



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Regional Report

May 11<sup>th</sup> 2011 / KHRG #2011-01

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### **Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District**

*At least 8,885 villagers in 118 villages in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District have either exhausted their current food supplies or are expecting to do so prior to the October 2011 harvest. The 118 villages are located in nine village tracts, where attacks on civilians by Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw, have triggered wide scale and repeated displacement since 1997. As tens of thousands of civilians in northern Karen State have been displaced, over-population in hiding areas where civilians can more effectively avoid attacks has created shortages of arable land, depleted soil fertility and reduced potential crop yields. Civilians forced to cultivate land or live near Tatmadaw camps, meanwhile, have faced recent attacks, including indiscriminate shelling and attacks on food supplies, buildings and livelihoods. These existing obstacles to food security were compounded by an unusually dry rainy season in 2010, coupled with other environmental factors, causing the 2010 harvest to fail. The impact of acute food shortages on the civilian population is magnified by budgetary constraints of local relief organisations, which can access the affected area but are currently unable to provide emergency assistance to many of those facing food shortages. This regional report is based on research conducted by KHRG researchers in Lu Thaw Township in February and March 2011, including 41 interviews with villagers and village and village tract leaders in the affected areas. This research was augmented by interviews with members of local relief organisations in February, March and April 2011.*

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At least 8,885 villagers from 118 villages in nine village tracts of Lu Thaw Township, Papun District have either exhausted their current food supplies or will run out of food before the October 2011 harvest, according to research conducted in the area by KHRG field researchers in February and March 2011. At least 1,246 families are currently at risk in Kay Bpoo, Nah Yoh Htah, Ler Muh Bplaw, Saw Muh Bplaw, Plah Koh, Gkaw Loo Der, Yeh Muh Bplaw, Kheh Bpah and Bpay Gkay village tracts. When interviewed in February and March, some villagers told KHRG they expected to have consumed all of their existing food supplies by May 2011.

In 41 interviews conducted by KHRG field researchers in Lu Thaw Township, villagers, including village and village tract leaders, discussed the causes of food insecurity in their communities. Villagers explained that agricultural production has been severely hampered in much of Lu Thaw Township for more than a decade, as a result of attacks on civilians, civilian settlements and civilian food supplies by Burma's state army, the



This photo, taken on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2011, shows a large basket of milled rice that was punctured and overturned during an attack by Tatmadaw LIB #252 soldiers on Dteh Neh village in Saw Muh Bplaw village tract. Families from 14 communities in the area fled the attack. [Photo: KHRG]

severely hampered in much of Lu Thaw Township for more than a decade, as a result of attacks on civilians, civilian settlements and civilian food supplies by Burma's state army, the

Tatmadaw. Communities displaced by Tatmadaw operations are concentrated in hiding cites or other communities less accessible to Tatmadaw forces, but isolated from established and productive agricultural land near their homes.<sup>1</sup> Land in host areas has steadily grown more limited and less productive as displaced populations have grown, to the point that many households in Lu Thaw have had difficulty producing enough rice to feed their families and plant the following year's crop. Dry weather and other natural factors, such as insect infestation, during the 2010 planting and monsoon seasons further disrupted agriculture and undermined harvests throughout Papun District and other parts of eastern Burma, exacerbating the long-standing pressures on food security and triggering the current crisis.<sup>2</sup>

*"Out of 40 families, just three or four will have enough food. For these cases, we can't look after them ... Here, we have to gkaw aw may ['stop eating'] and I've seen that. Some people eat once a day and some people don't eat. They just let their children eat. There are people like this. They stay the whole day without eating."*

-Saw Y--- (male, 45), Ler Muh Bplaw village head, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

#	Village Tract	Total			Facing Food Shortage		Source of Information
		# of Villages	# of Household	# of Villagers	# of Household	# of Villagers	
1	Kay Bpoo	Censored	Censored	Censored	325	2251	Village Tract Member, Village Tract Secretary <sup>3</sup>
2	Nah Yoh Htah	Censored	Censored	Censored	139	1031	Village Tract Secretary <sup>4</sup>
3	Ler Muh Bplaw	Censored	Censored	Censored	64	516	Village Tract Secretary <sup>5</sup>
4	Saw Muh Bplaw	Censored	n/a	Censored	150	1200	Village Tract Secretary <sup>6</sup>
5	Plah Koh	Censored	Censored	Censored	54	363	Village Tract Secretary <sup>7</sup>
6	Gkaw Loo Der	n/a	n/a	n/a	110	795	Village Tract Secretary <sup>8</sup>
7	Yeh Muh Bplaw	Censored	Censored	Censored	90	657	Village Tract Secretary <sup>9</sup>
8	Kheh Bpah	Censored	Censored	Censored	179	1217	Village Tract Secretary <sup>10</sup>
9	Bpay Gkay	Censored	Censored	Censored	135	855	Village Tract Secretary <sup>11</sup>
<b>Totals<sup>12</sup></b>		<b>118</b>	<b>2785</b>	<b>21182</b>	<b>1246</b>	<b>8885</b>	

*\*Cells marked 'censored' indicate where population figures were provided to KHRG in February and March 2011, but have not been published in the interests of security of communities in hiding and actively avoiding Tatmadaw forces. Cells marked 'n/a' indicate where complete population data was not provided to KHRG.*

<sup>1</sup> Extensive background on Tatmadaw military activities in Lu Thaw Township and civilian protection strategies, including strategic displacement, is available in *Self-Protection under Strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in Northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010. The report drew on a dataset including 125 interviews with residents of Lu Thaw Township and 40 situation updates, incident reports, and other notes submitted by KHRG researchers between January 2009 and April 2010.

<sup>2</sup> KHRG has also reported extensively on the causes and consequences of food insecurity, and local efforts to address problems stemming from food insecurity, in Lu Thaw Township in *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Information on the total population in Kay Bpoo was provided in an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011 with Saw S---, 40, who was referred to as a 'member' of Kay Bpoo village tract, likely meaning a position of leadership within the Kay Bpoo village tract administration. The information on the total population facing food shortages in 2011 was submitted to a different KHRG researcher in Lu Thaw Township by the Kay Bpoo village tract secretary.

<sup>4</sup> Information on the total population in Nah Yoh Htah was provided in an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011 with Saw Yo---, 40, the village tract secretary for Nah Yoh Htah. Saw Yo--- submitted separately the information on the total population facing food shortages in 2011 to a different KHRG researcher in Lu Thaw Township.

<sup>5</sup> Information on the total population in Ler Muh Bplaw was provided in an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011 with Saw K---, 42, the village tract secretary for Ler Muh Bplaw. The village tract

*"There are 8 villages and 54 households and 363 people that need food [in our village]. They have no food and they need food now... There are a few people who have enough food. Most people will have half the food [enough food for half a year]. Some have [enough food for] one month and two months, or four or five months. So we know the problem will become bigger."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

The testimonies of villagers that spoke with KHRG about the current food crisis make clear that protracted food insecurity, and the current food shortages faced by at least 1,246 households, are fundamentally a consequence of attacks on civilians in Lu Thaw Township by Tatmadaw forces carried out since 1997; these attacks continue into 2011.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on the 41 interviews conducted for this report, as well as recent published reports and an additional 125 interviews conducted during 2009-2010,<sup>14</sup> this regional report begins with a background section explaining the history and geography of displacement in the nine village tracts covered by this report. The second section of this report then examines the impact of this displacement on food security in the affected village tracts, before a third section analyses the impact of weather and other

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secretary submitted separately the information on the total population facing food shortages in 2011 to a different KHRG researcher in Lu Thaw Township.

<sup>6</sup> Information on the total population in Saw Muh Bplaw was provided in an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 with Saw H---, 37, the village tract secretary for Saw Muh Bplaw. The village tract secretary submitted separately the information on the total population facing food shortages in 2011 to a different KHRG researcher in Lu Thaw Township.

<sup>7</sup> Information on the total population, and the population facing food shortages in Plah Koh was provided in an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011 with Saw Ka---, 41, the village tract secretary for Plah Koh. The village tract secretary emphasized that the 54 households and 363 villagers facing food shortages only referred to individuals who had no food left as of February 24<sup>th</sup>, and that others were expected to face food shortages later in the year.

<sup>8</sup> KHRG was unable to obtain complete population estimates for Gkaw Loo Der village tract. The village tract secretary of Gkaw Loo Der; submitted information on the total population facing food shortages in 2011 to a KHRG researcher in Lu Thaw Township.

<sup>9</sup> Information on the total population in Yeh Muh Bplaw was provided in an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011 with Saw Th---, 52, the Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary. Saw Th--- also submitted a written report on the same day to the same KHRG researcher providing information on the total population facing food shortages in 2011, stressing that the figure of 90 households only reflected those requiring urgent assistance, not the total households worried about food insecurity this year.

<sup>10</sup> A KHRG researcher interviewed the Kheh Bpah village tract secretary, Saw Mu---, 24, on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011. Saw Mu--- first stated that 197 households in Kheh Bpah are facing food shortages in 2011; he later stated that 179 households were facing food shortages. He then repeated the figure of 179 households in response to a later question. The figure of 179 households was not explicitly confirmed by KHRG's researcher during the interview. He also stated that he was not sure of the exact number of villagers already facing food shortages on the day he was interviewed, suggesting that the figure of 1,217 reflects the number of villagers that expected to face food shortages at some point in 2011. He also noted that the figure of 1,217 is probably lower than the actual number of villagers facing crisis, since it is based on information excluding one village in Kheh Bpah village tract that had yet to report how many households were facing food shortages.

<sup>11</sup> Information on the total population of Bpay Gkay village tract, and the number of residents facing food shortages in 2011, was submitted in a written report by Saw A---, 53, the Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, and two other village heads to a KHRG researcher on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2011. The figure of 135 households and 855 villagers facing food shortages was also cited by Saw A--- in an interview with the same KHRG researcher on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Note that the 'Totals' listed in the table are only totals for the data available at the time of writing, and do not necessarily reflect complete totals for the nine village tracts listed, or for other village tracts in Lu Thaw that may be confronting food shortages in 2011.

<sup>13</sup> See: "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Analysis of these interviews was published in August 2010, see *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010.

natural factors on civilian food production during 2010 and 2011. Section four then examines villagers' attempts to address food insecurity, and current limitations to these approaches. Section five explains current obstacles to emergency assistance for villagers confronting food insecurity, including limited international support to local relief organisations. The report then concludes by arguing for increased financial support to local relief organisations, which can access the affected area but are currently unable to provide emergency assistance to many of those facing food shortages.

*"In terms of amount of support, we normally distribute one big tin of rice (16 kg. / 35.2 lb.) per person, per month. Now they'll need food for six months to rebuild their lives... One big tin of rice costs 300 baht (US \$10) at current prices... It's a lot of money and it isn't easy to find that amount of money."*

- Saw Ma--- (male, 43), KORD Relief Coordinator (April 19<sup>th</sup> 2011)

## **Background: Geography and displacement in Lu Thaw Township**

An overview of the displacement situation in Lu Thaw Township at the village tract level reinforces the scale on which the displacement of communities due to ongoing Tatmadaw military activities have isolated hundreds of households from established agricultural land near their homes, and concentrated populations less accessible to Tatmadaw operations. This section aims to briefly outline the geography, Tatmadaw infrastructure and scope of operations, and resulting displacement dynamics within Lu Thaw. The impact of this displacement on land resources and agricultural production across the region are discussed in the next section of this report.

Lu Thaw Township comprises twelve village tracts<sup>15</sup> and is located in the northwestern part of Papun District adjacent to Toungoo District to the north and Nyaunglebin District to the west. The Yunzalin River flows northwest to southeast across the mostly upland terrain of Lu Thaw Township and constitutes a major transportation artery for the local population. A Tatmadaw-constructed vehicle road running eastwards from Kyauk Kyi Town in adjacent Nyaunglebin District to Saw Hta on the Salween River approximately divides the seven northernmost village tracts of Lu Thaw from the five southernmost tracts. Another Tatmadaw-constructed road follows a north-south axis through the northwestern part of Lu Thaw, connecting Pwa Ghaw on the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road with another road running from Toungoo Town to Mawchi in Karenni State



This photo, taken on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, shows the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road, which villagers in the area have said they can only cross on specified days, when they can obtain assistance from KNLA soldiers who know the location of landmines and can monitor Tatmadaw activity in the area around crossing sites. [Photo: KHRG]

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<sup>15</sup> A village tract is a local administrative unit larger than a village, but smaller than a township, used in both Naypyidaw and KNU geographic designations. Villages are the smallest administrative units designated by the Naypyidaw government's system, followed by village tracts, townships, and states or regions. The KNU system has village, village tract, township and district-level administrative units. Village tracts usually consist of 5-20 villages and typically are centred around a larger, usually eponymous village.

at Kler Lah, in Toungoo District.<sup>16</sup> Tatmadaw troop deployments and operations in Lu Thaw Township are typically facilitated by and supported via these roads and a network of camps maintained at strategic points along the roads.

