



Situation Update

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Dooplaya District Situation Update: COVID-19 restrictions and lack of rain threaten local livelihoods in Noh T'Kaw, Kruh Tu, Kaw T'Ree and Waw Ray townships, September to December 2020

This Situation Update covers the impact of the COVID-19¹ pandemic in Noh T'Kaw, Kruh Tu, Kaw T'Ree and Waw Ray townships, Dooplaya District between September and December 2020. Travel restrictions to curb the spread of the virus have translated into livelihood difficulties for local villagers. Day labourers are now unable to travel around to find jobs, and some have started facing food shortages. In Kaw T'Ree Township, the lack of rain has damaged paddy fields in Hsoh K'Lee village tract.² The villagers affected are afraid they might face food shortages in the coming years if they cannot harvest enough rice.³

Travel restrictions and prevention measures

Travel restrictions [to curb the spread of COVID-19] are currently being implemented in every township in Dooplaya District [according to a KHRG researcher, these restrictions started being put in place at the end of August 2020]. Transportation and travel are now more restricted than they were over the past few months, as the COVID-19 situation in Myanmar is not improving. There are screening checkpoints in some villages. These checkpoints also provide water, soap and masks. Some villages have banned the entry of outsiders. If important issues arise, villagers have to obtain a travel letter [issued by village heads or village tract administrators] to be able to enter other villages in their area.

In Kruh Tu Township, local villagers are not allowed to go to other villages [both within and outside the township]. The relevant local authorities are allowed to travel, but only to deal with urgent issues; and provided that they carry a travel letter with them. Failure to present such a letter will result in them being denied entry [or ordered to go back to their village by one of the screening checkpoints along the way]. All the villages placed security guards at their entrance

¹ Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in December 2019 in China, and has resulted in an on-going pandemic. For more information, see WHO, "[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)".

² A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

³ The present document is based on information received in December 2020. It was provided by a community member in Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

[to implement these restrictions]. The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA),⁴ the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA),⁵ the Border Guard Force (BGF)⁶ and healthcare workers work together to check the temperature of the people who travel on the main road [a concrete road that connects the main cities in the region]. People with a normal body temperature can continue their journey.

In Noh T'Kaw Township, local people cannot go to other villages but some people still travel on the main road. The KNLA, DKBA and BGF operate screening checkpoints along the main road, notably in Kah Li Hkee and Yah Ther Tah villages. People must wear a mask to be allowed into Kya Inn village, Kyain Shwe Doe village tract. Failure to wear a mask in the village will result in a 5,000 kyats [USD 3.75]⁷ fine. One villager from Law Pa Hkee, Yaw K'Daw village tract told KHRG: *"It is so difficult to travel between villages and village tracts. We cannot go from one place to another. If we do, we have to carry a travel letter with us."*

There are travel restrictions in Kaw T'Ree Township as well. People who wish to go to other villages must obtain a travel letter. The letter only allows its holder to travel to specific places within a limited period of time. However, it is not easy to obtain travel letters to go to Khoh Ther Pler [Payathonzu], Seikgyi and Kawkareik towns, as the [KNU] authorities do not want the local villagers to go there.

The Htee Th'Bluh Hpoh Hkee [Kaw T'Ree Township] village secretary told KHRG that it was not easy to travel between village tracts because of the COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, traders and local villagers are only allowed to sell and buy goods beside the screening checkpoint at the entrance of the village.

There is a newly-built quarantine site in Kyaw Hta village, Kyaw Hta village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, but not many people are being isolated there. There is no screening checkpoint but the villagers have to wear masks everywhere. The local villagers can go to Kya Inn village, Kyaikdon and to other towns but, according to the Karen National Union (KNU)⁸ policies, they have to obtain a travel letter to go to other places [such as Hpa-an and other major towns].

On November 1st 2020, the KNU set up a COVID-19 screening checkpoint in Kaw T'Naw village, Poh Yay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. Karen villagers from nearby villages can travel to and buy foods or other things in Kyaikdon Town. However, outsiders from areas or towns such as Hpa-an, Kaw T'Ree and other places are banned from entering the local villages. The local villagers who want to go there have to obtain a travel letter from their village head.

There are similar restrictions in Waw Ray Township. However, they are implemented more strictly as this township is close to Mon State.

⁴ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

⁵ In 1994, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) split from the KNLA over religious considerations. In 2010, the majority of DKBA troops transformed into BGFs, but one faction refused and changed its name to Democratic Karen Benevolent Army in 2012. The DKBA signed the NCA on October 15th 2015.

⁶ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw.

⁷ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 26th 2021 official market rate.

⁸ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.



