Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam

Details
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KHRD

This Photo Set includes 28 photos taken in two villages in the southern area of Bu Tho Township in Papun District, and in three villages in the northern area of Lu Pleh Township in Pa'an District, all of which are located in the Salween river valley near the site where the Hatgyi dam will be constructed. These photographs depict villagers throughout these townships pursuing their livelihoods and children attending school. According to the community member who spoke with villagers in the area and took these photos, as well as local media,[1] the villagers will be displaced by flooding near the dam site if construction at Hatgyi goes ahead as planned. This Photo Set also includes evidence of an earlier meeting in Myaing Gyi Ngu regarding intended forced relocation of villages in the proposed Hatgyi dam site prior to flooding. The photos depict a pamphlet on the dam, as well as solar panels, LED lights and batteries that were given to villagers in the areas that will be affected. In order to pre-empt forcible relocation or flooding, some villagers in the area have chosen to close schools in preparation for moving.

Report Maps

Map 1: Papun District
This Photo Set includes 28 still photographs selected from images taken in January 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG.[2]

Map 2: Pa'an District

Map 3: Karen Districts

Map 4: Burma

Bu Tho Township, Papun District

The photos above, taken in January 2012 show, on the left, B'Yah Kyauk village in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District, and, on the right, show a B'Yah Kyauk villager who has to work in many ways for his livelihood, including catching fish in the Salween River, some of
which he sells and some he eats with his family. He reported to the community member who took these photos that he sells one viss\[3\] of fish for 3,000 Kyat ($3.52),[4] and said, "if the dam is really successful, this place will be destroyed and the livelihood [of villagers] in these villages will become completely destroyed." [Photos: KHRG]

The photos above, taken in January 2012, show the B'Yah Kyauk school, which is located beside the B'Yah Kyauk village in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. The photo on left shows the B'Yah Kyauk students studying and the photo on right shows a B'Yah Kyauk schoolteacher, who is originally from Myaing Gyi Ngu town and cannot speak Sgaw Karen, which is the dialect spoken in the area. This school was not supported by any organisation, but only by the villagers who provide teachers' salaries and equipment for the school by themselves. [Photos: KHRG]

The photos above were taken in January 2012 and show the P'Teh Hta villagers' flat field farms in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. The P'Teh Hta villagers expressed that their village and these farms would be damaged if a large section of the Hatgyi dam is successfully constructed. [Photos: KHRG]
The photos above were taken in January 2012 and show the area of the Salween river valley near P'Teh Hta village where government officials from Thailand and Burma reportedly came to mark the land where the dam is to be constructed.[5] P'Teh Hta villagers explained to the community member who took these photos that their villages would be damaged if the dam is successfully constructed. [Photos: KHRG]

Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District

The photos above were taken in January 2012 in Shway Weh village, Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District, and show one Shway Weh villager beside a flat field farm and another villager preparing a net to go fishing in the nearby Salween river. The Shway Weh villagers told the community member who took these photos that Shway Weh village and villagers would have to move if the Hatgyi dam is built. [Photos: KHRG]
The photos above were taken in January 2012 in Shway Weh village, Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District, and show the Shway Weh village school. After opening for the school year in approximately June of 2011,[6] the Shway Weh school remained operational for only one month, before the villagers decided to close the school because of the proposed construction of Hatgyi dam. The students in Shway Weh could not attend school anymore. [Photos: KHRG]

The photos above were taken in January 2012, by a community member trained by KHRG. The top two photos show the T--- village general location in Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District. The villagers reported to the community member who took these photos that, this village would be flooded if the Hatgyi dam is built. The bottom left photo shows the T--- village school and the bottom right photo shows one of the school's teachers. There are no students currently attending this school because the school stayed closed this year due to the proposed dam. [Photos: KHRG]
The photos above were taken in January 2012 in T--- village, Pa'an District, and show a male villager who reported that if a large part of the construction of the Hatgyi dam is successful, T--- villagers would have to move. The villager reported to the community member who took these photos that the Tatmadaw arranged a meeting before January 2012 in Myaing Gyi Ngu, Pa'an District, regarding the relocation of villages. During the meeting, the Tatmadaw gave him one solar panel, one solar LED lantern and one battery. He said that the Tatmadaw soldiers gave an LED lantern and a battery to all villagers who came to the meeting. The villager in the photos above explained that, "This gift does not benefit our villagers, but we accepted it when they gave it to us. The situation will be worse if we have to move our place and leave our village, than if we can live in our own village." The top two photos show the front and back of a solar panel that was given to the villagers during the Myaing Gyi Ngu meeting. The bottom two photos show different angles of the solar LED lantern light also given to the villagers during the same meeting. [Photos: KHRG]
The photos above, taken in January 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG, show a pamphlet and business card distributed to T--- villagers who attended a meeting before January 2012 in Myaing Gyi Ngu, in Pa'an District, regarding the construction of Hatgyi dam and the relocation of nearby villages. The cover of the pamphlet reads, "Hatgyi Electricity Plan: Information we should know." [Photos: KHRG]

The photos above, taken in January 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG, show K'Moo Hpoh village, in Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District. K'Moo Hpoh villagers told the community member who took these photos: "If the taw kyah [valley] dam is successful, we could not live in this place anymore; we do not know what to do." [Photos: KHRG]

Footnotes

[1] According to the Burma Rivers Network, the construction of the Hatgyi Dam would cause destruction to the Salween river's ecosystem and flood many areas including villagers' farmland, necessitating the relocation of dozens of villages and thousands of villagers living downstream of the dam site; see "Environmental groups call on government to stop Salween River dams," Burma Rivers Network, October 2011.

[2] KHRG trains and equips villagers in eastern Burma to take photographs to document individual human rights abuses. KHRG censors all faces of individual villagers who continue to live in eastern Burma and may be endangered by having their photo published. The 29 photos included in this report were received in January 2012 along with other information from Papun District, including 296 other photos, two situation updates and 13 interviews in Papun District.

[3] A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

[4] As of June 22nd 2012, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 853 Kyat to the US $1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the Kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 Kyat to US $1.

[5] While it was not explained when these land-markers were planted, media sources reported that (after being suspended in 2009 due to protests by local residents) the Hatgyi dam project was resumed in 2011 due to pressure from China's Sinohydro Corporation and the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, which prompted the Karen National Union (KNU) to allow investors to carry out surveys on the Hatgyi dam in 2011, see "Mega dams holding back tide of goodwill in Myanmar," Bangkok Post, March 25, 2012.

[6] In Karen areas, as well as throughout Burma, primary and secondary schools open in June of each year.