



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Toungoo Situation Update: April 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in May 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Toungoo District, during the period between 2006 and April 2011. It contains updated information concerning military activity, specifically the replacement of Tatmadaw battalions under MOC #7 with MOC #9. It also details the following human rights issues: movement restrictions, including road closures and travel restrictions, and the requirement that villagers purchase permission documents to work and travel; restrictions on the transport of medicine and staple food items to civilian areas; forced labour, including portering, production of building materials, messenger duty and road maintenance; the use of civilians' vehicles to sweep for landmines; civilian injuries resulting from the use of landmines by the Tatmadaw and non-state armed groups; and the prohibition of Karen language education in government schools. This situation update also documents villagers' responses to abuses, including negotiation with Tatmadaw officers, false compliance, and lying to avoid complying with forced labour demands. This report also discusses concerns regarding limited access to health care; limited access to quality education for children; and food insecurity due to abnormal weather and limited availability of essential commodities.

Situation Update | Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (April 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including five incident reports, six interviews, and 700 photographs with researcher notes.²

Introduction

In our Toungoo District, 2nd Brigade area, villagers farm plantations for their livelihoods. When we look in Tantabin Township, in the plains [in lowland areas] villagers cultivate [paddy] farms and also bean plantations. In the Gkaw Thay Der, Maw Nay Bpwa and Khoh Kee areas, for the villages which are based in the mountains, we see there are just plantations. We plant cardamom, betelnut, coffee, mangosteen and durian. Now we cultivate cardamom plantations

¹ KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, villagers are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Toungoo District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2011.

and, after three years we can get an output [the crops become productive]. For our work, we villagers *ma daw ma gka* [cooperate with] each other.³

As for armed groups' activities, we see that they [the Tatmadaw] are based in Bpyin Ma Na, now called Naypyidaw, which is close to our Toungoo District. We see their troops and their activity a lot. We see also that their army camps are based along the road. There are 12 total army camps based along the road between Toungoo and Kler La, and the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] soldiers who live in those camps charge a gate [checkpoint] fee of 500 kyat (US \$0.64)⁴ [at each checkpoint] to villagers who have to travel on the road. If a motorbike taxi wants to go to Toungoo Town, he has to get *hsin kwin* [a travel permission document] from Kler La Town. Motorbike taxi drivers have to face SPDC [Tatmadaw] pressure along the way.

When we look at Toungoo District, it is necessary that villagers be healthy because medicine is very expensive. The SPDC government⁵ [authorities] closes [restricts] medicine from Toungoo Town to Kler La Town. We are not allowed to bring medicine, but some villagers bring medicine in secretly so that, if medicines do get to our living places, they are very expensive. As for education, if we look in our Toungoo District, we see that children mostly can study only up to fourth standard because further study is very expensive for them. So there are problems for children's education too.

Food problems

If we look in our Toungoo District, villagers farm plantations for their livelihoods. They grow cardamom, betelnut, mangosteen, durians and other fruits. If we look at Tantabin Township in the plain [lowland] areas, villagers mostly cultivate [paddy] farms and peanut plantations. Villagers who live in Toungoo [mostly] do not farm [paddy] hill fields and farms so if the SPDC comes and attacks them and destroys their food, they have to face problems to find more food.

Because of this, villagers have to face food problems because their main food is rice. They have to go to Toungoo Town to buy rice and we saw that, in 2008, MOC #5 under LID [MOC] commander Brigadier General Kaung Mya came and, since that time, villagers who live in Toungoo District have faced a problem to get rice. In Toungoo, it was the first time this happened in our villages so it was one of the biggest problems for our villagers. MOC #5 commander Brigadier General Kaung Mya closed [restricted] selling rice along the Kler La road, and villagers could only work in their own villages [villagers could neither leave their villages to perform day labour nor purchase rice along the Toungoo to Kler La road]. They didn't have rice so they had to go to Toungoo Town and stay there. We saw that people who didn't have houses in Toungoo Town borrowed rice from friends who cultivated [paddy] farms or hill fields. Some villagers bought [enough] rice for one year so they could stay in their villages. We saw that most villagers from the Kler La area faced large food problems, because the transport cars [used to] go and come every day so they could buy rice day by day [before Kaung Mya ordered the road closed]. Rice is the main food that villagers eat, so they could eat only *dta gka bpor*

³ *Ma daw ma gka* refers to when community members cooperate on agricultural tasks such as planting, rotating from one household's agricultural project to the next.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this bulletin are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of June 9th 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 782 kyat.