*"The SPDC [Tatmadaw] has constructed only one road in the middle of our tract. Now our tract has two parts... They started making [the road] at Der Kyuh Htah, and in our Saw Muh Bplaw area it goes to Wah Gklay Htoo ... From Wah Gklay Htoo [it goes] to Ler Muh Plaw, and to Kler Lah in Toungoo District ... The SPDC made the road in the middle of our Saw Muh Bplaw tract, and villagers had problems like losing their farms, lands, and fields, so they had to move and split up to different places, and work in difficulty... For the villagers to go and come, to work, or to visit they have a problem to cross the road so... Whenever they cross the road and meet with the SPDC, then the SPDC will shoot them directly."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

*"[The Tatmadaw camp at T'Ler Gkeh Koh] is close to our village. We don't dare to go and stay in our village... The distance [to T'Ler Gkeh Koh] is about two hour's walk [from Ta---]. From our current place [D---], the distance is about four hours."*

- Saw Ti--- (male, 43), Ta--- village head, Kay Bpoo village tract, in hiding at D--- (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Villagers interviewed by KHRG have frequently linked explanations of their displacement within, from, or into a given village tract to such factors as proximity to a vehicle road or Tatmadaw camps that facilitate military access, and the intensity of Tatmadaw operations in an area. Tatmadaw forces continue to target accessible civilian populations in ten of the twelve village tracts of Lu Thaw Township, staging targeted or indiscriminate military attacks against civilians, civilian settlements, food stores and agriculture, property essential to civilian survival and humanitarian assistance.<sup>17</sup> While the geographic scope and intensity of these attacks appear to have declined since the end of a major Tatmadaw offensive in upland northern Karen State in 2008, localized attacks continue, while Tatmadaw deployments and infrastructure continue to undermine the ability of civilians in Lu Thaw Township to access their homes and lands, and indeed to survive in upland areas beyond military control.<sup>18</sup>

*"[Tatmadaw soldiers] don't shoot villagers but they shoot into the places where they hear sounds coming from... They don't care, even if it's villagers or animals. There has been no event that they shot villagers closely in this year [but] they do shoot villagers' huts from a distance. It's like, they shoot when they see flashlights... They shot at me and friends of mine who went [to fields]. They saw a light and they shot from a distance... Last month, maybe around the 20<sup>th</sup> [of February 2011], they shot at 9:00 pm. They saw a flashlight and they shot. No one got injured... They shelled mortars into fields. On the 26<sup>th</sup> [of February 2011] they shelled three mortars into a field close to our workplace. And in the evening, they shot two mortars, too."*

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<sup>16</sup> For a more complete explanation of the relationship of roads to Tatmadaw operations in northern Karen areas in general and Lu Thaw Township in particular, see: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.22-24

<sup>17</sup> The two southeastern most village tracts in Lu Thaw Township – Baw Thay Htah and Gk'law Htah – are under Tatmadaw control and should not be considered 'shoot-on-sight' areas in which civilians and civilian objects including settlements, schools, hospitals, food stores and agriculture, and agricultural and cooking implements are considered legitimate military targets by Tatmadaw forces. For background on Tatmadaw practices entailing targeting of civilians see; *Submission for UN Universal Periodic Review: Human rights concerns in KHRG research areas*, KHRG, June 2010.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of the situation in northern Lu Thaw Township since the end of the 2005-2008 Offensive in northern Karen State, including ongoing Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians, see: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.22-46.

-Saw Y--- (male, 45), Ler Muh Bplaw village head, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium's 2010 report on displacement in eastern Burma described Lu Thaw Township and adjacent mountainous areas of Toungoo and Nyaunglebin districts as "*arguably the most militarily contested area in Burma*," and calculated that more than 69,000 civilians remain in hiding, actively avoiding Tatmadaw attacks in the area.<sup>19</sup> Information received by KHRG in March 2011 from a field researcher in Lu Thaw Township indicates that at least nine Tatmadaw battalions under two Military Operations Commands (MOCs) were active in Lu Thaw at the end of 2010.<sup>20</sup> Tatmadaw attacks on civilian settlements have been documented by KHRG as recently as February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011.<sup>21</sup> Soldiers from Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and one battalion of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) are also active in Lu Thaw Township.<sup>22</sup>

*Village tracts north of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road*

#	Village Tract	Location
1	Kay Bpoo	On both sides of the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah road; at the headwaters of the Yunzalin River in northern Lu Thaw, south of Toungoo and east of Nyaunglebin districts;
2	Nah Yoh Htah	Southeast from Kay Bpoo, on both sides of the Yunzalin River; east of the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah road
3	Ler Muh Bplaw	On both sides of the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah road; south of Kay Bpoo tract, east of Nyaunglebin District and west of Nah Yoh Htah tract
4	Saw Muh Bplaw	On both sides of the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah road; south of Ler Muh Bplaw tract and between Nyaunglebin District and the Yunzalin River
5	Plah Koh	On both sides of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta and the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah roads, south of Saw Muh Bplaw tract between Nyaunglebin District and the Yunzalin River
6	Tay Muh Der	On both sides of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road; south of Nah Yoh Htah tract between, east of the Yunzalin River and west of Gkaw Loo Der tract
7	Gkaw Loo Der	On both sides of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road; south of Nah Yoh Htah tract, east of Tay Muh Der tract and west of the Salween river

Of the seven village tracts north of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road, only Nah Yoh Htah is not traversed by one of the two Tatmadaw roads in the area. These roads effectively split communities living on either side of the roads, and in some cases isolate villagers living on one side of a road from agricultural projects located on the other. Villagers have described Tatmadaw forces shooting on sight anyone seen on or near the road, while Tatmadaw and KNLA forces both deploy landmines extensively on or adjacent to the road. Traveling or farming near the roads thus entails serious security risks for civilians, who have said they can only cross

<sup>19</sup> The report further indicates that, of the 69,000 civilians displaced in northern Karen areas, 29,000 had become displaced due to ongoing Tatmadaw operations between August 2009 and July 2010. *Protracted Displacement and Chronic Poverty in Eastern Burma / Myanmar*, TBBC, November 2010, pp.50-51, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Note that this number may have changed in early 2011. KHRG recently documented a February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 attack in Lu Thaw attributed by local sources to Tatmadaw LIB #252; see: "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011. KHRG's field researchers had not previously indicated that LIB #252 was active in Lu Thaw, however the *Narinjara* news agency reported in January 2011 that LIB #252 had been rotated, along with six other battalions normally based Arakan State, to the front lines in Karen State. LIB #252 may have replaced one or more of the nine battalions previously reported as active in Lu Thaw by KHRG's field researchers, or it may have reinforced those nine battalions. See: "Many Battalions Based in Arakan March to Fight on Eastern Border," *Narinjara*, January 13<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>21</sup> See: "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011.

<sup>22</sup> For detailed background on KNLA and KNDO activities in Lu Thaw Township, see: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.83-88.



the road on specified days, when they can obtain assistance from KNLA soldiers who know the location of landmines and can monitor Tatmadaw activity in the area around a crossing site.<sup>23</sup>

*"My village tract is separated by a vehicle road... It's not easy for villagers to travel when the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers transport their rations or patrol. We can travel when they stay in their camp, don't transport rations or patrol... [To travel] Security guys have to take security for us. We don't dare to go without security guys<sup>24</sup>... Villagers haven't been injured [often], but they shot one villager yesterday [recently]. The villager's name was Saw B---. He was a S--- villager. He was 45 years old."<sup>25</sup>*

- Saw S--- (male, 40), Kay Bpoo village tract member, G--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"We can't go back and farm hill fields on our old land because of the SPDC [Tatmadaw]. Since 1995, they came and put their army [camp] in Pwa Ghaw, which is in the middle our village tract. After they based there, they went and took and controlled other places step by step. There are ten places that they're based in our village tract. They built two vehicle roads. From Pwa Ghaw to Maw Bpoo, one vehicle road goes through our village. And they made another road from Pwa Ghaw to Gk'Baw Toh. The roads go through villages in our tract like Ta Koh Der and Thaw Kweh and Maw Law villages. Those three villages had to move."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

*"There's a road on the [lower] side [of Ke---]. We'd go to take food from there, if there wasn't a road... It's an SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers' car road... We cross the road [only] on limited days. The [KNLA] soldiers sent [escort] us to cross the car road... We don't dare to cross by ourselves... The distance between the place where we cross the road and their camp is only thirty minutes [on foot]. They can see us... One time in 2010, they shot at the villagers while they were crossing the car road... One villager from Maw Lay Der was injured."*

- Saw Te--- (male, 45), Ke--- village head, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

In northwestern Lu Thaw Township, Kay Bpoo, Ler Muh Bplaw and Saw Muh Bplaw village tracts are located on an approximate north to south axis along the eastern edge of Nyaunglebin District. These three tracts are traversed by the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah road.<sup>26</sup> Tatmadaw forces maintain camps and conduct patrols in each of these three tracts, usually in the October to May dry season. Villagers in these areas have described to KHRG researchers fleeing Tatmadaw operations multiple times since 1997, including to less accessible locations within Kay Bpoo, Ler Muh Bplaw or Saw Muh Bplaw; west into adjacent Nyaunglebin District; or east into Nah Yoh Htah tract. Remote communities in Kay Bpoo tract also host some households that have fled into the area to evade Tatmadaw operations further north, in adjacent Toungoo District.

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<sup>23</sup> For more on villagers views on the use of landmines along roads in Lu Thaw Township, see *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2011 pp37-38.

<sup>24</sup> It is not clear whom Saw S--- refers to as 'security guys'. In the context above, he could be referring to KNLA soldiers, local KNDO militia members, to *gher der* home guards, or some combination of the three.

<sup>25</sup> KHRG has previously reported this incident as occurring on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2011. See: "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011.

<sup>26</sup> KHRG has previously reported that the Papun section of this road had been completed by November 2007, and that the Toungoo section connecting the road to Kler Lah Town was complete by the end of March 2008. See: "Increased roads, army camps, and attacks on rural communities in Papun District," KHRG, November 2007; "SPDC Spies and the Campaign to Control Toungoo District," KHRG, March 2008.

"Some people still have workplaces so they keep staying, and some people who have no workplaces, like farms, have run out of the village. There are villagers who have fled in every village... From the SPDC [Tatmadaw] coming and pressuring us like this, there are many who have had to leave their lands. To the west of Saw Muh Bplaw tract there were a lot of farms, more than 100 farms... [Villagers] have fled to other tracts as I said before.

#	Tatmadaw Camp	Village Tract
1	T'Ler Ker Koh	Kay Bpoo
2	Hsa Law Kloh	Kay Bpoo
3	Khaw Daw Koh	Kay Bpoo
4	Bpay Thoo Koh	Kay Bpoo <sup>27</sup>
5	Htaw Muh Bpleh Meh	Ler Muh Bplaw <sup>28</sup>
6	Wah Gklay Htoo	Saw Muh Bplaw
7	Boh Hser Kyaw Loh	Saw Muh Bplaw
8	Bpaw Khay Koh	Saw Muh Bplaw
9	Der Kyuh Kyo	Saw Muh Bplaw
10	Der Kyuh Htah	Saw Muh Bplaw <sup>29</sup>

There are some in Nah Yoh Htah tract, some in Ler Muh Bplaw tract, some in Plah Koh tract, and some still live in our tract and stay split from each other."

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

"Some [villagers] have [fled] since 2006 and 2007. Until now, they haven't gone back to their own places yet... Anytime they [Tatmadaw soldiers] have come, they've burned [my village]. It's been three times that they've burned the village... They've entered the village with their weapons and opened fire in the past. They arrested a mother and daughter. [We don't know if] They're still alive or not but, until now, we haven't heard anything from them... Some people have fled in [to Kay Bpoo tract]. Some are from 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade [Toungoo District]; there are about 30 households."

