

**MASSIVE ABUSE ON LAND, ENVIRONMENT  
AND  
PROPERTY RIGHTS**



**DISCUSSION PAPER ON BURMA**

**SUBMITTED TO**

**COHRE**

**Aug 2006**

**WRITTEN BY KHAING DHU WAN**

**Network for Environment and Economic Development (NEED)**

Email: kdwneed@gmail.com

Phone/Fax: +66 219 606

Mobil: +66 04 6144 522

## **Contents**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Purpose of Discussion Paper

### **2. Background History**

2.1 Ethnic Politics and Military Interference

### **3. Land tenure legislation (1948-62)**

3.1 Earlier a brief period of Democracy (1948-1962)

3.2 Under BSBP rule (1962 - 1988)

3.3 Under Military ruling (1988 - Up to now)

### **4. Socio-Economic Poverty and Land Ownership**

### **5. Summary of Findings**

### **6. Analysis of Findings**

### **7. Militarization and land confiscation**

### **8. No rights to a fair Market price and food sovereignty**

### **9. Abusing the environment and natural resources**

### **10. New poverty due to illegal Tax payment**

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Purpose of Discussion paper**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss key findings that emerged from our projects *of Environment and Economic Development program* In 2005-6, 12 young people from the different ethnic communities whom selected from the border areas and inside Burma to participate on a course of capacity building, researching and analyzing by the different perspective from multi ethnic society from Burma. The issues was focused and discussed about ownership, management and decision making of the Natural resources in Burma. On the other hand, our current knowledge and understanding of various aspects of land, environment and property rights that is relevant to the displaced people, migrant workers and refugees. We are most concerned with individuals and families from the ethnic groups of Burma who have been forced to leave their homes, land, gardens and their village environment. Especially, since after the 1988 uprising in Burma, young people and children and women, we highlight a numbers of the issues that rise from the findings and future research, and invite your comment, suggestions and reflections on our developing project. We would be extremely privileged to work with regional and international organizations facilitated the efforts of our ethnic groups who feel strongly about our housing, land, environment and property rights Which is very concerned with economic, social and cultural rights that accompanied our forced displacement our recourse right to restitution and compensation when we return our respected home and lands at one day.

## **2. Background History**

### **2-1. Ethnic Politics and Military Role**

Ethnic Politics is very much a part of the history of Burma. After a brief period of democracy from 1948 to 1962, Burma has been under military rule ever since. As the SPDC continues its ruthless consolidation of power, the KNU, the reconstituted Shan State Army, KNPP, CNF and ALP are still leading the Ethnic resistance along the Thai- and Indian borders. The interface of geographic racial and religious diversity and division underpins the strong feelings of right to self-determination and autonomy and ongoing ethno political conflict. The current ethnic composition of Burma is about 68 % Burma, 9% Shan, 7% Karen, 4% Rakhaing ( Arakanese ), 3% Chinese , 3% Mon, 2% Indian and 5 % of other ethnic groups. About 89% of the population is Buddhist, 4% Christian, 4 % Muslim, 1% animist and 2% are of other religious persuasions, 1

### **3. Land tenure legislation (1948-62)**

#### **3.1. Earlier a brief period of Democracy (1948-1962)**

Burma's first constitution, that of 1947, guaranteed Burma's independence in 1948 and, under Article 23, in which, it seemed protected the people's rights to private property but these rights are restricted in circumstance under the Government legitimization. In article 30, it clearly said that the protection to small farmers from losing their land and property as result of exploitation by monopolistic organizations such as cartels, syndicates, and trusts but also clearly point that the State is the only one of the owner of land of nation wide.

Land titles which had been issued during the British colonial administration were originally honored by the new U Nu-led government, which was a parliamentary democracy.

However, in 1953 farmland in all parts of Burma were nationalized under the Agricultural Land Nationalization Act. Under this Act, the government confiscated all land from foreigners and landlords with the explanation that "each farmer has to grow only for his own consumption and distributed it freely to peasants. The farmers' lands were granted "right of exemption" under Article 6 of the 1953 land reform act. The new government regulations stated that "No landowner is allowed to farm larger area than 1 Kyat (1 Kyat, a Burmese unit equal to 6.4 acres).