⁵ The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was officially 'dissolved' on March 30th 2011; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term 'SPDC' was used by the villager who wrote this situation update, and is therefore retained in this translation.

[rice porridge with mixed vegetables]⁶ and *kaw naw* [noodles]. Some villagers could not do that anymore so they went to Toungoo Town. For this reason, villagers who live in Toungoo District have faced food problems.

In 2010, we saw that villagers who live in the Gkaw Thay Der and Khoh Kee areas of Tantabin Township faced problems on their plantations from the SPDC soldiers who were taking security at Ko Day [Tatamdaw camp]. We saw that, at that time, they destroyed villagers' cardamom plantations. In 2010, villagers who live in Toungoo District had to buy rice and fish paste as their main food. They reported many problems, such as that some of their cardamom plantations were burned and, at the same time, some cardamom plants were destroyed because it was so hot and the plants were dry. For cardamom, we have to wait for three years [after planting] and we can get benefit [harvest the plants]. First, we have to use a lot of money and pay people to grow the cardamom plants. When we can get the seeds, we have to take care of the plants and clean the grass [in the plantations]. For our occupations we cannot work alone, so when we grow cardamom plants or betelnut, we have to go and help each other. Villagers' occupations [livelihoods] are not all perfect, and we see some are like that because they have a big family so they cannot provide for themselves. Some are also not in good health so they face a large problem with their livelihoods. Some cultivate large cardamom plantations but, at the time when they can get benefit [harvest], there is also SPDC [Tatmadaw] activity and they destroy and burn the plantations. Also the weather is [sometimes] not normal, so in Toungoo District it becomes so hot and the land becomes dry and cracked. We live under SPDC control in many ways so we civilians face problems for our livelihoods.

SPDC soldiers' activity

If we look at SPDC soldiers' movements in our Toungoo District since 2006, Tatmadaw Light Infantry Division (LID) #66 troops came and were active in our area. Villagers faced SPDC attacks on their villages so they had to flee to the forest and some fled to Thailand to the refugee camps. Villagers who live under SPDC control always face forced labour and [have to serve as porters when the Tatmadaw] attacks villages. In 2008, the villagers had to face a problem because they didn't have enough rice. MOC #5 Operation Commander Kaung Mya closed the road between Kler La and Toungoo so villagers who live in Toungoo District could not buy rice. Due to the SPDC attacks [military activities] at this time, villagers could eat only *dtah gka bpor* porridge and noodles.

We also saw that, in 2010, the SPDC government had an election and, after the election, they sent a lot of their troops to Toungoo District. SPDC soldiers were active in the Toungoo area. We saw they patrolled around and burned villagers' cardamom plantations and betelnut plantations. Villagers faced forced labour again and again. In 2010, the SPDC soldiers active in Kler La were MOC #7, under Operation Commander Myo Aye. They were based in Kler La. We saw SPDC soldiers' were active in our area, and they demanded villagers who are under SPDC control to go and carry their loads and food [porter supplies]. On September 15th 2010, SPDC soldiers forced [the following] villages to go and carry food from Ko Day to Th'Ay Hta camp: Wa Thoh Koh, Gklay Soh Kee, Klaw Mee Der, Maw Koh Der, Gkaw Soe Koh, Kler La and Ler Koh villages.