The photo on the left was taken on September 7th 2020 at the entrance of Kya Inn village, Noh T'Kaw Township. It shows government healthcare workers, members of the Myanmar Police Force and local authorities stopping villagers to distribute masks and question them on their travel plans. The photo on the right was taken on September 24th 2020. It shows a traffic jam at the entrance of Thingan Nyi Naung Town, Kawkareik Township. People travelling on the road from Myawaddy were denied entry pursuant to COVID-19 restrictions. [Photos: KHRG]

COVID-19 update and quarantine requirements

There have been no positive cases in Kruh Tu Township so far, but measures are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. People coming from towns or cities are banned from entering the township. [People can also choose to go through the quarantine process in order to enter the area.] People coming from towns will be sent to a quarantine site for 15 days if they are caught violating this restriction. They will only be allowed to enter the township afterwards.

In Noh T'Kaw Township, people found with high fever at the screening checkpoints are immediately sent to the closest hospital [by the health workers manning the checkpoints]. Local villagers coming back from other areas have to stay in a quarantine site for 14 or 15 days before being allowed into their village [this seems to apply to villagers who were outside of the township when the restrictions were established]. Almost all the bigger villages have their own quarantine site. In Yaw K'Daw village tract, the village authorities told the local villagers that they could not go to Khoh Ther Pler (Payathonzu) because they did not know whether the virus had spread there.

In Kaw T'Ree Township, local villagers are not allowed to travel, unless they have a travel letter. People who travel to other locations without a travel letter need to spend 14 [or 15 days, depending on the village] in a quarantine site before being able to return home [this requirement does not apply to villagers who obtained a travel letter ahead of their travel, as they are usually required to come back to their village within one day]. These rules were established by local and village authorities. These authorities informed the villagers that such restrictions were meant to limit the spread of COVID-19. There have been no cases of COVID-19 in Waw Ray Township either, but prevention measures are being implemented nonetheless.

In some places, there are no quarantine sites. In Kya Inn village, Noh T'Kaw, the nurses avoid touching patients who do not appear to be suffering from serious diseases [even though, according to a KHRG researcher, these nurses wear personal protective equipment]. They just question them [on their symptoms] and give them medicine. They [local authorities in Kya Inn] did not build a special place to isolate suspected cases of COVID-19. Potential COVID-19 patients are kept at the local school. Some other villages [in the district] are also doing the same. The village leaders said that they did not have enough funds to build a quarantine site, so they decided to use the local school instead.

Livelihood difficulties

COVID-19 restrictions have translated into livelihood difficulties for the local villagers, as they cannot travel to look for jobs. Consequently, they do not have enough food left, such as rice [and they cannot afford to buy more]. The first and second waves of COVID-19 infections have been a threat to the livelihood of the local villagers in Kruh Tu and Noh T’Kaw townships. The Myanmar government and the organisations affiliated with the KNU established policies to curb the spread of COVID-19 [such as travel restrictions]. Therefore, the local villagers cannot travel. The local villagers worry that they will be left with nothing to eat because they cannot travel to find work and there is no other work for them. They are worried because they do not have enough food, and some even had to borrow [food or money to buy it] from others.

In Kaw T’Ree Township, local villagers are facing livelihood difficulties because of the lack of rain. The villagers have been complaining about it since September 25th 2020. As the lack of rain damaged their paddies, they fear that they might face food shortages in the coming years. The entire Hsoh K’Lee village tract faces this problem. This issue was reported in the following villages: Kwee Tah Auh, Maw K’Noo Hkee, Hsoh K’Lee, Paw Baw Hta, K’Neh Thay Poe Lay, Meh K’La Hkee, Hser Poe Hkee, Poh Kler Hkee and Kraw Plaw. This has been a big challenge for the villagers, and they are now waiting to see the situation. If their paddies cannot be harvested in November or December 2020, they will face huge problems in 2021. [Although the villagers did manage to harvest some rice, it will not be enough to cover their daily needs in 2021.]



These two photos were taken on September 24th 2020 in Hsoh K’Lee village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. These paddy fields were damaged by the lack of rain. Local villagers could face food shortages if they do not manage to harvest enough rice in 2020. [Photos: KHRG]

Conclusion

This situation update covered the situation in all four townships in Dooplaya District. The situation on the ground is getting worse when compared to previous months. Everyone has to abide by the COVID-19 restrictions.

Further background reading on the impact of COVID-19 in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: Gold mining activities and COVID-19 restrictions threaten local livelihoods in Moo Township, May to July 2020”](#), December 2020.
- [“Delayed and Uneven: COVID-19 Response in Rural Southeast Myanmar, March to June 2020”](#), October 2020.
- [“Southeast Myanmar Field Report: COVID-19, armed conflict, landmines and sexual violence, January to June 2020”](#), September 2020.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrg.org.

Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District



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