- Saw S--- (male, 40), Kay Bpoo village tract member, G--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"I lived in Ta Keh Der [in Kay Bpoo tract] before living in Ke---... They didn't burn [Ta Gkeh Der] but they destroyed the houses. They took the body of the houses [dismantled the houses] and rebuilt their own buildings... I started fleeing at the end of April 2007... I ran and lived in the Ke--- area... They shot and killed a villager from Ta Gkeh Der village while we were fleeing... They burned some rice. They burned three rice barns because we didn't dare to take our rice. They took the rest of the rice and kept it in their military camp... When we ran, the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers came along the car road, on both sides of the car road. Some of them came from east side and some from the west side. Si Day, Baw Lay Der, Ta Gkeh Der, Kaw Htoh Der, Ta May Kee, Po Nah Der, Htee Hsee Kee, Htee Buh Kee, Htah Ku Mu Der, and Hsoh Per Koh: all the people from these villages ran... They haven't dared to live in their own villages, until now... People went back beside the village [Ta Gkeh Der] when SPDC soldiers' [operation] decreased... People went back to take their materials [belongings], but the SPDC soldiers had taken everything."

- Saw Te--- (male, 45), Ke--- village head, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"[Since 2006] because of the SPDC [Tatmadaw] activity in our village, we had to flee and stay in the jungle and in other people's villages and cultivate hill fields... First, we fled to the jungle on the border of 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade [Nyaunglebin District]. Later, we fled to the Htee Baw Day area... There are 35 farms [abandoned when villagers fled Mu---]."

<sup>27</sup> Information about current Tatmadaw camps in Kay Bpoo tract was provided by Saw S---, a Kay Bpoo village tract official, in an interview with a KHRG field researcher in Lu Thaw Township on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Information about the Tatmadaw camp in Ler Muh Bplaw tract was provided in a situation update submitted by a KHRG field researcher in Lu Thaw Township in March 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Information about current Tatmadaw camps in Saw Muh Bplaw tract was provided by Saw H---, the Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in an interview with a KHRG field researcher on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011.



- Saw Wa--- (male, 46), Mu--- village head, Kay Bpoo village tract, in hiding at Na--- (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Due to the enemy [Tatmadaw] operations, we had to flee from our old village, Shway Muh Der, to other places. [We fled] step by step, to this area, Pl---... The first place was Dteh Chah Kee; the second place, Nah Yoh Htah; and the third place, Dteh Neh... Even though we had to flee place by place, we fled together and stayed together. We haven't fled and stayed separately... We stayed a year in Dteh Chah Kee, three years in Nah Yoh Htah, and about four years here."*

- Saw To--- (male, 30), Sh--- village head, Saw Muh Bplaw village tract, in hiding at Pl--- (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)



The photo on the left, taken on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, shows a village that hosted residents of H--- village, Lu Thaw Township, who fled shelling and attacks by Tatmadaw LIB #252 in the area around Dteh Neh village, Saw Muh Bplaw village tract, on February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011. The photo on the right, also taken on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, shows children from H--- studying while in hiding in the village pictured on the left. [Photos: KHRG]

Nah Yoh Htah tract lies east of the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah road along the Yunzalin river. It is the only tract in the northern seven tracts of Lu Thaw in which there is neither a road nor a Tatmadaw camp. The area is however accessible to Tatmadaw forces active along roads and deployed to camps in adjacent village tracts, between one and two hours' walk away, and communities in Nah Yoh Htah have been attacked and destroyed in both of the two major Tatmadaw offensives in the past 15 years, triggering displacement and loss of crucial resources for residents.<sup>30</sup> Nah Yoh Htah hosts villagers from neighbouring village tracts including from Kay Bpoo, Ler Muh Bplaw, Saw Muh Bplaw and Plah Koh.

*"[In Lu---] the land isn't good to farm hill fields and the population has increased. They [villagers from other areas] fled and came to stay with us... They fled before 2000, maybe in 1999 at the time when the enemy [Tatmadaw] was active. They came and some stayed, but some have left. I told them to stay together and work together... We could have food to eat if the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers didn't come and operate... [In the past] the Burmese soldiers [Tatmadaw] came and we fled somewhere around our village. The Burmese came and set up their camp close to here. They came and shot villagers. At that time, we had to flee several times. We came back when they went back."*

- Saw M--- (male, 56), Lu--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"[In Nah Yoh Htah] There's no SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] base. They just come from the bases located close to our village tract... Kay Bpoo and Ler Muh Bplaw village tracts are*

<sup>30</sup> Notably at the beginning of major Tatmadaw offensives in the area in 1997 and 2006; see: *Self-Protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, p.24

close to us. It takes one hour or one and a half hours' walk... In 2006, they constructed a road in Ler Muh Bplaw, but the road doesn't go through our village tract. It goes beside the village tract. It goes through Kay Bpoo and Ler Muh Bplaw tracts. But it's close to our village tract... Ba--- had to move when the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw] came and constructed the road. Now there's no Burmese Army [camp] so they [Ba--- villagers] went back to their village, but only this year... [Villagers from] Ler Muh Bplaw, Saw Muh Bplaw and Kay Bpoo village tracts fled [to Nah Yoh Htah]... About 300 or 400 people from about 70 or 80 families [are staying in Nah Yoh Htah]."

- Saw Yo--- (male, 40), Nah Yoh Htah village tract secretary, Ht--- village, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Plah Koh village tract is located south of Saw Muh Bplaw tract, between Nyaunglebin District and the Yunzalin River; it is traversed by both the Pwa Ghaw to Kler Lah and Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta roads. Communities have fled the strong Tatmadaw presence in Plah Koh since 1997, moving in multiple directions: within less accessible areas of Plah Koh and adjacent areas of Saw Muh Bplaw tract; north into Nah Yoh Htah tract; across the Yunzalin River and east into Tay Muh Der and Gkaw Loo Der tracts; and, for many communities living south of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road, south into Yeh Muh Bplaw tract. The Plah Koh village tract secretary, Saw Ka---, told KHRG on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011 that only one village in the entire tract can currently stay in its original location and that two villages, Ta Gkoo Der and Htoh Gkee, can no longer be accounted for because families from these communities have 'scattered' to various hiding sites over the course of more than a decade.<sup>32</sup>

#	Tatmadaw Camps in Plah Koh tract <sup>31</sup>
1	Gk'baw Tuh
2	Der Thay Kyo
3	T'Ku Hta
4	Kheh Deh Kyer
5	Peh Leh Htah
6	Gker Koh
7	Plah Koh
8	Khah Koh
9	Kaw Thay Kyo
10	Eh Aw Kyo

"For Do---, Kh--- and Pe--- villages, which are located above the [Kyaukkyi to Saw Htah] vehicle road, villagers can stay somewhere in their areas, but they can't stay in their villages and cultivate their farms. But they can still work in their area. Do--- and Kh--- are close to Saw Muh Bplaw and Nah Yoh Htah village tracts. For Pe---, villagers can't stay in their village but they can stay in their area, close to Ge--- village in Gkaw Loo Der village tract, east of the Ko--- River. For the rest of the villagers, like [those in] Ma---, Gu---, Do---,<sup>33</sup> Ka---, Tu---, P---, Ha--- and Le---. They all moved to Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract, every village and household... Some people live in Nah Yoh Htah, Saw Muh Bplaw and Gkaw Loo Der village tracts. Some of them live in Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract."

- Saw Ka--- (male, 41), Plah Koh village tract secretary, Ma--- village, Plah Koh village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"[P--- village] Isn't located in the same place. We came to stay in Yeh Mu Bplaw village tract in a place called Bp---... Some people moved to [refugee] camps. Three families moved to camps, and 18 households are still left. They stay in two places in the Bp--- area."

- Saw Mo--- (male, 40), P--- village, Plah Koh village tract, in hiding at Bp---, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

<sup>31</sup> This information was supplied to a KHRG field researcher in Lu Thaw Township on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011 by Saw Ka---, 41, the secretary of Plah Koh village tract; Saw Mo---, 40, a representative of the headman of P--- village; Saw Mi---, 45, a resident of Gu--- village in hiding in Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract.

<sup>32</sup> Information about Plah Koh tract was supplied to a KHRG field researcher in Lu Thaw Township on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011 by Saw Ka---, 41, the secretary of Plah Koh village tract; Saw Mo---, 40, a representative of the headman of P--- village; Saw Mi---, 45, a resident of Gu--- village in hiding in Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract.

<sup>33</sup> Note that the Kyaukkyi to Saw Htah vehicle road passes through the Do--- village area. Saw Ka--- therefore is likely explaining that Do--- villagers north of the road can stay near their village, whereas Do--- villagers south of the road have had to flee south into Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract.

Tay Muh Der village tract lies east of the Yunzalin River and Plah Koh tract, and is traversed by the eastern section of the Kyauk Kyi to Pwa Ghaw road. Residents continue to utilise temporary displacement to avoid periodic Tatmadaw patrols and attacks. A Tatmadaw attack on Th'dah Der village in July 2010 displaced more than 900 residents of three communities into nearby hiding sites.<sup>34</sup> Some families from Plah Koh tract also stay in Tay Muh Der, according to the Plah Koh tract secretary.

Gkaw Loo Der village tract lies at the eastern end of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road, and is bounded by Nah Yoh Htah tract to the north, Tay Muh Der tract to the west, and the Salween River to the east. KHRG does not have details about the current Tatmadaw presence or displacement situation in Gkaw Loo Der. Testimony from villagers in other parts of Lu Thaw, however, indicates that remote areas of Gkaw Loo Der host some households from Kay Bpoo, Nah Yoh Htah and Plah Koh tracts.

#### *Village tracts south of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta Road*

#	Village Tract	Location
1	Yeh Muh Bplaw	Directly south of Plah Koh village tract and the the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road; between Nyaunglebin District and the Yunzalin River
2	Kheh Bpah	In southwestern Lu Thaw, on both sides of the Bilin River; between Nyaunglebin District and Gk'law Htah tract
3	Bpay Gkay	Southeast and downriver from Tay Muh Der tract, between the Yunzalin River and northern Bu Tho Township, Papun District
4	Baw Thay Htah	Southeast and downriver from Bpay Gkay tract, north of Papun Town between the Yunzalin River and Bu Tho Township, Papun District; under Tatmadaw control
5	Gk'law Htah	In southeastern Lu Thaw, north of Dweh Loh Township between Kheh Bpah tract and the Yunzalin River; under Tatmadaw control

Most village tracts south of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road are located further from Tatmadaw roads and camps. Communities in these tracts are heavily impacted by displacement, however, as they have fled periodic Tatmadaw offensive operations, as well as absorbed households fleeing Tatmadaw operations and infrastructure in neighbouring village tracts and districts.

Yeh Muh Bplaw tract lies west of the Yunzalin River and directly south of Plah Koh village tract, which is traversed by both Tatmadaw roads in northern Lu Thaw Township. Yeh Muh Bplaw hosts families from Plah Koh seeking to remain beyond the reach of Tatmadaw operations. Residents of Yeh Muh Bplaw, particularly among communities in the Go--- valley, have also fled within the tract, as well as southwest and southeast into adjacent areas of Kheh Bpah and Bpay Gkay village tracts, respectively, to avoid periodic increases in Tatmadaw patrols or full-scale offensives near their communities.

*"[Displacement] started in 1975, but at that time not a lot of villagers had fled yet. Later, starting in 1997 until now, more villages from Plah Koh village tract fled... It was because the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] constructed a road and it crossed through the centre of Plah Koh village tract. Therefore, the villagers in Plah Koh tract didn't dare to stay in the village tract anymore. They had to move and stay in our Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract... [Villagers in Yeh Muh Bplaw also had to flee] because when the SPDC Army came and constructed the road, they patrolled and made [carried out] operations. The villagers from Htee Ku Der village had to flee because the SPDC Army set up their camp there, and made operations in Htee Ghaw Kee, Htee Bway Kee, Tee Thoo Der and Yeh Cha Lo Klo... [In Ta---] We didn't dare to stay alone when other villages fled, because the*

<sup>34</sup> See: "Burma Army burns villages and chases over 900 people into the jungle, attacks continue in northern Karen State," FBR, July 24<sup>th</sup> 2010; "Surviving with dignity beyond military control," in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*, KHRG, February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011.