MOC #7 was replaced by MOC #9, based in Kler La, and MOC #4 came and took security along the road for MOC #9 and MOC #7 [when these units rotated]. Because SPDC troops changed places [rotated], villagers had a problem and it disturbed villagers' work and travel. As villagers face SPDC attacks, they always abuse villagers' rights. In October 2010, they [MOC #9] came

⁶ *Dtah gka bpor*, while an effective way to stretch declining food stores, is also a dish traditionally eaten by many Karen in upland areas. When food stores are limited households, and entire communities, may eat a basic *dtah gka bpor* or *may klaw*, a more basic thin rice gruel mixed with salt until more food can be procured.

and changed places with MOC #7. They sent their food by trucks and they forced villagers to go and porter from the road to villages such as Kler La, Gkaw Soe Koh, Ler Koh, Wa Thoh Koh, Gklay Soh Kee and Gkaw Thay Der. Those villagers had to go and cut bushes to clear the road between Kler La and Gkaw Thay Der. The SPDC bulldozer came to make [repair] the road, and was damaged by a landmine between Gklay Soh Kee and Gkaw Thay Der in September [2010]. Since this event, we saw that wherever they saw villagers they arrested them and took them to the Kler La army base. Therefore the villagers who live in Gklay Soh Kee village and Kler La villages were disturbed and were arrested when they came back from their betelnut plantations.

When the SPDC sends food to the Buh Hsa Kee army base they ask for villagers' trucks and, more than this, they ask for the villagers' trucks to go in front of them. The SPDC soldiers force the villagers' trucks to go and send food, and every year we see villagers' trucks are damaged by landmines. On December 22nd 2010, a truck belonging to Kler La villager Ga--- went and took SPDC soldiers' food to the Naw Soh and Buh Hsa Kee army camps and when he was coming back, the truck was damaged by a landmine in old Le--- village [where Le--- village used to be]. They [the Tatmadaw] did not help [to fix] this truck, and the villager had to repair it and pay for it on his own. These are the things that villagers in Toungoo District have to face. Because of the SPDC activities such as transporting the soldiers' food and changing their places [rotating]. Villagers have to do this every year.

Table: SPDC troop rotations in Toungoo District in 2011:

MOC #9 (rotated in)	MOC #7 (rotated out)	Area of Deployment
TOC #3	TOC #1	Kler La
TOC #1	TOC #2	Buh Hsa Kee
LIB #539	IB #102	Play Hsa Loh
LIB #541	IB #250	Gkaw Thay Der; Naw Soh; Bplaw Moo Der; T'Kwee Soh
LIB #378	IB #261	Buh Hsa Kee; Buh Loh
LIB #375	LIB #366	Gkaw Soe Koh; Maw Pah Der; Bpeh Leh Wa; Kyaw Koh
LIB #377	LIB #425	Th' Ay Hta; Ko Day (48 Mile); Maw Kee
LIB #376	LIB #423	Ker Weh; Ker Der; Gk'Thaw Bpweh; Ker Der Kah

Health

If we look at health, it is the most important thing for every one of our civilians. We see in our Toungoo District that most villagers have to face many health problems. In 2010, for villagers who live in Toungoo District, we saw that the most common disease that was happening was *hsin dtoh kway* [literally 'elephant disease'].⁷ This disease is a very bad disease for villagers. Villagers who get this disease have a problem to cure it, because they cannot bring the medicine to their villages. The SPDC does not allow villagers to take medicine between Toungoo Town and Kler La. For this reason, in our area, medicines are very expensive. If the villagers bring medicines they have to do it secretly. If the SPDC sees anyone doing that, they will arrest them and put them in prison. In our Toungoo District, we have a hospital in Kler La. Kler La hospital was set up by the SPDC government, so for villagers to cure ourselves [receive treatment] we have to pay money.