#### **3.2. Under BSBP rule (1962 - 1988)**

Under BSBP rule 1962 -88 under the dictatorship of General Ne Win, the BSPP drew up a new socialist constitution in 1974. This new constitution rejected the "economic rights" enshrined in the 1947 Constitution, and farmers were stripped of legal title to their own land. The 1974 constitution clearly states that ownership of all natural resources including land is vested in the government.

During the period 1962-88, farmers had the right to cultivate their land but they were deprived of the right of ownership.

#### **3.3. Under Military ruling (1988 - Up to now)**

Under SLORC and SPDC rule, there has been neither law nor constitution. The military can confiscate any land they want, without due process. Farmers are therefore wholly insecure in their occupancy of land. The military authorities have confiscated large tracts of land from farmers and people throughout the country, without compensation. The lawlessness nature of the regime means the farmers have no right to complain when they are deprived of their land. The protection afforded by the 1953 Land Act no longer exists. This land confiscation violates the political, social, and economic rights of ethnic people throughout Burma.

#### 4. Socio-Economic Poverty and Land Ownership

Regarded as a country with good development prospects when it became independent in 1948, Burma is now one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2004 the UNDP ranked Burma 132 out of 177 countries according to its Human Development Index based on indicators such as life expectancy, education and adjusted real income. Burma is one of the largest countries on the mainland of South East Asia, with a total area of 676 552 square Kilometers, but is the least densely populated. 2 In 1998 the UNDP estimated that Burma had a population density of 67 persons per sq Km 4. Current population estimates range between 47 and 50 million. 5

There are more women than men, especially in the 15 - 64 age groups. 6. About 20%- 30% of the population lives in Rangoon, the capital, and other urban centers and 70 %-80%, or the majority of the people, live in rural Burma. Average family size is 5 members. 7

According to the UNDP, the rural population will fall to 63.3% by 2015. 8. Rural poverty and a lack of access to means of agricultural production are closely linked. Lack of land and livestock are indicators of this. Those who are landless and those whose farms are less than two acres are poor. At current levels of technology and input rural households should have at least five acres for subsistence farming to be above the rural poverty line. The 1993 Agricultural Census revealed that over 80% of land holdings were below 5 acres. In 1997 the Human Development Index Baseline survey also found that one third of rural households owned no land, 40% owned no livestock and 25 % did not own land or livestock. The landless poor in rural areas are employed seasonally by larger farms for low wages, around 100- 150 kyats a day in 1998, 400 kyats a day in 2002 and 450 - 500 kyats a day in 2003. The rural poor supplement their income in a number of different ways, such as fishing and crabbing, raising prawns, breeding pigs, chickens and goats, trading, weaving baskets and mats and making jewelry.

In the upper land areas, Kachin, Kayan , Karenni , Chin , Shan Mon and Arakan state villagers are very poor and practice shifting cultivation.

#### 5. Summary of Findings

Between March and August 2004, forty four participants of different Ethnic Nationalities Youth were given a capacity Building training then all of them went back to their communities area and conducted interview, gathered information with displaced people within Burma and people who had fled to the Thai, Indian and Bangladeshi borders. The major finding from these interviews was that most of the subjects have been displaced more than once after originally being moved from their former or ancestral homes due to land confiscation by SPDC troops. The Confiscated land is used to build military camps and marking out farming land for military families, especially in ethnic areas.

---

## 6. Analysis of the Findings

Since Burma gained independence, decades of military rule have entrenched an attitude of chauvinism and oppression towards the different indigenous communities. The people's struggle is currently focused towards establishing democracy. The political movements have so far been unable to look at the issues faced by indigenous communities, such as the erosion of their ways of life and the losing of their traditional knowledge.

In addition, most of the ethnic/ indigenous peoples lack awareness of international human rights standards related to their inhabited land and natural resources. Although indigenous people have crucial knowledge of traditional farming and management of their environment, they lack an awareness or understanding of imposed national laws and lack power to protect their lands, forests and natural resources. The government does not allow local organizations and civil society to become involved in indigenous issues. At schools, most of the indigenous children and youth are only able to study the subjects that the military regime sets in the state curriculum.

Nowadays, land confiscation and other human rights violations, such as killing, rape, forced labor, trafficking and various kinds of tax extortions, are common practice throughout Burma. Although some ethnic armed groups have reached cease-fire agreements with the present regime, the human rights abuse by the SPDC army in the indigenous people's areas is far from over.