*SPDC Army reached to the Theh Loh Klo area and did the same thing as in the era of Japan's occupation. They burned all the houses. They didn't come to base in Ta--- village, but we didn't dare to say alone because they came and based near us and operated near us. So, we had to flee when other people fled. Only Ta--- village remained. Would you have dared to stay?"*

*-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)*

*"[Te--- villagers fled] because the SPDC army [Tatmadaw] came and constructed the road... I'm not sure. I think it has been almost 10 years. Te--- village has fled within Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract and stayed in many different places."*

*- Saw P--- (male, 21), Te--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)*

*"Yes, we had to flee [this year].<sup>35</sup> But, we didn't have to flee for as long a time [as in past years], like for many days. We fled for a day [each time]. We already had to flee once or twice during this year... I don't dare to see them [Tatmadaw soldiers] because they'll kill me if I see them... We couldn't bring food when we fled [this year] because we had to flee during mortar shelling. We had to go back and take our food back after we fled... We went back by ourselves. We monitored the situation and went back slowly and slowly like that."*

*-Saw R--- (male), Gh--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (March 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)*

Kheh Bpah tract lies on both sides of the Bilin River, adjacent to Nyaunglebin District in the southwestern corner of Lu Thaw Township. Community leaders have told KHRG that villages in Kheh Bpah host families that have fled Tatmadaw attacks and militarization in Nyaunglebin District, as well as operations in parts of Kheh Bpah since 1997. Written information provided by three village leaders to a KHRG researcher indicated that families from Nyaunglebin had stayed in at least fourteen villages and three upland hiding sites in Kheh Bpah for varying periods of time since 1997. Residents of Kheh Bpah have fled to local hiding sites within the village tract during past Tatmadaw operations.

*"In 1997 our villagers started reporting to us about the food shortage, due to the enemy's [Tatmadaw's] operations. We stay on the border of Nyaunglebin District and Papun District. We stay as though we are siblings [with villagers in Nyaunglebin]. We go together and work together. At that time, especially Kyo Poe Loh and Tee Thoo Der villages fled to other villages, and worked in other villages. Later, they moved back close to their villages, but they still can't return and stay in their own villages... [Villagers from Nyaunglebin] fled to stay in Baw Gkaw, Lay Poe Kaw Htee, Bper Kee Der, Kheh Bpa Htar, Wah Ka Der and Thaw Raw Htar villages. A higher number of villagers came to stay in these places... They fled since 1997 and [most] could return in 2006... [Kyo Poe Loh and Tee Thoo Der villages] couldn't return to stay in their own villages, because the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] still stays at the front and conducts operations. The enemy is based in Khoh Koh. If they [villagers] go back and stay in their own villages now, they'll face problems with transportation, to carry things in order to eat... They moved to stay in Gl---. It is very close to their villages. In the future, they want to be able to stay in their own villages. It's their desire."*

*-Saw Mu--- (male, 24), Kheh Bpah village tract secretary, N--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011)*

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<sup>35</sup> Saw R--- was asked if he had had to flee 'this year'. His answer may indicate that he has had to flee since the end of the rainy season, in October 2010, and not necessarily since the beginning of the 2011 calendar year.

*"There's no land in La--- because the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw] came, and villagers from 3<sup>d</sup> Brigade [Nyaunglebin District] also fled to our area. They came and lived together with us. They farmed hill fields and all the land was used."*

- Saw Ht--- (male, 50), La--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"The SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] came and was active in Kheh Bpah village tract. Civilians from 3<sup>d</sup> Brigade [Nyaunglebin District] came and stayed with us in our village tract. They came and farmed hill fields, but there isn't too much land... There are about ten families [that have become refugees]. Some people will go to refugee camps, some people will stay as long as they have food, and some people will choose to stay even if they starve."*

- Saw No--- (male, 46), We--- village head, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Bpay Gkay village tract is located on both sides of the Yunzalin River, immediately east of Kheh Bpah tract and west of Bu Tho Township. Bpay Gkay hosts families that have fled into the area to avoid Tatmadaw operations in Plah Koh and Yeh Muh Bplaw tracts, as well as households that have fled westward from Bpah Heh tract in adjacent Bu Tho Township. The Bpay Gkay tract secretary, Saw A---, also attributed some of the population increase in his tract to the migration of some families of KNLA personnel into the area from other parts of Lu Thaw Township.

*"We know that people have increased in every village, but some are more and some are less. In He--- village, some people came from Yeh Muh Bplaw and Plah Koh village tracts. They couldn't stay there, so they moved here, because of the enemy [Tatmadaw] operations. They are [at least] ten households, and could be more. In Mo--- and So--- villages, the number of people has also increased. Some people have come from Nah Yoh Htah and Kay Bpoo village tracts, because their sons or husbands serve in the army [KNLA], so they had to move here and their relatives follow after them. As I know, when I was a child, about ten years old, there were over ten households in Mo--- village. And there were six households in So--- village. But now, there are around 40 or 50 households when you combine the two villages of So--- and Mo---... There are no outside people who have come and stayed in Bu---, just local people. They got married and had two or three children. For Ni---, there are one or two households from Bpah Heh and Yeh Mu Bplaw village tracts. Not just one or two households. There are four or five households from Bpah Heh village tract."*

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

Gk'law Htah and Baw Thay Htah village tracts are located west and east of the Yunzalin River, respectively, in relatively low-lying terrain in southeastern Lu Thaw; villages in these tracts and are under effective military control of Tatmadaw forces. Residents of these communities are more likely to face exploitative demands from local military forces than targeting in offensive military operations.<sup>36</sup> Community leaders in Kheh Bpah village tract indicated that some villagers travel to Gk'law Htah tract to secure work as day labourers or purchase food supplies during periods of food shortage.

#### *The dynamic nature of displacement responses*

*"When I first fled I was a little young, just five years old, and we have fled place to place in many difference places [since then]... When I started to flee from Htee Baw Kee, we fled to the Khaw Loh Kee area. We made our little hut and stayed there for one year, then the SPDC [Tatmadaw] chased us and we fled again to Nyeh Plaw for one hot*

<sup>36</sup> For recent examples of such abuse, see: "Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control," KHRG, August 2010. Note that 'Gk'law Htah' was misspelled as 'Bplaw Htah' village tract in the cited report.

season. Then we came back and made our house in Nyeh Kwee Nee for one year, to Kyaw Gkaw Loo for one year, then the SPDC chased us again and we fled to Koh Kheh Kee for one year. We didn't have a house; we stayed in a field hut. The SPDC moved towards us a little, and we moved again to Htee Baw Kee. We built our house there and stayed for four years. [The first time] we rebuilt our house, we could stay only one month and we had to flee again, and when we fled the SPDC came and burned our house, our paddy hut [field hut], and paddy field. We didn't have our paddy field any more. We fled to Gkaw Maw Koh. We stayed in Gkaw Maw Koh for five or seven years. [We moved] to Kyaw Poh Loo for seven years, and [when] we stayed there the problem was that we couldn't work, so we moved to Kl--- until now, for about five years already... While we've stayed here we've had to flee many times [twice] because the SPDC came and shot in Htee Moo Kee and we fled to Noh Gklaw for one week, and the second time to Ta Gk'Thwee Kee for four days... We have never worked our [flat] fields without fleeing; every year doing hill fields we've fled too."

- Saw Gk--- (male, 40), Kl--- village head, Saw Muh Bplaw village tract (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

Patterns of displacement in Lu Thaw Township appear to be influenced by a range of factors including proximity to Tatmadaw roads or camps, and frequency or intensity of military activity. As these factors may change gradually or rapidly in local contexts, it is important to emphasize that civilians' choices to remain in or flee from a certain area are similarly dynamic, based on local assessments of security conditions. Communities that experience infrequent Tatmadaw patrols, for example, may be able to flee temporarily to nearby hiding sites when patrols arrive, and continue to work already-established agricultural land while monitoring the situation, and returning to their homes when the patrol leaves the area. Meanwhile, villagers seeking to protect themselves from longer-term security threats, for example from a new Tatmadaw camp established near their community, may go into hiding for a longer period of time; some may continue to work accessible agricultural land, either with or without security, while others may have to seek new land or take on alternative livelihoods activities until the camp is abandoned and land becomes accessible again. Villagers facing a more permanent obstacle to accessing their homes or agricultural projects, such as a vehicle road, may opt to abandon lands that can no longer be securely cultivated, relocate to a new area, and start livelihoods from scratch.

"[Gh---] isn't my original village...My original village is Bler Ghaw...I first left from Bler Ghaw in 1997, until now...We fled to Kheh Baw Kee. We stayed there for two years. We moved to Haw Ka Waw again when the situation got worse, and stayed there for a year. Then, we moved to Gh---, until now."

-Saw R--- (male), Gh--- village head, Yer Muh Bplaw village tract (March 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"We came and lived in Wee Dee after we fled from Ler Mu Bplaw. We stayed there for a week and went back again. The Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers came to our village again and we fled on June 5<sup>th</sup>, and we came directly here [to Gk---]. We've stayed here until now. While we've lived here, the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers built a road and we [had to] flee. It takes a week sometimes. They come close to Gk---. We come back and stay after they go back."

-Saw Y--- (male, 45), Ler Muh Bplaw village head, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

These differing patterns of displacement are neither static nor mutually exclusive. Rather, displacement strategies employed by families in Lu Thaw appear to shift constantly in response to changes in local conditions that can be difficult for local communities to predict. Sustained Tatmadaw activity in a given area, either as part of a localised seasonal offensive or a broader regional offensive, may transform short-term local displacement into a longer-term enterprise entailing multiple instances of displacement. Such military developments can also trigger a rapid deterioration in security in an area previously thought to be secure, prompting re-displacement: villages in Nah Yoh Htah village tract, for example, which presently host families



from other areas north of the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road, have been attacked and destroyed in two major Tatmadaw offensives in the past 15 years.<sup>37</sup>

*"In 1997 we fled to Yeh Muh Bplaw [from Plah Koh village tract]... It was going well at first, but later farming hill fields in [other] people's area, our livelihood [problems] become a little serious. Some people didn't have enough food so they had to find food. The food wasn't enough. In 2005, the situation became worse because the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] moved their base close to us so we had to move. They came and based at Kwee Lu Kyo and Khay Wah Kyo... Seven villagers have gone to the refugee camp [since 1997]... Some people want to go, but some people want to stay in their country."*

- Saw Mi--- (male, 45), Gu--- village, Plah Koh tract, in hiding in Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)



These photos, taken on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, show a temporary forest hiding site occupied by a family that fled from De--- village on February 25<sup>th</sup>, when Tatamadw LIB #252 shelled and attacked communities in the Dteh Neh area of Saw Muh Bplaw village tract. [Photos: KHRG]

## Impact of Displacement on Land Resources and Agricultural Production

*"Each village will have its area to farm hill fields. Because of the problems, we had to flee and stay with other people and villages. There are more people. The land is young. We farm hill fields but the paddy plants aren't good. The rain isn't good or on a fixed time [regular]. Birds and rats eat our paddy grains. And the insects eat the paddy. So civilians have to face food problems."*

- Saw Wa--- (male, 46), Mu--- village head, Kay Bpoo village tract, in hiding at Na--- (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Since 1997, all the people from our village tract had to flee. In that period, LID [Light Infantry Division] #77 entered and operated in the area, and burned down village, houses, huts and food stores. They burned down everything including old huts and kyaw khah koh [chicken coops]. Villagers had nothing, such as the clothes, pots and food that a family needs... Nowadays, that kind of thing has become less, but when we look at another side of it, the weight has become heavier and heavier [on villagers], because the workplaces [agricultural land] aren't good, and have become fewer."*

- Saw Ka--- (male, 41), Plah Koh village tract secretary, Ma--- village, Plah Koh village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

<sup>37</sup> Notably at the beginning of major Tatmadaw offensives in the area in 1997 and 2006; see: *Self-Protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, p.24



The majority of villagers in Lu Thaw Township engage in shifting cultivation of hillside rice fields, rather than more productive wet-rice cultivation of flat paddy fields in lowland areas. This is because flat, low-lying land suitable for wet-rice cultivation is relatively scarce in the rugged hills of Lu Thaw, and because the Tatmadaw's infrastructure, troop deployments, and capacity to conduct offensive operations is strongest in flat, low-lying areas where flat fields can be maintained. Hill field cultivation is labour and land-intensive, and hill field farmers typically live at subsistence-level: a household's annual harvest will ideally, though not always, yield sufficient paddy for the family both to eat until the next harvest, and to plant a new field the following May.