In Toungoo District we have two groups of villagers. The first is the villagers who live under SPDC control and the second is the IDPs [villagers in hiding from the Tatmadaw in upland and shoot-on-sight areas]. If the villagers who live under SPDC control face health problems, they have to go to Kler La or to Toungoo Town. If we have to cure our diseases, we have to deal with travel costs, food costs and medicine costs. The villagers who are not under SPDC control

⁷ 'Elephant disease' refers to *elephantiasis*, also called *lymphatic filariasis*, which is a parasitic infection transmitted by mosquitoes that causes the skin and tissue of the lower half of the body to swell and thicken.

face big problems also, because they live in the forest and we see that their children are not clean or well-cared for [healthy], and they don't have adequate food and shelter. For curing diseases, the KNU set up a clinic and other organizations come in and give out medicines.

For these reasons, in our Toungoo District, villagers have to face a lot of health problems in many areas.

Education

If we look at education, we see that every single human should attend school and should try to study. If we try very hard, we will be educated and valuable people and, furthermore, other people will respect us.

Nowadays, we see our Karen people can attend school but we are not allowed to study our mother language [Karen], so we still cannot write our mother language. In the students' education, the Burmese government does not allow our mother language to be taught so it has become a problem for our Karen people.

In our Toungoo District, we can see that education for civilians is very weak. We have two groups: villagers who live under SPDC control and villagers who live in the forest, not under SPDC control. In villages under SPDC control, children can study up to fourth standard and then move to Kler La or Toungoo Town [for further education]. We see the problem happening in the SPDC-controlled areas, that children who finish school don't know where to go and continue their studies. The villagers who cannot provide enough food for themselves have the biggest problem to send their children to continue attending school. Because their parents cannot support them, these children lose their opportunity to continue attending school and studying.

We see many children go and study in Toungoo Town and there are many students who have attended school, but only a few who have passed tenth standard. The reason why is that, in Burma's schools, starting from kindergarten to the end of seventh standard every student has the right to pass even if they do not qualify to pass. If children fail an exam, they can have the chance to do the test again and then pass. Students who pass [the early standards] are passing without qualifying step-by-step, so we see that when they arrive to tenth standard, it is not easy for the students to pass. So they have to stay two or three years to study [repeat standards], and then pass. We see some quit school, go back to their villages and work in plantations and hill fields. Mostly we see children from the mountains [upland areas] in Toungoo study for two or three years in the tenth standard but do not pass, so they come back and work in their villages on plantations.

If we look back to villagers who are not under SPDC control in Toungoo District, they have to hide in their plantations, betelnut plantations, and in the forest. We see that these villagers work with the KNU and set up schools for children so they can study in the forest. We see that the Karen Education Department (KED) comes and gives teachers training in the IDP areas so that the children can learn. We see also that they try hard for their people. But, the children cannot study smoothly [without disruption] because there is SPDC activity around their areas, so the children have to study in fear. For teachers, when they teach, they always have to be aware and worry. If there is heavy SPDC activity the teachers have to close the school, and when there is a good [security] situation the teachers start school again.

For both villagers who live in the areas that the SPDC attacks and villagers in the areas that they control, we see our Karen people do not have the right to study freely. If we look, our Karen students are not allowed to study or write in their own language. That is the situation now, so they cannot write and read their own language. It is the aim of the SPDC to disappear

our Karen language. Because of this, our Karen villagers who live in the mountains have faced oppression and are looked down on by the SPDC government. We have no opportunity to seek education so it is the biggest problem for us.

Landmines

About landmines in Burma, we know the Burmese government and the KNU have not signed the *Baw Muh Ser Pwoh Gk'Rer* [UN] Treaty on landmines. Landmines are the biggest danger to our civilians' lives. We see that, in our Toungoo District, Burmese government [Tatmadaw] troops have come and are active here and, moreover, they plant landmines and villagers get hurt. We see that many people get injured by landmines and become handicapped in Toungoo District. Landmines are the most dangerous kind of weapon to our lives. Furthermore, it [a landmine] is a thing that can damage the human body. Landmines are not good for people and they destroy people's lives.