After the cease-fire agreements, the SPDC has increased deployment of its troops in those areas. The regime plans to occupy the areas which had been under ethnic armed control. The SPDC ordered its local commanders to confiscate paddy farmlands and plantations from the ethnic local people. The government's intention is to provide food supplies and incomes for military personnel and to construct military barracks for battalions in the region. In some cases the land was confiscated under the name of the government's so-called 'development and population transfer projects'.

Land confiscation by the Burmese Army has been widespread throughout the ethnic areas. According to the report "No Land to Farm" from the Human Rights Foundation of Mon Land, the most severe cases were found in Mon State. The Burmese military regime has deployed thousands of troops in the ethnic areas after making a ceasefire agreement. Some of the ethnic areas were formerly recognized as black areas, which the government could not gain full access to due to insurgency. However, after the Burmese Army stationed its troops there, the areas have become the center of military operations in the region. In Mon State nearly eight thousand acres of farmland containing paddy, rubber, betel nut and orchards were confiscated between 1998 and 2002. Five years earlier, the Burmese army confiscated additional land which was used in building a natural gas pipe-line through Mon State into Thailand.

---

According to Kachin Independence Organization resources, recently the military junta put up 27,000 acres of fallow land for paddy production and has opened a land-title registration office in Myitkyina, capital of Kachin state, to facilitate the transfer of such land to new owners. Much of the ethnic Kachin lands were confiscated by the military commanders for mining jade and other natural resources in cooperation with Chinese business. The military regime has been able to raise the strength of its forces by getting financial assistance from mining the jade of the Kachin people and allowing business men to log the precious teak forests.

The military junta has also confiscated huge amount of planted lands from different ethnic areas in Shan State, such as Wa, Palaung, Lahu, Shan and Pa-O in order to settle its soldiers during the next decade. Hundreds of thousands of Burmese troops have already been stationed in Shan state alone. The Burmese Army not only confiscated farmlands, orchards, and plantations, but also forced the farmers and landowners to work in the confiscated lands. In some areas, farmers and villagers were forced to work in building military barracks on the lands. In those areas, the landowners were also put upon to provide building materials such as lumbers, bamboos, and thatches needed for construction. In addition, the military collected money from local civilians to help cover the expenses of building new barracks and battalions. Likewise, land in other ethnic cease-fire areas used for paddy, crops and tea growing as well as forest and mining resources, has also been confiscated. Many families from different indigenous areas have been adversely affected by this land confiscation. None of the landowners received full compensation for the value of their lands or plantations. Some ethnic cease-fire groups and landowners have appealed to local authorities, the Burmese Army commanders, for compensation or land substitutions, but their appeals are generally quickly rejected. Although the farmers were eager to appeal their cases to high-ranking authorities, the majority have had very limited access. These poor farmers could find no services to seek legal helps.

Furthermore, the military regime is constructing hydro-electric power plants and dams throughout Burma which is displacing many villagers and leading to their farm lands being confiscated. According to BBC reports, there were **1,269, 074 (702,351 male 556,732 female) Illegal Workers during July 2004 of whom around (905, 881( 497 372 male / 408,509 female) were Burmese.** Additionally, the army still has huge military operations in Karen, Karenni and Shan ethnic areas around the Thai-Burma border and occasionally in Arakan and Chin areas in the West of Burma. They have forced ethnic villagers to clear land mines, used local people as porters on the battlefield, burned down villages killing the inhabitants and used rape of ethnic women as a weapon of war.

. There have also been many forced relocations. As a result of this there is thousands of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP). According to the BBC report, the Updated Access to Internally Displaced Persons, there were 635,000 IPDs in the East of Burma of whom 365,000 were in relocation sites and 270,000 were in hiding or in temporary shelters.

The actions mentioned above have far reaching consequences for the peoples of Burma, for example, massive land confiscation by the army forces local ethnic civilians to become landless, jobless and homeless. Consequently, prostitution and crime have increased dramatically in those areas. Many young men and women have painfully left their homes and come to refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border.

---

Many others have taken large risks to enter Thailand illegally in the hope of gaining employment opportunities. As well as this large numbers still remain in towns and villages, suffering from poverty, starvation, helplessness and a deeply felt sense of fear. Land confiscation has exerted severe impacts not only on the economy but also on the social values and morality of the peoples of urban and rural Burma, especially in the areas of indigenous peoples and ethnic nationalities.

