [in the road construction] if we calculate in percentage?

One-third of the land was included.

When did you know that your land was confiscated?

We knew it when people came and built the road.

Who came and built the road?

Thai people came and built the road. The group [surveying the road area] included land administration department [representatives] from this area [Kawkareik Township], and Thai people came and measured it again [before they began construction].

Did they inform you about the road construction and about the measurement of the road before they did it?

No, they did not do anything [to inform us]. They just noted down what trees we have in the yard and what [else] we have in the yard. I had two houses in my yard. You can build two houses in my yard [it is big enough for two houses]. We were able to build one house in the land that was included in the road construction, [but] they gave us money to dismantle that house.

How much did they give you [in compensation] to dismantle the house?

We only got 180,000 kyat (US \$141.03) to dismantle the house because they said it was just a garage. [Some of] my land was also included in the road construction, so they said I will get 900,000 kyat (US \$705.15) [in compensation for the land]. So they gave me 1,080,000 kyat (US \$846.15) [in total].

Did you have the right to ask [negotiate] for the amount of compensation that you wanted?

No, we did not have the chance. We just had to take what they gave us.

When did they start to build the road?

I don't know. It has been two years already since the road was finished. You see, [even] this Grandma [points to woman sitting beside her] had to move her whole house, and moved [rebuilt] it back [away from the road].

What difficulties have you faced because of the construction of this road?

The problem is that now [in 2015] they came and demarcated more places [land] as the road [construction] area.⁴ They do not allow us to sell things [beside the road]. They said that we are encroaching on the road area. Actually, it is our land, and now they're saying we are encroaching on it. They stopped this Grandma from building her shop. They ordered the shops that [have already been built and] are selling things to be dismantled by October 29th [2015]. The reality is that we live on our [own] land, but they said we are encroaching on the road area. Actually, they are encroaching on our land.

How did they [give] you the order? By letter or verbally?

By letter.

Will your land be included in the road [construction] area?

Yes.

So you mean that part of your land was included when they first constructed the road?

Yes. It was already included when they first constructed the road, and now that they demarcated the [extended] road [construction] area it [my land] is [almost] all gone.

Will they give you compensation because your house and land were included in the road [construction] area?

They did not inform us of anything. They just came and demarcated the road area by themselves.

Did they inform you that your land will be included in the road [construction] area?

No, they did not. We did not even know it, and they [just] said it is the road [construction] area when we [finally] asked them.

Who came and demarcated the road area?

Young people [civil servants] from the municipality. We do not know them. We were thinking of opening a shop and now they have stopped us [from doing so].

What difficulties will you face if the road area [proposed boundaries] are true?

They can order us to move at any time because of this road area. We feel it in our minds and we are frightened. Where will we live? We cannot afford to buy a new [plot of] land anymore.

⁴ The additional land that was demarcated as the "road construction area" is on either side of the existing road, and presumably will be partially used to expand the road so that it is wider.

Did you submit a complaint letter to the [Burma/Myanmar] government regarding this case?

No, we have not done it, yet.

Do you dare to submit it?

We will dare to do it if other people do it. If we have someone that will lead us then we will follow them. Many people have been included [affected]: all the houses beside the road.

Do you have anything else to say about this case?

Now they came and demarcated it as road area and it included my whole house and all my yard is gone. We will tell them if they come and tell us to move, we would say we have no place to move to. We do not have another [plot of] land. Will they give us spare land [to live on]? Will they give us compensation for our houses? It cost two or three million kyat (US \$1,566.92 – US \$2,350.38) when I built my house. If they [decided to] give us places [spare land] to live on, they will only give us the place [land] that people do not live on [because it is unusable].

How do you want it [the situation] to be [turn out]?

[Woman #2:] ⁵

I want to say that I do not want to move any more. We are poor and we just want to live in this place. We can raise pigs and sell them when they grow up, or we can set up a shop and travellers can buy things from us, and we can survive. Where will we live if they do not allow us to live here anymore? Things are happening like this now: We are living beside the road, but we cannot [open a shop] and sell things. We want to sell things. Now we worry a lot because of the road area.

[Woman #3:] We already dismantled [and rebuilt] our house once, and how will we live in the house if it is dismantled twice [since it is likely that the material that would be salvaged will not be sufficient to rebuild the house a third time]?