Burma is included in the countries that use the most landmines. Civilians in Burma don't want the government to use landmines. Toungoo District is close to the Burma government's headquarters [in Naypyidaw] so the SPDC troops have come and built their camps in our Toungoo area in many different places. Not only do the SPDC soldiers use landmines, but also they don't let civilians know whenever they plant landmines. Furthermore, they plant landmines around and beside the villages, so the landmines hurt villagers' pigs and other animals. We can say that because villagers don't know where the landmines are, when they go to the wrong place where the SPDC has planted landmines, villagers surely can step on landmines by accident. Wo--- village is close to an SPDC Army camp. Last year, SPDC soldiers planted landmines close beside the village and two of the Wo--- villagers stepped on the landmines. One was a man and one was a woman. One of the villagers who stepped on the landmines is a woman named Naw Le---, who is 40 years old. She stepped on the landmine when she went to collect firewood in front of the village beside the vehicle road. The second one is Saw Pu---, who is 46 years old. He stepped on a landmine in the A--- area.⁸

If we look in our Toungoo District, people of our own ethnicity who work for revolution [KNLA soldiers] use landmines too, and the landmines that they use are made by hand. One of the Toungoo District [KNLA] leaders who didn't want to give his name, said:

"We know that landmines aren't a good thing. We know they damage the human body. Because of this reason, we don't want to use them but it's also impossible if we don't use them because we don't have enough weapons. Also, we're an armed group against the SPDC military [Tatmadaw] oppression so we use them to protect our people, civilians and ourselves. In Burma, we're the biggest ethnic revolution group in the country. We use landmines and, wherever we plant landmines, we let the villagers know. We tell the villagers: 'Don't go to that place because we planted landmines, so if you go you'll step on a landmine and it'll hurt you. If you have some important reason to go [to an area mined by the KNLA], come and let us know and we'll go and send you.' If our people don't listen to us and go, it depends on their luck because we already informed them."

Villagers' reports about the abuse of their rights

When we had a discussion in the second place [we visited] in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District, one of the villagers from Go--- village called Naw Ya--- reported about people [Tatmadaw soldiers] coming and abusing her rights when they demand forced labour and

⁸ KHRG published a report about these incidents in October 2010. For more information, see "Villagers injured by landmines, assisted by neighbours in southern Toungoo," KHRG, October 2010.

messengers. The SPDC demanded 100 villagers to go and porter for them; one villager from each household to go and cut bushes to clear the road; two villagers to go every day for messenger duty; and asked villagers to cut 120 bamboo poles for them. Villagers face these human rights abuses, as shown above. As the villagers already do, if the SPDC asks for 100 villagers to go for forced labour, only 70 villagers go. If they ask for one person from every household to go and cut bushes to clear the road, they [villagers] don't send a person from every house; just half or more than half will go, but not all. When they ask villagers to go and cut 120 bamboo poles, villagers only cut 80 bamboo poles. If the SPDC asks villagers to go and take rice on five motorbikes, the villagers have to go and take the rice but only send three motorbikes. If the SPDC asks for two messengers every day from the villagers, the villagers tell them they will go, but only send one messenger every two days. As described above, this is what villagers already do.

For the future, villagers have discussed that they will make their plans stronger about what to do if the SPDC asks them to go and clean the road, to porter, to cut bamboo, to do messenger duty, or to go and take rice. They said they will discuss it with their villagers and village heads, and they won't go and will not do it [forced labour] for the soldiers anymore. [They said] *'We'll apologize and refuse bravely, and we'll do our own work in our workplaces. If the SPDC asks us, we'll ignore them. We won't care about the SPDC forcing our villagers anymore.'* That is the villagers' way to make a strong arrangement, and plan how they will be stronger in the future.

About the villagers' suffering, a Go--- villager named Naw Ya--- reported the ways that they [the Tatmadaw] are hurting the villagers' rights, the things that villagers are already doing and, what they will do in the future to be stronger. She reported this when she came to a discussion in Dt-- - area, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District. As she reported what she had suffered and experienced.

