



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Growing drug use and its consequences in Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts, between February and December 2015

This News Bulletin describes drug issues and local armed groups' response in Hpa-an and Dooplaya districts between February and December 2015.¹

- *In Dooplaya District, elderly women who have family members in armed groups, living in the villages near Kawkaik Town, are secretly selling drugs while their husbands are on military duty.*
- *A villager who was over 50 years old was killed in a motorcycle accident. The person who crashed into him, Saw A---, was under the influence of the yaba drug. He was ordered to pay compensation to the deceased man's family.*
- *A group of BGF soldiers went into O--- village in Paingkyon Township on February 12th 2015 to arrest a woman, Naw B---, and her two daughters, as they have been selling yaba in the village. Naw B--- escaped during the raid on her house and is currently hiding with the KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC) Htaw Meh Pa Battalion, which is led by Commander Kyaw Kyaw. Her two daughters were arrested and brought to a BGF base in the area.*

As can be seen in previously published KHRG reports,² armed groups such as the Karen National Union (KNU), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA),³ Border Guard Force (BGF)⁴ and the Tatmadaw have previously attempted to cooperate to address the drug

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from community members from Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts who have been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It summarises information from three photo notes and one situation update received by KHRG between February 2015 and January 2016. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast 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.

² See for example, "[Hpa-an Situation Update: Paingkyon Township, June to October 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2015, as well as, "[Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe, Nabu, Paingkyon and Hti Lon townships, May to July 2014](#)," KHRG, November 2014.

³ 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.

⁴ 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 Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions

issues affecting communities in Karen State and take serious action in cases related to drugs. However, the production, sale and use of drugs are ongoing and have become a point of great concern in Karen State, especially in Hpa-an and Doooplaya districts.

According to a KHRG community member from Doooplaya District, the sale of *yaba* (methamphetamine)⁵ drugs in the villages near Kawkareik Town increased in 2015 and continues to increase in 2016. He reported that usually, it is the older women, those who are married to armed group members, who secretly sell *yaba* when their husbands are not home.⁶ The sale of drugs also occurs in many other places near the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, such as Waw Lay village, Thay Baw Boh village and Hpa Lu village.



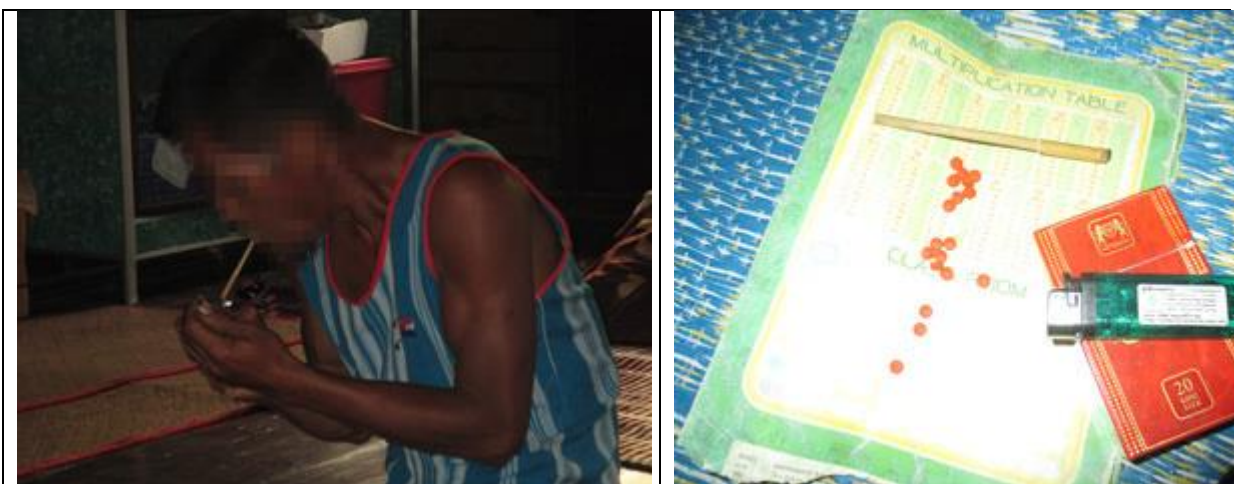
This photo was taken on October 11st 2015, in Kawkareik Township, Doooplaya District. It shows *yaba* tablets, which are slightly misshapen due to being exposed to moisture. The use of these *yaba* pills in the villages near Kawkareik Town is increasing. Some elderly women, including women whose husbands are members of armed groups, sell the drug while their husbands are away. [Photo: KHRG]



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.

⁵ *Yaba*, which means “crazy medicine” in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during World War II to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Vietnam, and in Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, “[Yaba, the 'crazy medicine of East Asia'](#),” UNODC, May 2008 and “[Woman raped and killed in Pa’an District, October 2012](#),” KHRG, December 2012, and “[Chapter: Drug production, use and the social impacts in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire](#),” KHRG, June 2014.

⁶ This information was included in unpublished Photo Notes received by KHRG in January 2016.