*"We have people who came from other village tracts [to Ler Muh Bplaw]... In our village, most people had enough rice to eat before the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers came to our villages... In our own villages, there were only a few people and we had flat fields, so we could get by, year after year. We haven't had any flat fields since we fled... We have [only] a little rice, because the rice [paddy] doesn't grow well. It has become a problem."*

- Saw K--- (male, 42), Ler Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"The soil in other places isn't good, too. There's some good soil but it's close to the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw soldiers] so we don't dare to go and cultivate it. We just have to cultivate hill fields in the places that we can access. So we have to face the food shortage."*

- Saw R--- (male), Gh--- Village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (March 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Villagers can't cultivate their farms [flat fields] and hill fields, and flee, because the SPDC [Tatmadaw] came and operated. Some farms were abandoned, and cultivating hill fields wasn't successful. Another problem is there's less land for hill fields."*

- Saw S--- (male, 40), Kay Bpoo village tract member, G--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)



These photos, taken on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, show homes and paddy fields abandoned in Da--- village, Lu Thaw Township. Villagers in the area told a KHRG researcher that residents abandoned the area because of its proximity to a Tatmadaw camp and the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Hta road. Tatmadaw forces continue to target civilians in ten of the twelve village tracts in Lu Thaw. [Photos: KHRG]

The scale on which villagers across Lu Thaw Township have utilised self-protection strategies entailing temporary and long-term displacement to remain beyond the reach of Tatmadaw forces has concentrated populations in less accessible areas of each village tract, and resulted in acute strain on the limited agricultural land available in these areas. Villagers interviewed by KHRG explained that many civilians in hiding are unable to grow rice on established and productive land near their homes, and instead have attempted to produce food on land near their hiding sites or host communities. Interviewees articulated concerns that the limited amount

of cultivable land in areas not under Tatmadaw control is insufficient to support the large populations that have fled from neighbouring villages and village tracts, as finite and low-yielding land has been increasingly shared to accommodate families in hiding.

*"The villagers' livelihoods don't go well. The first reason is, because of the SPDC Army's [Tatmadaw's] restrictions these villagers can't stay in their own villages. Moreover, Plah Koh village tract [residents] fled and it became more people staying in the same village tract. So, we don't have enough land to cultivate. The numbers of hill fields and people are not balanced."*

-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"The land is for the local people who live in the areas [where villagers flee]... They let us farm hill fields, but some hill fields are farmed by one person and some by two or three persons. Those people should [plant] ten baskets of paddy grain [to have enough food], but they can just use four or five baskets. Even if the paddy is good, it's not enough rice... If villagers from Plah Koh don't have sufficient rice, Yeh Muh Bplaw also won't have rice. If we come and work on their land, they'll receive 50 percent and we'll receive 50 percent [of the total rice that would normally be harvested]."*

- Saw Ka--- (male, 41), Plah Koh village tract secretary, Ma--- village, Plah Koh village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"In Saw Muh Bplaw tract, the enemy [Tatmadaw] has come and stayed here for a long time and they won't go back... Every year the number of civilians increases more and more, so for our workplaces, every year we get more and more strict... Even if the SPDC [Tatmadaw] isn't active, they've taken our land to stay so we have more problems for working, and food problems."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

*"[Villagers in Nah Yoh Htah tract] don't have enough [food]. The reasons are the SPDC Army's [Tatmadaw's] activities, and people from other village tracts have fled and come to stay close to us. The land has become less. The land has become young, so the paddy isn't good in the hill fields."*

- Saw Yo--- (male, 40), Nah Yoh Htah village tract secretary, Ht--- village, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Overpopulation and stress on limited land resources due to large-scale displacement also undermine the sustainability of traditional agricultural practices. Villagers interviewed by KHRG explained that hillside agricultural land must be left fallow for seven to twenty years between cultivation, depending on how naturally fertile the soil is, in order to allow soil nutrients and above-ground forest growth to replenish. In areas where populations evading Tatmadaw attacks have concentrated, hillside land is frequently re-cultivated in less than half the required time, because no other land is available.

*"[A hill field] should be [left] more than ten years [after cultivation]. After ten years, if we farm this hill field [again], it will produce good paddy. But, for the current situation, the villagers cultivate again after they've left a hill field for five years. Some leave them only four years and cultivate them again."*

-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Now people re-cultivate [hill fields] after six or seven years. We [used to] leave them [fallow] up to fifteen or sixteen years in the places where the paddy wasn't good [the soil*

*didn't yield good paddy harvests]. Here, people re-cultivate [land] again after four or five years."*

- Saw S--- (male, 40), Kay Bpoo village tract member, G--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"[Villagers leave hill fields fallow] Mostly for five years or just four years. The paddy doesn't produce good seeds and [villagers] can't cut any more [hill fields]. There are a lot of bushes and vines. If we cut small fields we can't survive, and if we cut wide fields, we can't cut any more [hill fields]. So for the villagers there's become a food problem."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

Farming hill fields on this 'young' land weakens agricultural output in two key ways, according to villagers interviewed by KHRG. First, land steadily becomes less fertile, as plots are re-cultivated before soil nutrients have had sufficient time to regenerate, resulting in lower crop yields.

*"The land has become young to farm hill fields. The time [between cultivation] is too short for the land to have good soil. The paddy isn't good because the ground doesn't have good soil. The paddy [starts to] grow and looks good for a while, but then the paddy becomes brown and dies."*

- Saw Ka--- (male, 41), Plah Koh village tract secretary, Ma--- village, Plah Koh village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Since the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers have been active near and far, the situation has got worse and worse... We just farm hill fields in five or six year old land. We can't find more [land older] than that... It should be more than ten years [land should lie fallow more than ten years]. The fertilizer will be good and the rice will be better."*

-Saw Ha--- (male, 46), Ht--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Second, hill fields cultivated on young land are more susceptible to insect infestation, which destroys paddy plants and reduces crop yields. According to villagers, when hill field farmers cultivate 'old' land, insect eggs laid underground are usually killed when thick forest cover is cut and burned to prepare hill fields for planting. When farmers attempt to re-cultivate 'young' land, however, the partially re-grown forest cannot always burn long or hot enough to kill off insect eggs deeper underground.

*"When the land is young, the tree leaves and bushes aren't thick. People burn a field but the fire doesn't consume the ground effectively. So the insects under the ground don't die. Insects like gkih [a kind of caterpillar], they lay their eggs or give birth under the ground. They don't die when the fire doesn't consume [the ground]. Those or other eggs become insects, and come up and destroy the paddy plants when the rain comes down... The paddy [plants] grow up and look good for a while, but when the soil is gone, they become yellow and die."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

*"Before, people farmed hill fields on [fallow] land after ten or twenty years, but now they have to do it after five or seven years. Our land is young and the soil isn't good. The fire doesn't consume the ground effectively, so the ants under the ground don't die. They destroy the paddy and eat the roots of the paddy... Before the SPDC [Tatmadaw] did movements [conducted an offensive] in 1997, we could cultivate hill fields on old land. We could burn it and the fire consumed [the ground] very well and the soil was good. Also the paddy was good... Before we farmed hill fields on old land and we got 70 to 80 baskets of paddy (1463 – 1672 kg. / 3219 – 3678 lb.) when we used five baskets of*

grain. Last year, I used five baskets of grain, but I just got 30 baskets of paddy (627 kg. / 1379 lb.)."

- Saw Ht--- (male, 50), La--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"The soil isn't the same as before. The bugs have increased. In the past, three baskets of Bu Klee [paddy grain especially for planting] could yield 60 baskets [of paddy] (1254 kg. / 2759 lb.), but [now] it'll only yield 30 baskets (627 kg. / 1379 lb.)."

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

Saw A---, the secretary of Bpay Gkay village tract, also told a KHRG researcher that he believes the problem of insect and other pest infestations is made worse by a decline in the population of those pests' natural predators. He believes that this trend is linked to population increases in Bpay Gkay, and an increase in the use of firearms for hunting.

"I think the reason [that there have been more insects] is that people's lives aren't the same as before. The people have increased and the area [inhabited by people] is larger. They eat more. Their weapons have increased... Before we never saw or heard muskets. There was just one baw gka [gun] in Mo---. People just used it sometimes. We got curry to eat when the gun was fired. The whole village had curry when we got a deer. For a wild pig, the whole village could eat. Nowadays, muskets are shot everywhere. You can hear the musket shots everywhere in the evening time. We found out that villagers were shooting owls, wild cats and yoo poe baw [squirrels]. Those animals are not full [big] enough to eat. When we look at the other side those animals – like owls – eat bugs. Wild cats eat rats and other insects. We told people, 'Don't shoot Htoh Bp'Nah Ee [literally, 'buffalo shit bird', a local term for a Common Myna].' I think it will be fine if there are no muskets. I don't use a musket and don't dare to shoot a musket. I saw people get blinded because of muskets. For me, I see these problems happen because of people. They just think to eat and feel happy. They don't know what the consequences are."

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

## **Irregular weather and other factors undermining the 2010 harvest**

"Most years, we don't have enough food... Last year, in 2010, it was the driest year for weather. We planted paddy and it rained, and the paddy grew [started to grow]. But the rain stopped, and some paddy died and some paddy was killed by insects."

- Saw Ho--- (male, 54) Lo--- village head, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract, in hiding at Gk--- (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"We start cultivating fields in February and finish in November. Last year, we harvested the rice and saw only hay and didn't see much paddy grain. We faced a very difficult problem. The water flooded. Later, the rice fell down and dried up. We didn't have any other things to do if we didn't want to harvest the rice. We had to harvest it. That was the [only] rice. We had to harvest it, even if we [only] got a little. We live because of rice. To get food, we didn't have anything else to do, if we considered it carefully. We had to collect one paddy grain if there was only one paddy grain. We had to collect two paddy grains if there were only two paddy grains. If we got one milk tin (.2 kg. / .43 lb.), we could eat for one day."

- Saw Sh--- (male, 35), Na--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

As explained in the preceding section, and in previous KHRG reports,<sup>38</sup> Tatmadaw operations in Lu Thaw Township and the resulting displacement of thousands of villagers have undercut agriculture and fostered food insecurity for many communities for more than a decade. In 2009 and 2010, food production was further undermined by irregular weather throughout Papun District, as well as in other parts of eastern Burma, which disrupted the agricultural cycle and weakened crop yields.

*"[The food crisis] got bigger in 2009 due to the unusual weather... When it reached the time to clear the hill fields, some villagers had already cleared their fields, but some hadn't. Especially villagers in Gkah Neh Der, Noh Lay, Kay Muh Der, Byar Htar, Buh Loh Kloh and Khoh Nee Htee hadn't cleared their hill fields yet, but it started raining consistently... The food shortage continued from 2009 to 2010. More villagers have begun to face it... There was a drought in 2010, and it rained consistently in [early] 2009... In 2010, some villagers had already planted their paddy, but it didn't rain. So the paddy seeds got dry, and most didn't grow. Then, the paddy which did grow was eaten by crickets, rats, white ants and insects such as caterpillars and hill ants."*

-Saw Mu--- (male, 24), Kheh Bpah village tract secretary, N--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011)

A number of villagers interviewed by KHRG explained that in 2010, a sustained period of dry weather during the May planting season, followed by extremely poor rains during the June to September monsoon season decimated their crops. This dry spell was followed by unexpected rain in October, which damaged those plants that had survived the dry weather and were ready to be harvested. In some areas, heavy winds and insect infestations also damaged paddy crops and undercut harvests.

*"Last year, the rain wasn't good. The weather was dry. We couldn't plant paddy at the time when we have to plant, because of the dry weather. We waited, but it still didn't rain. So we planted paddy and the paddy germinated, but it died because it was dry. Then, it rained and the paddy germinated, and their leaves became yellow because of insects and the not-on-time [late] rain. They [the paddy plants] didn't bend down when they bloomed, and the bu thot [bad grain] was more than the bu that [good grain]."*

- Saw Ht--- (male, 50), La--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"This year [in 2010], the rain wasn't good. The weather was dry. Since they [villagers] planted paddy in their fields, there wasn't much rain. It rained when the paddy started growing. But after the paddy grew, the rain stopped and the paddy [plants] died. Another [problem] was insects. Insects destroyed some [agriculture]... Some hill fields are in the mountains and the wind is strong in the mountains. So the paddy grains weren't good. And it rained when people were harvesting their fields."*

- Saw S--- (male, 40), Kay Bpoo village tract member, G--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"The villagers farm hill fields and flat fields. But, due to the drought, we couldn't cultivate our flat fields anymore. Because even though we cultivated them, there was no water. When we farmed hill fields, all of the paddy died due to the drought... Most houses don't have enough rice to eat."*

-Saw Kh--- (male, 48), Ne--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (March 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"In 2010, there was a drought and it caused a problem for them [villagers]... For flat fields, they should have water to be able to cultivate them. Even if it rains a little and you can grow the paddy, it won't grow when there's a drought after you plant. Especially for*

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010; "Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District," KHRG, October 2009

*hill fields, due to the unusual weather, they will be eaten by insects before they grow, after we plant the [paddy] seeds. When they grow, they'll become dry if it doesn't rain."*

-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"[In 2010] Due to the heat [drought], the rice couldn't grow well. The second reason was insects, mice and birds ate them [paddy plants]. The paddy plants laid down [blew over] because of the wind, and many of them became 'empty husk' rice [paddy plants grew but did not produce rice grains]. They were destroyed in many different ways like that."*

- Saw Te--- (male, 45), Ke--- village head, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

In Bpay Gkay village tract in particular community leaders asserted that insect infestations which attacked the roots of paddy plants were as significant, or an even more significant problem, than the lack of rain in 2010. Saw Kl---, the 58-year-old headman of Me--- village, told a KHRG researcher that he had never seen such severe damage wrought by insects in decades of experience cultivating rice paddy.