Villagers' strong and weak points

Among the villagers who came and attended the discussion, one villager from Th--- village named Naw Wa--- reported her village's strong points and weak points as follows:

"In our village, villagers have many strong points because most villagers love their own ethnic [Karen] people, and work for their village and for their villagers. Even villagers who aren't educated, they try as much as they can to give themselves for their ethnic people and not complain about working for their people. They work with all the energy they have. Furthermore, they try the best for their children and try to send them to school, like other very clever people. They also want their children to be clever and work for their people, to help to develop our ethnic people. [Sometimes] nowadays, we have people who pass school and then graduate. But we don't see people who finish school and graduate come back and help to develop their village or do something to benefit their people. We see that they're working in plantations for their own benefit."

Naw Wa---, Th--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District

About the villagers' weak points, they say they cannot read and write their own mother language, so that is one weak point. The reason is that the SPDC does not allow villagers to study and learn in their own Karen language. About villagers' strong points and weak points, Th--- villager Naw Wa--- reported her village's strong points and weak points as she had felt and experienced. The information that is shown above is true from villagers, so we write and report it.

Abuse of villagers' rights and other problems that are not human rights abuses

There are many ways that villagers' rights are abused. The SPDC Army destroys villagers' workplaces [agricultural projects], shelters, education, travel, farm animals, religion and, much more than that, kills villagers and breaks apart [separates] villages. Villagers have to face many difficult consequences. Because of SPDC Army activities that hurt villagers, villagers do not have enough food and are not healthy. They cannot work and cannot travel or leave the village, so it is not easy to find food. Because of this, the villagers are hungry and, therefore, villagers *gkaw wee gkaw say* [cannot eat until they are full] and eat boiled rice or porridge. It is the most difficult problem for villagers.

The things that are not [caused by] abuses of villagers' rights are that villagers could not take care of their workplaces well, and the weather was not good and there was irregular rain. So villagers could not work well anymore or get enough benefit [harvest] from their work as in the past. There are many things that are not abuses of villagers' rights but we report only this one. It is what the villagers themselves reported carefully.

A villager's report about abuses of villagers' rights

When we went and had a discussion in the second place [Tantabin Township] we saw villagers came to the discussion meeting and reported about human rights abuses happening in their villages, and how they protect themselves. One of the villagers who reported what human rights abuses are happening in her village was Naw Wa---, who lives in Th--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District, in the Gkaw Thay Der area. This is the information that the villager reported about human right abuses happening in her village and the problems that villagers face:

The SPDC asked 100 villagers to go and carry [porter] their food

"If we look at human right abuses happening in our village, there is forced labour. We saw that the SPDC asked 100 of our villagers to go and carry their food. When MOC #9 came and replaced MOC #7, at that time they asked our villagers to go and carry their food, such as rice, sweet milk, beans, cooking oil and other things. Starting from So--- to Da--- army camp, we went on March 12th 2011."

The SPDC asked for 50 motorbikes belonging to villagers to send their food

"We saw that when SPDC soldiers came and changed places [rotated] with each other, they asked for our villagers' motorbikes to go and take rice for them. They asked for 50 motorbikes, and one motorbike had to take three sacks (150 kg. / 330 lb.) of rice, starting from Go--- to Da--- army camp. Our villagers had to take three sacks of rice so they faced problems along the way."

The SPDC asked for one person from each house to go and cut bushes to clear the road

"When the SPDC soldiers send their food, we see that they send their bulldozers. As their bulldozers come to make [repair] the road, they also ask us villagers for forced labour. For forced labour, the SPDC soldiers asked for one person from each house to come and cut bushes to clear the road. We had to start from Go--- and clean the road to So--- village. We face this whenever SPDC soldiers' trucks come. We, the villagers, have to go and cut bushes to clear the road very often. The SPDC soldiers attack [are active] and ask for forced labour from us. We don't get any payment and also we have to bring our own food."