These photos were taken in December, 2015. They show villagers using the WY drug in Z--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. The WY drug is also known as *yaba* and it is sold in the form of a round pill containing a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine. To use the drug, users make a cup using the aluminum lining within cigarette cases, and they create a pipe with a bamboo branch or paper roll, such as the one seen in the last photo. Then, they put the pills into the cup, heat them by placing a lighter under the aluminum cup, and inhale the smoke that is produced using the pipe. Some people keep water in their mouth while inhaling, in order to soften the effect of the drug. The drug is sold at 2,500 kyat (US \$2.01)⁷ per pill and is used not only by adults but also by children in the village. [Photos: KHRG]

The widespread use of methamphetamines has been negatively affecting not only users, but also innocent community members. A stark example is the death of a villager named Kyaw Bleh from Mi Gan Kyar Ma Nai village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, who was over 50 years old. He was killed in a drug-induced motorcycle accident in Kaw Hser village while he was on his way to Kawkareik Town. Saw A---, the driver who crashed into Kyaw Bleh's motorcycle, was taken to the hospital after the accident. He mentioned that he had used *yaba* before driving and as a result, he accidentally collided with Kyaw Bleh's motorcycle.⁸



This photo was taken on September 11th 2015. The deceased person in this photo, Kyaw Bleh, who was a Mi Gan Kyar Ma Nai villager, was over 50 years old when he died in a motorcycle accident. On September 10th 2015, in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, at 3:00 PM, while he was heading to Kawkareik Town, he was hit by another motorcycle and died immediately in Kaw Hser village. The person who crashed into Kyaw Bleh, Saw A---, had to be hospitalised. Saw A---, from Law Par village, was under the influence of *yaba* when he caused this accident. He was ordered to provide compensation to Kyaw Bleh's family. [Photo: KHRG]

Given the negative consequences of the use of *yaba*, some armed groups have been taking action against known *yaba* dealers. In one case, on February 12th 2015, BGF soldiers⁹ came into O--- village, Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, to arrest Naw B--- and her two daughters, as

⁷ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the February 24th 2016 official market rate of 1,238.68 kyat to the US \$1.

⁸ This information was included in unpublished Photo Notes received by KHRG in January 2016.

⁹ It is not clear which BGF battalion conducted the operation; Battalion #1015 has traditionally operated in this area.

the BGF were informed that they sell *yaba* in the village. However, they were not able to arrest Naw B---, as she escaped to evade arrest. During the raid on her house, they found 20,000 pills of *yaba* and a 32 mm pistol, as well as some of the money that she and her daughters earned from selling the drug. Naw B--- is currently hiding with Karen Peace Council's (KPC)¹⁰ Operation Command #3 Htaw Meh Pa Battalion, which is led by Commander Kyaw Kyaw.¹¹



These photos were taken on February 12th 2015, in O--- village, Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District. The first two photos are of Naw C--- and Naw D---, the daughters of Naw B---, who were arrested by the BGF for selling *yaba* on February 12th 2015. The BGF confiscated 20,000 pills of *yaba*, a 32mm pistol and as well the money they earned by selling drugs. The BGF also intended to arrest Naw B---, but were unable to do so, as she fled and sought cover with the KNU/KNLA-PC Operations Command #3. The Battalion Commander Kyaw Kyaw warmly welcomed Naw B---, and a KHRG community member expressed that Commander Kyaw Kyaw should teach her not to sell drugs again. [Photos: KHRG]

Although the armed groups in Karen State are claiming to take serious action against drugs, they remain easily available for purchase locally, and the issues associated with them are ongoing. *Yaba*, in particular, is being widely used by many children, students and men in Hpa-an and Dooplaya districts, as it is not difficult to buy. The ease of access to *yaba* is especially apparent in Hlaingbwe Township in Hpa-an District, where even some students in

¹⁰ The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Gkaw Ko, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2007 and subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform its forces into the Tatmadaw Border Guard. See: "[KPC to be outlawed if it rejects BGF](#)," *Burma News International*, August 30th 2010.

¹¹ This information was included in unpublished Photo Notes received by KHRG in 2015.

sixth and seventh standards¹² know how to use these drugs and are already addicted to them. As a result, these students do not obey their teachers and parents anymore. Consequentially, villagers from Daw Nan Sein village and the Chairperson from Phlone-Sqaw Democratic Party U Saw Thein Aung reported the case to the national parliament, calling on them to put a stop to the drugs issue. Information regarding drugs remain highly sensitive, as local villagers also see the local armed groups as complicit in perpetuating the drug issues. According to a KHRG community member from Dooplaya District, *"The methamphetamine drug came from the organizations [armed groups], then [they] spread it to the civilians."*¹³

Further background reading on the situation in Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Dooplaya Photo Set: Road construction and expansion results in destruction of villagers' plantations in Kyonedoe and Kyainseikgyi townships, December 2014 to July 2015," (March 2016)
- "The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar," (February 2016)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, July 2015, (February 2016)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, March to May 2014," (February 2016)
- "Hpa-an Short Update: Nabu Township, April to March 2015," (October 2015)

¹² A standard refers to a school year in the education system of Burma/Myanmar. The basic education system has a 5-4-2 structure. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 5, lower secondary school is Standards 6-9, and upper secondary school is Standards 10-11.

¹³ This information was included in an unpublished Situation Update received by KHRG in January 2016.

Locally defined Northern and Central Karen Districts



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