*"I can say what has happened step by step. We had space to farm hill fields before. There were [often] rats, caterpillars and termites. But I've never experienced something like last year. I've never experienced that, even though I've been farming hill fields for many years. The paddy plants had no roots and I couldn't see the insects that ate the paddy roots. The paddy plants fell down when they were about to bloom... The roots were black. The roots couldn't control [feed] the stems... I thought it [might have] happened because we didn't keep the bu klee [paddy grain] carefully; but no, we kept the bu klee very carefully. We dried it and took care as before. Any way we cared for it, the paddy plants became yellow... I myself thought I'd get 100 baskets of paddy (2090 kg. / 4598 lb.). At the end of the year [harvest], I just got 50 baskets (1045 kg. / 2299 lb.)... I think it was because of the weather. I can say this because in the past, when I was young, it rained in the rainy season and the paddy grew. It was different last year in June. The paddy plants needed to grow up in June but the weather was dry. We thought 'They won't grow anymore. The bu klee will dry up and die.' But it rained on June 25<sup>th</sup> and they grew and looked good. But it didn't last long because of the insects. If not [for the insects], we think we'd have got enough food."*

- Saw Kl--- (male, 58), Me--- village head, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"In 2010, I cultivated a farm, and bugs destroyed my farm. After I planted, not a month had passed and bugs destroyed my farm. I couldn't do anything so I came to the [KNU] agriculture department. There was no medicine [insecticide]. Bugs appeared everywhere, but we didn't have medicine and we couldn't do anything about it... I came back and did as much as I could do. I sprayed [paddy plants] with Pay gklah [ash] and burned [made a fire]. I did as other people did, but I couldn't solve [the problem]. Last year, I cultivated a farm and I thought I would get 100 baskets (2090 kg. / 4598 lb.) of paddy, but I just got 41 baskets (857 kg. / 1885 lb.)."*

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

According to villagers from communities across Lu Thaw Township interviewed by KHRG, weak 2010 harvests have left more than 1,200 families anticipating acute food shortages this year. In the nine village tracts surveyed in February and March 2011 by KHRG's field researchers, data supplied by local village tract leaders indicates that at least 8,885 villagers will exhaust their existing food before this year's harvest (see table at top of this report). Some families will run out of food by May 2011, and require immediate support.

*"Especially this year [2010], the rice [paddy] died because of drought... 49 hill fields and 27 flat fields were [abandoned]; those people couldn't harvest... Just 40 or 50*



households [out of 163 households in Ler Muh Bplaw tract] have enough rice. Some people [will] need more rice in one or two months. Some people have started to look for rice already because they just have 30 or 40 tins of paddy grain."

- Saw K--- (male, 42), Ler Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"There are 18 villages [in Kheh Bpah tract] and 17 villages have reported that they're facing food shortages. Only Kay Muh Der village hasn't reported to us yet. It doesn't mean that this village has enough food and didn't report their records. For records like this, they have done [reported] many times in the past. They [only] want their hopes to be achieved."

-Saw Mu--- (male, 24), Kheh Bpah village tract secretary, N--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011)

"The rain hasn't been good this year and it's hot. So it'll be worse than previous years. There isn't enough food... Not even half of the families have enough food."

- Saw Yo--- (male, 40), Nah Yoh Htah village tract secretary, Ht--- village, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

"If we think back deeply, [the food crisis] is because of the SPDC Army's [Tatmadaw's] operations. We've had to flee again and again and can't do our hill fields smoothly... Last year [in 2010] I grew five baskets of paddy seed and got 30 baskets of rice (960 kg. / 2112 lb.)... [In 2009] I also grew five baskets of paddy seed and got 40 or 50 baskets of rice (1280 – 1600 kg. / 2816 – 3520 lb.)... There are 10 households facing food shortages [now]. Some have food that will be enough for only half of the year. There will be only one or two households that will have enough food until the end of the year. In the future, there will be more villagers who won't have enough food to eat."

- Saw Na--- (male, 38), T---, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)



These photos, taken on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2011, show rice paddy scattered amid ransacked homes in Dteh Neh village in Saw Muh Bplaw village tract. After firing mortars in the area around Dteh Neh on the morning of February 25<sup>th</sup>, Tatmadaw LIB #252 entered Dteh Neh village and poured out paddy stores and destroyed homes, rice barns, cooking and agricultural equipment, animal enclosures and personal possessions. [Photos: KHRG]

## Challenges to local strategies to address food insecurity

"I couldn't suggest anything to them [villagers facing food shortages]. They looked at my face and they said, 'People elected you to be a delegate, to lead us as a group. Find a way and give us a suggestion.' I replied, 'I'm not an educated person who can give you



suggestions. Go and look inside my barn and you'll see.' I couldn't help them and they couldn't help me also."

- Saw Sh--- (male, 35), Na--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Some people are eating twice and some people are eating once a day, so they can extend [their food] one more month... They have to look very hard for rice. They work one day and they can eat for one day. They work in the morning and eat in the evening... They carry things for other people and dig for other people sometimes [as day labour]... You just get one or two hundred [Thai baht] (US \$3.33 – 6.66) for one day. A tin of rice is three hundred. To get a tin of rice, you'd have to go and carry [work as day labour] twice or three times."*

- Saw Mo--- (male, 40), P--- village, Plah Koh village tract, in hiding at Bp---, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract, February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Interruptions to the day-to-day labour hill fields require between February and November, constraints on access to land and other factors undermining agricultural production, including attacks on fields under cultivation, weather irregularities, and insect infestations, can drive a household's hill field rice production below subsistence level in any given year. The prevalence of these constraints in Lu Thaw Township means that food insecurity has been a perennial problem for many communities since 1997. In response, villagers in the area are adept at accessing a range of strategies to augment food supplies and attempt to survive from one harvest to the next during short or long-term displacement. Strategies described by villagers in Lu Thaw include: attempting to borrow or buy rice from family members, neighbours, or villages in less-affected areas, including under Tatmadaw control; engaging in alternative livelihoods activities, such as daily wage labour or local trade to be able to buy rice; and obtaining food or financial assistance from relief organisations operating in Lu Thaw with administrative offices based in Thailand.<sup>39</sup>



This photo, taken on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, shows a hill field cut by residents of L--- village near the Kyauk Kyi to Saw Htah road. L--- villagers told a KHRG researcher that a shortage of land near their current hiding site has forced them to cultivate hill fields near the road, making it more difficult for them to avoid attack by Tatmadaw forces active in the area. [Photo: KHRG]

Local community members and leaders interviewed by KHRG in February and March 2011 continued to cite these options when asked how they would deal with food shortages this year. Many villagers, however, made clear that their strategies will be acutely challenged, and even insufficient, in the context of the current food shortage in Lu Thaw Township.

*"We had to flee and leave our property behind, and it's very hard for me and other villagers to feel. [Before fleeing] We could cultivate our farms, and if it wasn't enough we'd cultivate a small hill field, so we could overcome [food problems] year by year... [Before the village had to flee] Just three or four people out of 40 would have food problems. For these cases, we could look after them. For example, if you had enough*

<sup>39</sup> For more on strategies used by villagers in Lu Thaw Township to respond to food insecurity, see: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.52-64. For more general background on locally-developed strategies to avoid human rights abuse or reduce the harmful impact of abuse, including examples of specific strategies, see: *Village Agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008.

*paddy grain but I didn't have enough paddy grain, you'd give [some] to me and help me. This wasn't a big deal."*

-Saw Y--- (male, 45), Ler Muh Bplaw village head, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Some went to buy rice from those who have enough rice. But, as there are a lot of villagers facing the food shortage, some buy rice from their siblings or relatives, and some go to buy rice from neighbouring villages. Some buy in our village tract. But that's still not enough, so some go to buy rice in Ku---. The rice there is transported from No---. Others go to buy rice in Se--- village tract."*

-Saw Mu--- (male, 24), Kheh Bpah village tract secretary, N--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011)

Villagers that spoke with KHRG explained that the sheer number of households facing food shortages has made sharing or borrowing food from other villagers increasingly less viable. Many families, moreover, already have accumulated debts from borrowing rice or money in previous years, which are increasingly difficult to repay as the amount of food they can produce from year to year has declined. Interviewees also told KHRG that it is particularly difficult to repay debts when family members fall ill, which often occurs among communities living in remote areas and in hiding in Lu Thaw Township.<sup>40</sup>

*"Many years ago, most people had enough rice. We even shared a little rice with each other [if] we didn't get enough rice. Now, most people don't have enough rice and just a few people have enough rice, so we can't request to get food from each other anymore."*

- Saw He--- (male, 38), Ba--- village, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Some borrow money from other people and owe debts. For example, we owed 50 baskets of paddy this year. If we get 60 or 70 baskets of paddy, we'll pay them back and keep the remaining 10 or 20 baskets of paddy for ourselves. Then, we'll borrow for the next year again. Some go and work as daily paid workers. We live depending on the situation."*

-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"People borrow [money and rice] from other people. They farm hill fields and they get some paddy grain, so they give [pay] back and still have some [paddy grain] left, but they just can get through half a year. They do this year by year. The situation has become worse now, when we look back at our village tract."*

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

*"We always have to buy rice to eat and borrow money from other people and owe debts. We have to pay back our debts every year. Some have paid off their debts and some still owe it. Most villagers are hard-working, but we [always] face food shortages, so we can't do it anymore."*

- Saw To--- (male, 30), Sh--- village head, Saw Muh Bplaw village tract, in hiding at Pl--- (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

*"There are only five or six households who have enough rice to eat. There are eleven households who don't have enough rice to eat... It's because they borrow rice from other people first and pay back when they get rice. It causes a problem when they get sick."*

<sup>40</sup> For more on the health problems confronting villagers in hiding or living in areas of Lu Thaw less accessible to Tatmadaw forces, see: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.64-73.

- Saw P--- (male, 21), Te--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"I myself am facing a food crisis. Although we tried our best year by a year, due to the unusual weather, we don't get enough paddy to eat. So we have to borrow rice from other people. We buy rice when we have enough money. We also search for work as daily paid workers, but we don't have time to farm our hill fields when we work as daily paid workers. Therefore, the problem follows us step by step. The problems get bigger when our family members get sick... For myself individually, I'm shy to go into debt with other people."*

- Saw Na--- (male, 38), T---, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Engaging in alternative or supplementary livelihoods activities remains a key strategy for communities in Lu Thaw Township confronting food shortages. Income earned from daily labour, for example, can be used to purchase additional rice. Villagers have explained to KHRG, however, that there is a limit to how often farmers can work for wages in their own and neighbouring communities without neglecting their own agricultural projects. Long absences from a hill field can threaten output, as a farmer will miss out on important day-to-day tasks to maintain crops, such as clearing grass and weeds that grow between paddy plants and provide food and cover for pests that damage paddy plants.