The SPDC asked villagers to cut 120 bamboo poles

"We face SPDC soldiers when they come and are based beside our village, and they force our villagers. This happens a lot. We see they come and base their army camp beside the village and ask our villagers to cut 120 bamboo poles for them. Because they come and are based close to our village, our villagers face problems to travel, and there are more and more disturbances."

When villagers go to Toungoo Town they ask for a 1,000 kyat (US \$1.28) gate [checkpoint] tax from each person

"When we look at the Kler La area, whenever people come and go [travel] we face SPDC soldiers' demands a lot. Villages face this when they travel. When we want to go to Toungoo, we have to go down to Kler La army camp on motorbike to get a permission document. Whenever we go, we have to pay 1,000 kyat [for permission to travel] from Kler La to Toungoo. The distance between Kler La and Toungoo passes a total of 12 gates so, when our motorbikes go down we have to pay 500 kyat (US \$0.64) at each gate. From Kler La army camp along the Kler La road, we see a total of 12 gates so villagers face demands."

Villagers have to get written permission to work in plantations and it costs 100 kyat (US \$0.13) for one person.

"We face SPDC soldiers when they come and are based close to our village and the villagers face big problems. Furthermore, they order villagers who go to their workplaces, like plantations and fields, to get written permission. One permission document can be used for one week and, if it one week has passed, we have to go and get another and give another 100 kyat. So for villagers' occupations they face problems [restrictions]."

How the villagers already try to solve problems that happen in their village

"We see SPDC soldiers force villagers to go and carry their food, to clear the road and to cut bamboo. We see that they asked us to porter but we didn't go completely [with as many people] as they asked. Our villagers protested and we only sent 80 people. The village head went and told them that 100 of our villagers couldn't go because some villagers weren't healthy, some had gone to stay and sleep in their plantation fields, and that there were mostly only old people left in our village who couldn't walk anymore. We and our village heads discussed together and we protected ourselves this way."

For the villagers' motorbikes that have to go and take rice, we and our village head discussed and advised each other. We went and told them: 'Thu Koh [Officer]! You asked for 50 motorbikes to go and take rice, but we can't find 50 motorbikes because some of our villagers' motorbikes are broken and they've gone to repair them in town, and they haven't come back yet. Also, some motorbike owners have gone to their betelnut plantations.' So we went and told them we could find only 40 motorbikes. That's one way that our villagers solve the problem and protect themselves."

If we have to go clear the road, our village head goes and tells them: 'You asked my villagers to go and clean the road, one person from each house, but they can't because some of my villagers have gone to the town.' Because our village head went and apologised to them, we only sent half of the amount of people they asked for. The people who were left could go and do their own work."

About their demands for villagers to go and cut 120 bamboo poles, we said to them: 'In our village, we rebuild our houses every year so there;' only a little bamboo left.' Because we explained to them this problem, they asked our villagers to cut only 100 bamboo poles.

For the demand that one motorbike has to give 500 kyat at each gate if we go to Toungoo Town, they say it [the payment] is for the gate so we have to give it, but we tell them: 'We'll give it to you after we come back, now we haven't had anyone hire the [motorbike] taxi yet, so we don't have any money in our hands.' From Kler La to Toungoo Town, there are 12 gates. We can't give money at every gate, so we have to protect ourselves like this."