## **7. Militarization and Confiscated land Ethnic areas in Burma**

The major cause of land confiscation is increased military troop deployments in ethnic areas. The past 20 years have seen a rapid expansion of military power. For example, in 1980, there were only 3 battalions within the 4,580 square miles of Karenni State but by the year 2000 these had increased 30 battalions and Arakan State, there were 3 battalions, but by the 2001 these had increase to 57 battalions.

The newly-formed battalions confiscated a lot of land from local communities in various indigenous and ethnic minorities' areas. The military's so-called development projects and population-transfer projects also led to much land being confiscated from people without compensation.

The generals ruling the country increased the numbers of soldiers in the army, but did not provide enough rations to feed them. Consequently they were ordered to be self-supporting both as regards food supplies and other requirements. The result has been that army units confiscate farmland from local communities and force them to work the fields for the army's benefit. The farmers are forced to work on their own, confiscated farmland for the benefit of the army. According to a comprehensive report on real estate and property confiscation by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (Burma), local military battalions in the Mon and Karen states and Tenasserim division are known to have confiscated at least 8,000 acres of agricultural land from local communities. As well as the confiscation of arable land, hundreds of millions of kyats-worth of plantations have been wantonly destroyed. Incidents of this kind are the norm in Burma today, above all in the ethnic areas. Farmers in many areas have suffered loss of land, joblessness, and conscription as forced labor. For I instance; Arakan state there are there battalions only before the 1988, but after the seizing the state power by the SLORC and SPDC there are 57 battalions now, one of ex solider, sergeant ( Aung San Nyo) ID 911727 from LIB 270 was saying that one battalion has to confiscate at least 280 acres for their buildings. I can prove with the following data for the Arakan state.

---

Militarization in Sittwe, the capital of Arakan (Rakaing State )

No	Name	Township /place	Confiscated cares for Building	Confiscated cares for their Business	Year in establishment
1	LB 20	Sittwe	268		1974
2	MI 10	Sittwe	240	560	1981
3	MI 18	Sittwe			1990
4					
5	Singal 818	Sittwe	246		1992
6	Signal 4	Outside town			1993
7	engineering 908				1992
8	Field med	Out side town			1990
10	Supply 828	Outside Town	204	168	1990
11	MTC 9	Outside Town	500		1990
12	LB 270	Out side town	241	198 , 356	1993
13					
14	306		280	234	1992
14					
15					
16	LB 232	Pardeli	280	200	1992
17	SM 8	Outside Town			1991
18	L b 344	Outside Town			1991
19	IIB 354	Outside town			1991

Recently, LIB (550) based on Ponenarkyaun. This camp as part of the program of which claims farm land for the SPDC, the military authority in Ponenarkyaun Township near Bae Ngar Rar Hill is confiscating land with any confiscating any compensation. This year It from Yaw Ngu village, all the gardens and farms near the yaw Ngu have been bulldozed unclaimed land is almost non-existent. Most of land there is privately owned. But to meet the government project's aim, private land in the Bae Ngar Rar Hill has been confiscated " says a farmer from the region. In the Bae Ngar Rar Hill region, much of the land from Aung Pru Pyin , Kyan Ta Lin , Kran Kroan, Pannee Lar , Aung site and Kha Mong Dark has already been confiscated one piece after another. Most of villagers are indigenous people in Arakan State. (Sources; [www.narinjara.org](http://www.narinjara.org))

### **8. No rights to a fair Market price and food sovereignty**

From the time the BSPP took over the country and until last year, the regime forced farmers throughout the country to sell rice to them. The authorities' policy required farmers to sell 8-15 baskets of paddy per acre to government paddy-purchasing centre at a price of 10% to 20% of its market value.

Last year the military authorities announced the introduction of a free market for paddy. In reality, what has happened is that a group of major rice companies has formed a cartel that buys rice at a price slightly more than before but still way below the market value. The military regime has shown itself incapable of formulating effective agricultural policies. Most of their projects to force local farmers to grow marketable crops have been a miserable flop. Local farmers have the experience to choose crops that are adapted to local conditions, but they are forced, without being allowed to use their judgments, to grow cash crops that they know to be inappropriate. The result is frequent failure, and the farmers must bear the cost of a decision they did not make.