*"Everyone doesn't have enough rice to eat... They have to carry things to sell; then buy food to eat. If they get money from carrying things, they buy rice from a lower [lowland] place, Ra---... It takes three days to go and come back."*

- Saw Te--- (male, 45), Ke--- village head, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"They [villagers facing food shortages] will work as daily paid workers and buy rice to eat when they get paid... The payment for carrying things isn't the same, because when they carry things and reach Wo--- [village], they'll get 200 baht (US \$6.66) for the day. If they carry only for a day, they can't buy rice. They'll have to carry things for two days or three days in order to buy rice. They don't have time to clear the grass in their hill fields when they go to carry things to earn some payment."*

- Saw P--- (male, 21), Te--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"I'll tell you about myself. A hundred people have the same problem. This year, I planned to peh [clear trees for a hill field] to plant three baskets of paddy seed, but this year I have no food and no money to buy food. I can peh to plant three baskets of paddy seed; I have food that I can eat until April or May. I have no money to buy rice for the whole year, so [in order] for me to be able to stay in my field for the entire period [the paddy cultivation season]. When the food is gone and it's the time when I have to cut grass in my field, I'll have to go and do hired work [day labour]. I won't be able to cut the grass and my field will be covered by grass. I should get 60 or 70 baskets of paddy (1254 – 1463 kg. / 2759 – 3219 lb.) at the end of year but I won't get it."*

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

*"I do daily wage labour if someone asks me to. Honestly, I do [labour] in the morning and eat in the evening. It's hard. We don't dare to move closer to the SPDC [Tatmadaw] and we don't want to go to refugee camps."*

- Saw Sh--- (male, 35), Na--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Daily labour remains a fundamentally short-term strategy for combating food shortages, as such jobs are not always available, and villagers typically do not earn sufficient wages to allow them to stock up on rice or other foodstuffs for an extended period of time. Other strategies described

by villagers in Lu Thaw, meanwhile, appear only able to supplement meagre food resources and incomes during difficult times, not to solve the problem of food insecurity in the long term. Several villagers, for example, said that they or people in their villages grew vegetables or cash crops, either for their own consumption or to trade for small amounts of rice with other communities.

*"Year by year, civilians have to face with this problem. There's no support; they have to solve the problem by themselves. They have to carry for others to earn money and work for other people. They plant betelnut leaves and dog fruit and, when the time comes, they go and sell them. Some people Hsit Pu Dah [make bamboo strips] and sell them when people need and come to buy them. They do these things and solve the problem by themselves. Even though they try to solve by themselves, there are many people who still have debts. They live in debt and in a difficult situation. They'll have to do the same thing for the coming year, because there's no support to them. There's no economic way that they can support themselves."*

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

*"We have to find food on our own. Some villagers exchange things for rice and some villagers grow sweet corn, and exchange sweet corn for three or four milk tins (.6 – .8 kg. / 1.3 – 1.7 lb.) of [husked] rice. "*

-Saw Kh--- (male, 48), Ne--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (March 4<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"[Other villagers] grow pumpkins, carrots, gourds and cucumbers. They don't grow any other things. These are for them to eat... Nobody weaves things to exchange with food. If we weave things and sell them, no one from Sa--- will buy them."*

- Saw Sh--- (male, 35), Na--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"I just grew a few vegetables and fruits for my family. They weren't to sell; there wasn't enough to eat. Some of them were good and some weren't... I haven't seen any ways to get food in the rest of the months [between the end of the rice harvest in November and February]. I've grown tobacco a little, but not everybody [grows tobacco]."*

-Saw Ha--- (male, 46), Ht--- village head, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Some of the strategies for securing essential food described by villagers in Lu Thaw Township suggest that as food shortages are more acutely felt, community members will take increasingly risky steps to be able to survive. Some villagers will covertly access Tatmadaw-controlled villages in other townships or districts – often crossing vehicle roads where civilians may be shot on sight or injured by landmines – in order to work, purchase food, or trade. In these cases, they depend on villagers living in controlled villages for security.

*"If our brothers and sisters didn't have any rice, we carried our baskets and went to Sa--- to find about one or two milk tins (.2 – .4 kg. / .43 – .86 lb.) of [husked] rice from our brothers and sisters there... SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers didn't make any problems for us because we hid ourselves to go and find the food from our brothers and sisters. They didn't see us and we didn't see them also... [Sa--- village] is under the control of SPDC soldiers, and SPDC soldiers control them. They [villagers in Sa---] are their people but [when] people from our side went there, they still talk to us in Karen because they are Karen... Sometimes, we go to 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade [Nyaunglebin District] to carry areca nuts [betelnuts]. We have to cross a vehicle road. We open our eyes and we are really afraid of everything. We arrive there and come back with one thousand or two thousand areca nuts. People who don't go there, they want to eat areca nuts and they exchange areca nuts for one or two milk tins of rice. We find food like that."*

- Saw He--- (male, 38), Ba--- village, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"[In 2011] Only one household has enough rice to eat... We have to buy the rice from Si---... SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers are there, but Si---'s villagers will take responsibility [for protecting us]."*

-Saw Ro--- (male, 52), S--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract, in hiding at Wa--- (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

In other contexts, food shortages may drive villagers to brave physical security risks, including being shot on sight, to attempt to covertly cultivate agricultural lands close to Tatmadaw camps. Saw Y---, for example, described being shelled by Tatmadaw forces while working in his field on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2011, just nine days prior to his interview with KHRG. This incident was likely part of a two-day Tatmadaw operation on February 26<sup>th</sup> during which Tatmadaw soldiers shelled the area around Dteh Neh village in Saw Muh Bplaw village tract before entering Dteh Neh,, where they looted civilians' possessions, burned parts of settlement areas and destroyed buildings and food stores; residents of 13 other villages in the area temporarily abandoned their homes in response.<sup>41</sup>

*"They shelled mortars into fields. On the 26<sup>th</sup> [of February 2011] they shelled three mortars into a field close to our workplace. And in the evening, they shot two mortars, too."*

-Saw Y--- (male, 45), Ler Muh Bplaw village head, in hiding at Gk---, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"We see good places [to farm], but they're close to the SPDC [Tatmadaw] so we can't go, we just work here, farming hill fields on young land... We're so afraid of them [Tatmadaw soldiers]. If they see males they shoot to kill; females they shoot to kill; and if they see children they also shoot to kill. We can't go and [stay] close to them, but we have some people who go and work close to them. They have to do that at night time because they have to really try to get food... There's no other food and no other way, so we have to do that. If we had another way, we wouldn't do that. It's very difficult... Villagers like me need nearly everything."*

- Saw Gk--- (male, 40), Kl--- village head, Saw Muh Bplaw village tract (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

*"Now, some villagers went back to farm hill fields very close to the enemy [Tatmadaw] camp... It's because they don't have the lands which are old enough to cultivate the hill fields. So, they had to go back and farm hill fields in the lands close to the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers' camp in order to eat. There's another villager whom the SPDC soldiers shot dead. He was Muh Gay's father. His name is Thay Kler Muh. The SPDC soldiers shot him dead when he went to harvest his hill field near the road. His wife died before him."*

- Saw P--- (male, 21), Te--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"There are 48 households in Mu--- village and there are 325 people... There are four or five households that have enough food out of 48 households... Last year, in 2010, [some] villagers did go back to work close to the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw camp]... Even though they went back and worked, they worried about shooting by the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers... It's about ten minutes [from the Tatmadaw camp to the workplaces]"*

- Saw Wa--- (male, 46), Mu--- village head, Kay Bpoo village tract, in hiding at Na--- (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

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<sup>41</sup> For a full account of this incident, see: "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011.

*"They're based close to our villages and there are no more [work]places far from them, so villagers have to farm fields close to SPDC Army camps. Villagers have to work in worry and fear."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)



These photos, taken on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2011, show residents of some of the 14 communities that fled Tatmadaw attacks in the Dteh Neh area of Saw Muh Bplaw village tract on February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011. In the photo on the left, mothers and children wait by a forest path with baskets containing possessions families were able to gather before fleeing. In the photo on the right, a group of male villagers prepare to return to their village to scout the area for Tatmadaw presence, while other residents remain in temporary hiding sites in the forest. Of the ten villagers in the group, all were unarmed save for three, who carried black powder muskets normally use for hunting small game. [Photos: KHRG]

Some villagers, particularly in northern Lu Thaw Township, have explained to KHRG researchers that the high risk of attack while cultivating land close to Tatmadaw forces and infrastructure has led individual some villagers to employ uses of small arms and landmines as part of their strategies to counter food shortages. Villagers have utilised weapons to protect themselves and other community members while attempting to cultivate lands where the risk of Tatmadaw attacks are perceived to be high. Such armed protection measures may be employed by individuals or locally-organised 'home guard' groups, with varying degrees of cooperation with, and autonomy from, local KNLA forces; although several villagers interviewed by KHRG researchers have indicated that armed self-protection strategies have emerged in response to declining KNLA capacity to provide security for their communities amid ongoing Tatmadaw attacks.<sup>42</sup>

*"Because many people flee and stay far from them [Tatmadaw soldiers], the land isn't old enough to do hill fields. So they [villagers] have to go and farm fields close to SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] camps, in fear and in difficulty... For the villagers who go and farm fields close to SPDC Army camps, they have little security as few people can take security [for them]."*

-Saw H--- (male, 37), Saw Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, in hiding at M---, Plah Koh village tract (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

*"We have to go back and work close to the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw], and if we don't use landmines, they can come and arrest us. If people [Tatmadaw soldiers] come and a mine explodes, people will be alerted."*

- Saw Ho--- (male, 54) Lo--- village head, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract, in hiding at Gk--- (March 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)

<sup>42</sup> For background on armed self-protection strategies employed by villagers in northern Lu Thaw Township, including their relationship to, and autonomy from, the KNLA, see: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.82-115.



*"They use them [landmines] to protect themselves and to be able to do their livelihoods work. They use them to prevent SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers from coming and destroying their farms... We wouldn't use them [if there were no Tatmadaw operations]. If you use them, what are you going to do with them? People use them for the SPDC soldiers, not for other [reasons]."*

- Saw Yo--- (male, 40), Nah Yoh Htah village tract secretary, Ht--- village, Nah Yoh Htah village tract (March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"Some people have gone back [to cultivate fields near Tatmadaw camps]. They went back and did it this year as a test... They [villagers] aren't patient anymore when the period of time become longer and longer... Some people take security by themselves, and there are one or two [KNLA] soldiers. They cooperate and look after each other."*

- Saw Mo--- (male, 40), P--- village, Plah Koh village tract, in hiding at Bp---, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract, February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"There are over 40 home guards [in Kay Bpoo tract]... They go around and watch, for security. Sometimes, they fight when they meet with SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers. They don't go and attack SPDC soldiers. They just go around and watch, and meet each other. They come back and give information to the village when we need to flee and escape... They use weapons as people usually use. They use automatic guns or muskets, and landmines. The landmines were given by the KNU [KNLA] because they aren't free all the time to patrol and watch. So they [home guards] put landmines to protect themselves. If there's less patrolling and watching, villagers can give more time to their work... The landmines wouldn't be used if there were no operations."*

- Saw S--- (male, 40), Kay Bpoo village tract member, G--- village, Kay Bpoo village tract (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Some village leaders interviewed by KHRG articulated specific concerns that acute food shortages are threatening important social and cultural values among affected communities. KHRG has previously documented that providing education for children is a priority for families in eastern Burma, and that communities have developed resilient and flexible education systems in response to the challenges posed by Tatmadaw attacks and civilian displacement.<sup>43</sup> The current food crisis, however, is making it exceedingly difficult for families attempting to survive until the next harvest to maintain their children's education.

*"There are many children who don't study because their families don't have enough food to eat. They quit school and help their parents. Some parents send their children who want to study to school in a difficult situation. They work as daily paid workers and borrow rice from other villagers in order to eat. At the same time, they also afford for their children to study in the school. Some can't afford for their children to study in a school anymore. Some children have to look after their younger siblings when their parents go to work in hill fields."*

- Saw P--- (male, 21), Te--- village head, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"There are 47 households and there are 326 people [in my village]... Just one or two households have enough food. Maybe there are three households out of 47 households have enough food... There are some people who can't send their children to school because of food problems."*

- Saw Ti--- (male, 43), Ta--- village head, Kay Bpoo village tract, in hiding at D--- (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2011)

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<sup>43</sup> See for example: *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.73-81



Community leaders, meanwhile, told KHRG researchers that they expect instances of theft of food supplies to increase as the food crisis intensifies and families become increasingly desperate. They also voiced worries that food shortages would prevent villagers from hosting guests in their homes out of embarrassment that they would not be able to uphold cultural practice by providing food to visitors.