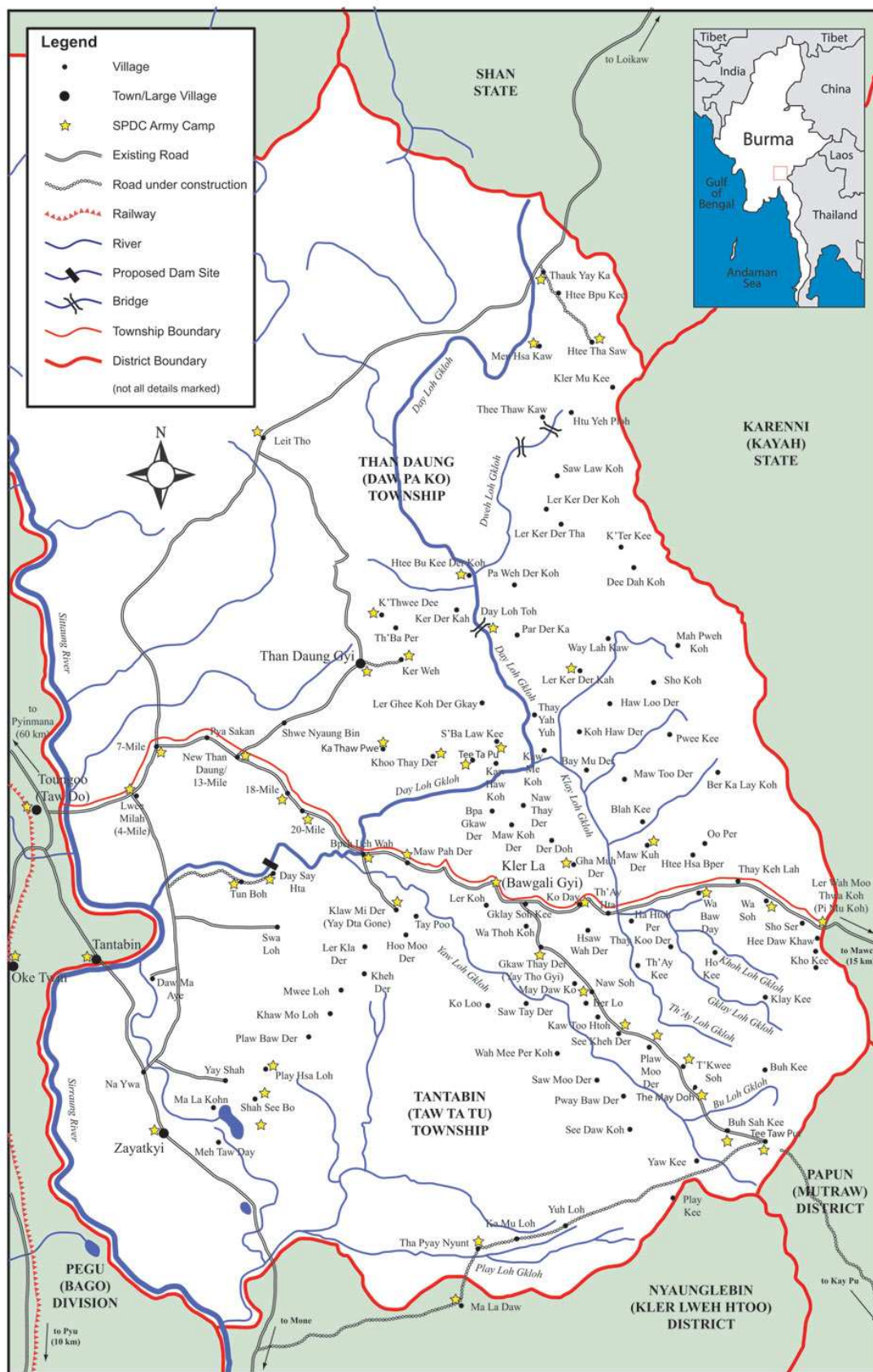
The information that villagers reported above is the real situation happening in their villages, about the pressures that villagers face and how they solve them.

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

- *Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011* (June 2011)
- *Toungoo Interviews: November 2010 to April 2011* (June 2011)
- *Joint Tatmadaw patrol burns field huts and seed stores, displaces six villages in Toungoo District* (May 2011)
- *Toungoo Incident Reports: March and April 2011* (May 2011)
- *Toungoo Situation Update and Interviews: May 2010 to January 2011* (May 2011)
- *Villagers injured by landmines, assisted by neighbours in southern Toungoo* (October 2010)
- *Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District* (May 2010)
- *Forced labour, Movement and Trade Restrictions in Toungoo District* (March 2010)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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