For example, when General Maung Bo was in charge of Eastern Military Command, he ordered Shan farmers to grow rubber. He coined the slogan, "Northern Shan State will be covered with white gold."

The resident farmers complained that rubber is not suitable to grow in Shan state because of not appropriate weather but any explanations are ignored so local farmers lost their rights to choosing appropriate crop and finally the project was failed by putting deep suffering to local farmers.

## **9. Abusing land and the environmental in Burma**

Burma has long been known for the richness of its natural environment. While under British rule its fertile farmland and plentiful supplies of valuable natural resources, such as teak forests and mineral reserves, were exploited to make it one of the most profitable colonies. However, the advantages brought by this natural richness have often not been felt by the local populations, especially when the resources are located in the land of the ethnic minority peoples.

The profit reaped from the exploitation of natural resources is very unevenly distributed the world over. The richest twenty percent of the world's population consume around eighty percent of the world's natural resources. Within this twenty percent are not just the populations of rich countries in Europe and North America, though they are the main consumers, but also the political and business elites in poorer countries.

Although the benefits of this resource use are not shared evenly, the negative costs to the environment are felt by everyone. In fact, it is often the poor who will feel these costs most acutely. For example, the effects of climate change, caused by high levels of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels in car engines or in electricity generation is likely to impact much more deeply on the life of a subsistence farmer than on the economically better off who were responsible for the damage in the first place. This is the same with other forms of industry, the negative externalities caused by logging for paper production or of damming rivers for hydroelectric power will be felt much more by the inhabitants of the area of production than by the consumers of the paper or electricity.

The natural environment in Burma is very diverse with over 7000 different species of plant. The destruction of the environment not only poses a threat to the diversity of plant and animal species but also to cultural diversity among the different peoples of Burma. The cultures of Burmese indigenous groups are intrinsically linked to their local environment. Different groups have individual methods of farming and also use natural products from the surrounding area in religious ceremonies, clothing and house building. Therefore if the natural environment in Burma is destroyed, important aspects of the local peoples' culture will be lost along with it.

A recent environmental initiative pushed by NGOs and activists is community foresting. Community foresting projects aim to give local people more control of the forest land around their villages. The forests belong to the local people. This initiative, if correctly implemented, will be beneficial to both the local inhabitants and the environment. Villagers will plant species that will be of direct use to them, such as fruit trees and trees to produce medicine, dyes and firewood. As the forest belongs to them, the villagers will also take an active role in protecting the forest so it continues to provide for them in the future, as appose to just stripping it of resources as may be done if the forest was not community property.

Community foresting projects have been implemented throughout the world but have been particularly popular in Asia with projects set up in India, Nepal, Thailand and the Philippines. In 1995 the military government in Burma, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), decided that it should not be left lagging on this issue so, working closely with the Burmese forestry and land record departments, it produced a set of Community Forest Instructions known as CFI.

However the Burmese military's style of government has predictably not proved very compatible with the key aims of community forestry, that of devolving power over the land to local people and letting them decide democratically how to use it. The SPDC's irresistible desire to stay in control of the forestry projects has led to them being run very differently in Burma than in other countries in the region.

This can be seen from a brief outline of the SPDC's Community Forestry Instructions. Firstly the SPDC has only allowed two types of land to be used as community forest, barren land, with no or very few trees, and degraded forest with only poor quality trees. Aside from this restriction there are many other rules and regulations governing the establishment and use of the forests. If a village wants to set up a community forest it must apply to the forestry department, a forestry officer will then be sent to examine the area. The officer will select a piece of land and from then on the land will be controlled by the forestry department. The officer will also give instructions on what is to be grown and provide the tree seedlings. The community must consult the forestry department about any plans it has for the forest.

With community forests created on previously barren land the government will generally instruct for plantations to be established. The plantations will contain only one species of plant and as they are being planted on barren land will need large amounts of fertilizer. Apart from the potential damage of excess use of chemical fertilizer on the surrounding environment, the establishing of a plantation with only one species of plant drastically cuts diversity meaning the community will have access to only one product and their forest will be at risk of decimation should disease hit the species they have been instructed to plant.

The restrictions for the use of the community forests established on degraded forest land can be even tighter. The community is instructed to protect and work in the forest but is forbidden to use forest produce. The government effectively gets control of the land and free labour.