When did they distribute this order letter?

[Daw A---:] Yesterday, October 23rd [2015]. There was no seal on this letter and it seems like they [Burma/Myanmar government land administration officers] wanted to make money [for themselves].⁶ They [Burma/Myanmar government land administration officers should] just say openly if they want to make money [for themselves]. This is kind of threatening. They said they will sue us [if we do not dismantle the shops by October 29th 2015]. They gave us 2,500,000 [kyat] (US \$1,958.65) to dismantle our house. It already cost [us] 2,500,000 (US \$1,958.65) to hire workers [to dismantle the house]. We also had to spend our own money, more than 2,000,000 kyat (US \$1,566.92), because the wood [that the house was built with] was destroyed when they dismantled it, and we had to buy it again.

Did they threaten you?

No, they just gave us this letter.

⁵ At this point in the interview, two women who were observing the interview interjected to provide their own testimonies of the impact the land confiscation order letter had on their lives.

⁶ Daw A--- is insinuating that the lower level land administration officers wrote the letter ordering the villagers to dismantle their houses unofficially, without higher-level administrative approval, and so they did not dare to seal the letter with an official seal. She thinks that the land administration officers were looking to be bribed by villagers who wish to keep their shops along the road open.

Did any foreigners come to tell you about the road construction before the road was built?

No. They came and demarcated the road area after people [had already] built the shops. They did not say anything before we built the shops.

How did you feel when they came and demarcated the road area?

I felt really sad. My heart was broken, and I am lucky that I did not die [of sadness]. We do not have a man in our family and we had to hire [workers for] everything [that needed to be done to dismantle and rebuild the house] and all the [compensation] money is gone. 2,000,000 kyat (US \$1,566.92) is barely enough for the carpenter's fee. I used cement [for the floor] in our old house, and I felt really upset when people destroyed it because we cannot [afford to] get it again.

[Woman #3:] These things [our properties] were included in the [initial] road construction and we got compensation for it and we were satisfied because we still had land to live on, right? We could still live on it. Now, how would you have felt when they came and demarcated the road area? No place to relocate, no money. We have opened a shop and now they banned us [from selling goods] and ordered us to dismantle it by October 29th [2015]. The things that we are selling are not valuable: just rice [food] and tea. We cannot afford to sell valuable things.

[Woman #2:] We just sell snacks, tea, and betel nut - only these three things. I will not sell alcohol. I do not like it and I cannot stand the noise [of intoxicated people]. I am almost 70 [years old] and I have never drunk alcohol and I have not killed anyone [I am a good person].

How many households were affected because of the road construction in this village?

[Daw A---:] About 16 households. There were [also] some [villager] plots without houses [on them].

What else do you want to say, and how do you want it [the situation with the road construction] to be [turn out]?

Just like we said, we cannot relocate anymore. We want to sell things [for a living] because we cannot do [physically] hard jobs anymore.

Thank you very much.

Yes.





These photos were taken on October 24th, 2015 by a KHRG community member at Section B---, D---zone, Kawkareik Town, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. The first two photos depicts the houses and shops located beside the Asian Highway from Myawaddy to Kawkareik. The Burma/Myanmar government declared that the villagers who are living on either side of the road are encroaching on the area designated for the expansion of the road, and they were ordered to remove their houses and shops by October 29th 2015. The villagers were told that if they do not dismantle their shops, they will be sued by the Burma/Myanmar government. The second two photos are of a villager's house which had to be removed because the government confiscated his land for the road construction. Almost an acre of his land was confiscated but he did not get compensation because the government said that he does not have a land title. The last two photos show the stone marker that was put up by the Burma/Myanmar government to demarcate as the land as the “road construction area” and the order letter from the government that ordered the villagers to dismantle their shops by October 29th 2015. [Photos: KHRG]

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

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships, July to November 2014,” (January 2016)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, March to May 2015,” (November 2015)
- “Forced recruitment of a child soldier by KNLA in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District, October 2015,” (October, 2015)
- “Hpa-an Short Update: Nabu Township, April to March 2015,” (October, 2015)

- “Fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers along the Asian Highway displaces villagers in Dooplaya District, July 2015,” (September, 2015)

Dooplaya District



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