*"If they [villagers] can't hope anymore, they'll have to stand on their own. Some will be able to stand on their own. Some will borrow from other villagers when they can't buy rice to eat. Some might steal rice in order to eat. If people arrest them when they're stealing, they might decide to accept the punishment. It didn't happen before. It can happen in the future... I'll tell you honestly. I usually travel, but I don't see the villagers call me to visit their houses and provide me with rice to eat, as before. Some villagers [don't] welcome guests. It doesn't mean that they don't love guests and welcome them. It's because they don't have enough food to eat... I have experienced welcoming guests when I didn't have enough rice to eat. We wanted to welcome guests, but we didn't have enough rice and food to provide for them. We went to borrow one or two milk tins (.2 – .4 kg. / .43 – .86 lb.) from others' houses, and paid them back later. We asked the guests to eat breakfast first, and we ate at lunch time when the guests went back."*

-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"We've heard there's more stealing happening in Kheh Bpah village tract. Some villages report it to us, but some don't... As the villagers are facing food shortages, we can't solve the [issue of] rice theft yet. We can't say whether it will increase in the future or not... About the dishonesty and stealing cases, I want to say that we are Karen and known for loving justice and welcoming guests warmly. However, due to the food shortage some villagers close their doors when guests come because they don't have any food to provide for the guests."*

-Saw Mu--- (male, 24), Kheh Bpah village tract secretary, N--- village, Kheh Bpah village tract (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011)

*"[If villagers can't find rice] They'll stay and die or they'll go and steal things. It'll become a problem. They'll do this. They will do when they see where people keep [food]... I don't encourage them [to steal], but they can't find a way to work because there are no jobs to do in our area. Currently, we're in a difficult situation. People won't hire people to work for a month or a year. People work ngah bpyaw kya [irregularly], to go and carry a load or cut bamboo strips when people ask them. From here, you borrow from other people and some people have [owe] hundreds or thousands of debt to other people. And they [still] don't have food to eat for the coming year. There are some people will do this [steal], if they have seen something... The numbers of people who have had to face the [food] problem last year and this year isn't so different. But civilians have no more strength. They have no jobs to go and find. If the situation stays like this and if there's no way open to them, maybe some of them will die. This is true."*

- Saw A--- (male, 53), Bpay Gkay village tract secretary, B--- village, Bpay Gkay village tract (February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

## **Limited access to emergency assistance**

Villagers in northern Lu Thaw Township have, like villagers hiding in other upland areas, long employed a variety of strategies to survive in spite of protracted displacement and attacks by the Tatmadaw. Villagers interviewed by KHRG researchers in February and March 2011 stated explicitly, however, that they did not believe that these strategies would be adequate to resolve this year's food crisis. In previous years, some communities like those hiding in Lu Thaw have

been able to address the most acute forms of food insecurity by acquiring emergency assistance from local humanitarian organisations.<sup>44</sup> In northern Lu Thaw, this has primarily been provided by the Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD) and Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), which operate without permission from state authorities and under the same risk of attack as civilians in hiding. Burma's central government does not currently permit any international humanitarian organisations to conduct activities of any kind in Lu Thaw.

Representatives of KORD and CIDKP confirmed to KHRG that the failed 2010 harvest has left many communities in eastern Burma facing food shortages in 2011, including villagers in other townships of Papun District as well as Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Thaton districts. The KORD official that spoke with KHRG explained that the situation for villagers in Lu Thaw is particularly grave, due to the long-standing pressures on agriculture and food security created by Tatmadaw military activities, and difficulties in obtaining supplemental or alternative food resources.,

*"Villagers affected by irregular weather has really happened, and not in Papun District alone; it has happened in Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, and Thaton districts, too... other districts are facing the same problems as Lu Thaw Township."*

- Saw Ko--- (male), CIDKP Official (April 2011)

*"The food shortage is really happening, because of irregular weather last year. Villagers mostly depend on farming [in that area] and where there's been drought, they couldn't farm. Paddy fields that could grow produced no paddy seed [rice]; mostly the paddy plants are plaw thoh [paddy flowers that have no rice inside the husk]. This irregular weather also happened in Bu Tho Township. If we only looked at irregular weather causing problems, Bu Tho Township was more affected than Lu Thaw Township. But villagers in Lu Thaw Township aren't only affected by irregular weather, they also have to face military operations. In the area [Lu Thaw] it isn't as easy [for villagers] to look for food as it is for villagers from Bu Tho Township. We have our field staff in every part of the area [Papun District]. From early 2011, our staff from the field have sent more than ten request letters already, and all the request letters are about food problems."*

- Saw Ma--- (male, 43), KORD Relief Coordinator (March 29<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Villagers in Lu Thaw Township interviewed by KHRG researchers in February and March expressed concern that access to food assistance provided by local relief organisations would be limited in 2011. Interviewees told KHRG that they feared they might not receive food assistance because provision of humanitarian support to communities that had been attacked recently by Tatmadaw forces would be prioritized over support to communities that had their 2010 harvests damaged by weather or pests.

*"To get support, the reason must be the operations of the SPDC [Tatmadaw], and other incidents that are serious that the village tract or township can't control. Those organisations [CIDKP and KORD] will give support if the situation is serious. Now, the situation is serious to us... Now, the problem is too big for us. Actually, this is the time they need to support us... If there weren't any SPDC operations, this kind of situation wouldn't occur."*

- Saw Ka--- (male, 41), Plah Koh village tract secretary, Ma--- village, Plah Koh village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

KORD and CIDKP representatives explained to KHRG in March and April 2011 that their organisations' funding is finite, and that it is difficult for them to deliver assistance to all families in need in eastern Burma in any given year. These perennial financial constraints have forced

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<sup>44</sup> *Self-protection under strain*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.61-62.

these organisations to evaluate their own ability to meet requests for support, and prioritise assistance to families and communities whose need is most acute. Both the KORD and CIDKP representatives that spoke with KHRG indicated that communities throughout eastern Burma experiencing failed harvests due to irregular weather and/or pest infestation would have to be supported as a priority lower than communities that have been recently attacked.

*"The priorities depend on what we can request [from donors]. When we make requests to donors, we organise them by priority. The first priority will be emergencies, [such as] when villagers are attacked by the army. The second priority will be natural disasters, followed by other things that happened in the area... We developed these criteria to guard our relief activities because if we don't have criteria, we wouldn't be clear about our activities... If we look at our priorities, it [the current situation in Lu Thaw Township] will be the number three priority. This is because we don't even have enough budget [to assist] the first priority people."*

- Saw Ma--- (male, 43), KORD Relief Coordinator (March 30<sup>th</sup> 2011)

*"The first priority [for support] will be when the SPDC [Tatmadaw] or BGF [Border Guard Battalions] attack villagers. Normally the funds that we receive from our main donors are only for emergencies, like when villagers are attacked. Even requests for [villagers affected by] human rights violations, we don't have enough funds for those kinds of issues. It's not because our donors don't want to give. They also don't have enough money to give to all those people. So we do [give support] by priority. Natural disasters and pest destruction [infestation] are second and third [priorities]... When we make requests we have topics, according to what our donors are more interested in. [They're more interested] in man-made conflicts, like the army attacking civilian population, compared to irregular weather creating problems or insect or animal destruction [of crops]. [For example] If donors spend ten or twenty million [baht] in a year, that isn't enough because what people need is worth a hundred million, and the area that the aid goes to is wide. For the main donors, they can't do [fund] that, so we have to find donations from others like individuals and churches, and ask friends in third countries to look for funds.... For our main donors, we focus on the first priority, and from other private or church donors, we request for villagers affected by drought or pest destruction. Even to our main donors, we've also requested for villagers who have been affected by the weather. But because of not enough funds, we have to focus just only on first priority."*

- Saw Ko--- (male), CIDKP Official (April 2011)

KORD and CIDKP do not expect their present budgets to enable them to provide support to everyone currently threatened by acute food shortages not only in Lu Thaw Township, but across other regions of eastern Burma. Their limited ability to provide support to villagers in need of relief in eastern Burma appear to be the produce of economic factors, including fluctuations in currency values, rising prices of essential foodstuffs such as rice, and reduced donor support. In this context, the current level of need in eastern Burma calls for increased funding for relief organisations capable of accessing and delivering support to affected populations.

*"In 2011, we planned to give relief to the area as usual, but [if] we look back, our strength to give support is not strong as in the past. What I say about 'strength' is not about policy or criteria. What I want to mean by strength is [the strength] to give support, meaning money. It's difficult to find ways to get support, because of changes to the economic situation, and instability. For example, the value of the dollar has decreased a lot. This is one reason. The second reason is that commodity prices have gone up and up. In the past, one sack of rice cost 500 baht (US \$17) and now has gone up to 800 to 900 baht (US \$27-30). The third reason is that donors that give support to the border [organisations working cross-border from administrative offices in Thailand], they have*

*less interest because what has happened here has become a long time already... If we look generally difficulties exist in the whole of Burma. But civilians in eastern Burma, what they have been suffering is not just single incidents that are finished. There has been suffering for a long time."*

- Saw Ma--- (male, 43), KORD Relief Coordinator (March 29<sup>th</sup> 2011)

## Conclusion

*"Since I was four or five I've seen problems until now, when I'm 40. There are always food shortage problems... I have [more to say] but I think today it's enough. If we [try to] say, we can't say it all. The main [thing] we need is food; every one needs it, not only me."*

- Saw Gk--- (male, 40), Kl--- village head, Saw Muh Bplaw village tract (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

Widespread food insecurity among civilian populations in Lu Thaw Township is primarily caused by displacement triggered by Tatmadaw military pressure, including attacks on civilian populations, and the resulting strain of over-population on land resources. The failed 2010 harvest due to irregular weather exacerbated these serious, long-standing barriers to food security, and appears to have marked a tipping point between perennial food insecurity and a severe food crisis. Currently, 8,885 villagers across 118 villages expect to run out of food before the 2011 harvest; some families expected to run out of food in May 2011. Villagers in Lu Thaw believe that the scale of this crisis will profoundly challenge the capacity of local strategies for responding to food insecurity, which have been developed by communities that since 1997 have survived two major Tatmadaw offensives, ongoing annual attacks that continue to target civilians and the civilian food supply, frequent and protracted displacement, as well as a range of natural factors that make it difficult to cultivate sufficient amounts of rice in the hills of Lu Thaw Township.

The current food crisis, furthermore, has emerged at a time when local relief organisations logistically capable of accessing the area do not have adequate financial capacity to deliver assistance to all affected communities across eastern Burma. Increased financial support to organisations that can access populations in need of assistance in eastern Burma, then, is necessary immediately. The 1,246 families currently struggling to respond to acute food shortages require support if they are to survive the current food shortage without further displacement or employing responses that increase their vulnerability to attack.

*"As long as they can stand on their own feet, they [villagers] will continue staying here. If they can't stand on their own feet anymore, I believe these villagers will go to a refugee camp."*

-Saw Th--- (male, 52), Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract secretary, Ta--- village, Yeh Muh Bplaw village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

The provision of emergency food assistance to families facing food shortages in Lu Thaw will broaden villagers' options for protecting themselves from Tatmadaw attacks targeting civilians, which have continued into 2011. As reflected in villagers' testimony throughout this report, short-term or long-term displacement into hiding remains the most effective means for civilians to protect themselves from such attacks. Displacement patterns since 1997, as well as explicit statements of villagers interviewed by KHRG, indicate that many villagers affected by the food crisis would prefer to remain near their original communities and agricultural land, despite the grave physical security threats and hardship they confront while displaced. Villagers and community leaders interviewed by KHRG in February and March affirmed that they felt most civilians facing food shortages wished to remain in their country; however, they also stated that they believed some would consider becoming refugees if no longer able to survive in hiding.

*"[The Tatmadaw] have taken over our villages and lands, our workplaces, so we have to face more and more difficulties. I hope the bad things they do will change to good. Or that they'll go back and give space to us... If not, and if they still do these things to civilians, the problems will become bigger and bigger. If the problems become bigger and bigger, some villagers will go to [refugee] camps, but some people's attitude is, 'This is our country. Whatever [happens], we'll stay here and die here. We will work here until we die.'"*

- Saw Ka--- (male, 41), Plah Koh village tract secretary, Ma--- village, Plah Koh village tract (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)

The funding and delivery of emergency food assistance should thus be recognised as consistent with the priorities expressed by the residents of 118 communities threatened by food shortages, and essential to broadening affected civilians' options for obtaining adequate food to survive beyond the extremes of displacement as refugees and armed protection strategies. Funding and delivery of emergency assistance to affected civilian populations should therefore be prioritised and pursued by all actors interested in promoting human rights and security in conflict-affected areas of eastern Burma, particularly actors with an interest in long-term and sustainable peace-building, and the resolution of conditions that trigger internal and cross-border displacement.

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

- "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," (April 2011)
- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, (August 2010)
- "Southern Papun District: Abuse and expansion of military control," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Village-level decision-making and strategic displacement," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control," (August 2010)
- "Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River," (August 2010)
- "SPDC mortar attack on school in Papun District," (February 2010)
- "Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District," (October 2009)
- "Attacks, killing and the food crisis in Papun," (February 2009)