Another factor standing in the way of true community forestry in Burma is land ownership laws. As all land belongs to the government the community cannot fully own its forest. The communities are granted a thirty year lease on the land. This means that if the community is unwilling to fulfil the instructions of the forestry department the lease can be withdrawn and the villagers dispossessed.

In some cases the establishing of community forests in Burma can lead to almost the exact reversal of the role they were designed to play. If a community is assigned to protect an area of forest in its vicinity that it had previously used for hunting or firewood or other forest products then the villagers will have to stop using it for that purpose and start protecting it for the government. What had previously been a de facto community forest for the use of everyone in the area would become, despite its designation as a community forest, a de facto state forest for the benefit of the government.

All this is not to say that there is no benefit at all to the community forest projects in Burma. Despite them deviating so widely away from the original concept, the Burmese Community Forestry Instructions could in some cases lead to an improvement of the natural environment if degraded forests are rehabilitated and can give a small chance for communities to have some say in the use of their surrounding land, even if at present it is still very limited.

At the international level the Burmese military government has been very willing to put its name to a number of environmental treaties, such as the 1994 Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1997 Convention on International trade in Endangered Species (CITES) among many others. These treaties are done purely on a governmental level and SPDCs ratifying of them helps to give it the legitimacy it seeks on the international stage. It also helps to project an image to the outside world and environmental groups that the military junta is really a responsible national government that is truly concerned about protecting the environment, despite its behaviour to the contrary.

There are also many international environmental organisations working in Burma. Although they may be able to achieve some gains in conservation, due to the military forcing them to get permission for every aspect of their projects they are open to manipulation. In order to get the permission to carry out projects in Burma the organisations will have to take on board the military's suggestions and desires for the project. If the work is being done in an area of ethnic conflict then Burmese police or troops will be sent to assist. The regional military commanders will also likely have a large say in the way environmental policy is implemented in their areas. Aside from the potential of having their work manipulated for the benefit of the ruling Junta, international organisations also need to consider that their presence in Burma may assist the Generals in their quest for international legitimacy and provide a boost to their finances.

---

One prominent aspect of the military's environmental policy is the establishment of national parks. Though this may seem like a commendable initiative, considering the SPDC's neglecting of other issues such as air and water pollution, it is worth looking at potential ulterior motives besides wildlife conservation. An obvious one is the hope of attracting eco tourists who would bring in much desired foreign currency. However, given the poor state of infrastructure in most of the national park regions, this seems like a distant dream. Another potential gain for the military in setting up large national parks is more control over the people who live within the parks.

A good example of this is the huge Hu Kaung valley tiger reserve in the Kachin state. This reserve covers 22 000 square kilometres, approximately one third of the state's area. The reserve was established with assistance from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) which is based in New York. The military and the WCS blamed the shifting cultivation and nomadic ways of the local Lisu people for the destruction of the forest. It therefore ordered them to settle in one spot and practice sedentary agriculture. This made it much easier for the military to control, monitor and tax the Lisu people. Sacrifices will obviously have to be made to protect the environment and this policy would seem excusable if it were not for the military's attitude towards other groups present in the parks boundaries. The SPDC continues to allow Chinese mining corporations to operate in the area despite the fact that that entails new roads being made through the national park and having to tolerate the hunting activities of the mine workers.

The local people are also left out of the planning process of national parks despite the fact the hunting and logging laws will have a large impact on their livelihood. The WCS in planning for park development was not permitted to talk to any ethnic groups, it could only consult with the forestry department therefore the wishes of the ethnic organisations are ignored.

Although the issues discussed above seem overwhelmingly negative, there are some positive environmental developments. As the military's actions have shown environmental issues can be used for political ends. This has not been lost on activists within Burma. Research can be carried out much more safely if it is stated that it is purely about environmental issues rather than political ones despite the fact that the two are intrinsically linked. There have also been a number of success stories of local people coming together to fight for the protection of their environment. In the Kachin state, worried by the increase in natural resource extraction following the ceasefire agreement by the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the SPCD, groups led by local headmen and church pastors managed to organize together to stop the gold mining on the Irrawaddy river which was threatening their ancestral land.

Successes such as these can show people that if they come together to protect their natural surroundings they can make a difference, they are not completely powerless. Shared local environmental concerns can also act as a strong unifying force. They can lead people to overcome ethnic and religious differences to work together and fight for a common goal.

Ref; NY forum Workshop on ecology 18-20 July

## 10. New poverty due to illegal tax demands

Illegal tax demands have a hugely negative impact on local farmers, handicraft workers and micro-business people throughout Burma. The public has to pay government tax, such as housing tax, land tax, farm tax, crop tax, water tax, and all similar municipal taxes in each village and township. However, since the military camps were established nationwide in the year 2000, every military family and their battalions has had to find money for their own survival one way or another. They therefore seized or had even control of the rivers, mountains and forests that local people deeply depended on daily diet. Township administrators were called to put municipal tax collection out for tender and forced to accept the offers of Military officers or other powerful groups, such as police inspectors and wealthy businessmen. These groups then sold the rights on to local rich people, commissioners and some companies who then recouped their investment, with interest, from the local people. Therefore local communities have had to pay double the usual amount of tax for all customary services.

A good example of this process comes from figures given in an official note in The Dana Magazine. In March 2005 the fishing areas of Arakan were put out for tender by the Government Municipal and Fishery Department of Myanmar and rights to the water line were sold off to local businesses for the amounts shown in the table below. These large sums, together with a considerable profit for the businesses, will then have to be extracted from the local population in the form of new taxes such as boat and net (For catching fish) tax.

### Government Municipal and Fishery Department of Myanmar called Tender for fishery services

No	Township	Water areas	Value /kyat	Year
1	Kyauk Taw	10 areas along kaladan river	1,188,000	2005 march to 2006 march
2	Mruk Oo	3 areas along the laymyo river	911,000	2005 march to 2006 march
3	Rambee	12 areas along the rambee river	960,000	2005 march to 2006 march
4	Anna	15 areas along the Anna river	1044,000	2005 march to 2006 march
5	Tawgoke	7 areas along the Tawgoke rivers	2,868,000	2005 march to 2006 march
6	Sittwe	3 area along the kaladan, koritae river	7,480,000	2005 march to 2006 march
7	Rathedaung	4 areas along the mayu river	12,818,000	2005 march to 2006 march
8	Pauktaw	16 areas along the kalitawn river	125,715,000	2005 march to 2006 march

Draft discussion Paper submit to Forum Asia - Pacific  
Oct 2005

9	Phunakyaun	18 areas along the phunakyun rivers	3,315,000	2005 march to 2006 march
10	Kyauk Pru	10 areas along kyaukpru rivers	9,561,500	2005 march to 2006 march
11	Mreybon	9 areas along the Mreybon rivers	2,423,000	2005 march to 2006 march
11	Mreybon	9 areas along the Mreybon rivers	2,423,000	2005 march to 2006 march
		Total	<b>169,275,500</b>	

According to this table, it is clear that the local communities have lost their rights on managing their natural food cycle. In many countries local grassroots communities especially the ethnic minorities' lives are very much depended on natural food resources. This is not only for daily diet but also for seasonal income for local families.

Privatizing on the communities' natural resources that very concerned on their daily life style is stealing social security or systematically destroyed public daily life. These kinds of incidents are taking place all over the country. Due to incompatible Government provided income with necessary for survival, from top to down of the Government servants bodies was not function well and the corruption is taking place in everywhere. This is also a big threaten to the local grassroots communities that depended on their work for other sources of income.

Actually Burma is enrichment of natural resources but the benefit is never turn to grassroots communities either directly or indirectly. For example Burma even able to export natural gas but for daily cooking local communities deeply depended on firewood it is also impact to the environment. In cover clearly see that local poor family tried to collect firewood for cooking.

Finally, for country like Burma, the whole structure needs to change and need to take time for transition. The country needs good governance bodies that care to public and grassroots communities which hearth of the country.

Khaing Dhu Wan  
NYForum

Reference:

- Dana Magazine, from Myanmar.
- Ecology workshop hosted by NYForum.
- Participants' discussion from Land and Environment advocacy training, hosted by NYForum.
- The Constitution of the Union of Burma (1947)
- www.myanmar.com

List of interview:

- NY forum training Participants
  - Aung San Nyo, Arakan, ex-solider.
-

- NY Forum training participants.
  - San Shwe, migrant worker from Arakan state.
  - Tun Tin, fact finding in Arakan state.
-