



Interview

August 31, 2018 / KHRG #17-130-A1-I1

Toungoo Interview: Saw Cn--- and Naw Dq---, November 2017

This Interview with Saw Cn--- describes different village agency strategies used by villagers to regain their confiscated lands in Htantabin Township, Toungoo District in November 2017.

- *Since 2000, authorities of the Ba Yint Naung military training school have confiscated 1,521 acres of villagers' plantations in Htantabin Township. The Tatmadaw used these lands as firing fields for soldiers, which caused major damages to villager's farmlands [plantations]. The Tatmadaw has not provided compensation for any of the damaged plantations.*
 - *Local communities in Htantabin Township have been facing land confiscations for 20 years because of the Industry 1 rubber tree plantation projects. Consequently, they experienced perpetual livelihood challenges and difficulties accessing health and education. In 2017, villagers tried to reclaim their ancestral lands by reporting their case to the Myanmar government. The company did not provide compensation for damaged lands, nor did they release the lands to villagers. Instead, the manager Aung Kyaw Oo sued 5 villagers in Co---, including three women who confronted the company and attempted to reclaim their lands.*
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Interview | Saw Cn---, (male, 70), Naw Dq---, (female, 50) Co--- village, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District (November 2017)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Toungoo District on November 11th 2017 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including three other interviews and 13 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern Burma/Myanmar 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

Occupation: Working on farm

Position: Villager



This photo was taken on November 11th 2017 in Co---village, Shauk Pin Chaung village tract, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District. This photo shows the interviewee Saw Cn--- who expressed about the land confiscation of Tatmadaw and the ministry of industry 1. Villagers were sued by the company when they confronted their ancestral lands. *[Photo: KHRG]*

What is your name?

My name is Saw Cn---.

How old are you?

I am 70 years old.

What is your ethnicity?

I am Karen.

What is your religion?

I am Christian.

Do you have a family?

Yes, I do.

How many children do you have?

I have 5 children.

How old is your oldest child?

My oldest child is 40 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

My youngest child is 22 years old.

What is your occupation?

I work on a plantation.

Where do you live?

I live in Co--- village, Shauk Pin Chaung village tract, Toungoo [Htantabin] Township, Toungoo District.

Are there any corporate development projects in your area that have started since the peace process (2012 preliminary ceasefire)³?

Yes, there have been land confiscations due to business developments in our village since the 2012 preliminary ceasefire. Although there is development, it does not improve our village. Land confiscations negatively affect the whole village. Villagers do not have the right to work on their land anymore. They do not even have land to secure their livelihood.

What kinds of development projects are in your area?

UNICEF (United Nation International Children’s Emergency Fund) is operating in our village.

What does UNICEF do?

They donate rice and provide cattle to villagers to raise them for their livelihood. I still have a couple of cows that were given to me by UNICEF.

They donate these to support the well-being of villagers. Did you have to pay for the cows, or were they bought for you?

They bought them for us. At first they let us take turns to raise a heifer for a year. Each villager can take the heifer for a year only. When the heifer gives birth, we can keep the calf as our own and transfer the heifer to another villager after the heifer has stopped breast feeding. But we need to pay 7,000 kyats [\$5.16 US]⁴ for the village fund.

So, if you get one cow, you have to pay 7,000 kyats.

Yes.

Why do you have to pay 7,000 kyats?

After we get a calf, we pay 7,000 kyat to developer for the fund of the village so that they can provide more support to the village.

How many cows each family receive?

³ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage](#) on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors began in Yangon, see [“Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations,” Karen National Union Headquarters](#), March 18th 2015. Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see [“KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders’ Summit,” Karen News](#), April 22nd 2015.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 19 June 2018 official market rate of 1,356_kyats to US \$1

Only one.

How many households are in your village?

There are 70 households in this village.

Do they provide [cows] to all 70 households?

Villagers that did not want to raise a cow did not take the cow but villagers who wanted to raise cows did.

Do you know how many people raised cows?

Around 15 people raised cows.

What do other people do if they do not raise cows? Are there any other things provided by the UNICEF?

No.

[Interjection by Naw Dq---] They [UNICEF] provide pigs and cows to everyone.

[Naw Dq--- begins to be interviewed] What is your name?

My name is Naw Dq---.

How old are you?

I am 50 years old.

What is your ethnicity?

I am Karen.

What is your religion?

I am a Baptist Christian.

Are you married?

Of course I am. I have a lot of children. I had nine children before. Now, there are only five left.

What is your occupation?

I just work odd jobs. I do not have a plantation because it has been confiscated. The Burma/Myanmar government confiscated my land and said that it is owned by the government. Actually, it is not government land but civilian land. The land should be returned to civilians.

Where do you live?

I live in Dr--- village, Shauk Pin Chaung village tract.

What are the corporate development projects in your area? Do they benefit villagers?

No. What they are doing is not beneficial for villagers.

They confiscated villagers' land in the past. So, have they already returned the land to villagers? Or, have they continued using the land after the 2012 preliminary ceasefire?

Now, they are still using the confiscated land. We requested for them to return our land.

What are the other projects being conducted in this area?

There are projects being conducted such as the rubber plantation by the Ministry of Industry #1. Ba Yint Naung also confiscated villagers' land. The projects are not for villagers. Instead, it creates problems for villagers.

In order to implement their project, do they use the land?

Yes, they have to because the project is a plantation.

Who are the owners of the land where they conduct the plantation project?

It is villagers' land. They trespassed onto and arbitrarily confiscated villagers' land. We have not received any opportunities or benefits from the project, but they do.

Did they compensate the land that they confiscated?

No, they didn't. The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and the Ministry of Industry #1, U Than Myint and Ba Yint Naung confiscated our land but we have not received any compensation from them. None of the authorities gave compensation for our land or supported us.

Have there been any negative consequences due to business developments for you or your community?

Yes, we had to leave our village and live in other villages. Now, my oldest son is away and has not come back to us.

Have there been any other negative consequences other than this? We know that after villagers' lands were confiscated, they have been facing negative impacts.

Yes, of course. They trespassed on our land and confiscated it. Plus, they also sued us for trespassing on their land. They sued the villagers more than one time. Instead of the project bringing opportunities for villagers, now villagers are facing loss of their possessions. There are many villagers who have been sued by the company workers. I asked them [companies or government authorities] to sue me but none of them did. Now, my husband has been sued.

Your husband uncle Saw Cn--- has been sued?

Yes, he has.

So, uncle Saw Cn---, could you please tell me how you got sued? [Interview with Saw Cn-- resumes]

Aung Kyaw Oo said that the land that villagers were fencing were his land, so he came to see his land. He said that when he came by motorbike to see what was happening, I was one of the villagers who dragged him down from his motorbike, so they sued us.

Villagers fenced on Aung Kyaw Oo's land? Why?

We went there to fence our own land. We did not fence on his land. We went to fence our land that is confiscated by the Ministry of Industry #1. Now, we have been sued. The authorised person [Aung Kyaw Oo] from Ministry of Industry #1 who sued the villagers was invited by the authorities [to discuss the case] but he refused and said that it was none of his business. Because of what he said, villagers were waiting for him at the plantation and dragged him down from his motorbike to go see the authorities. But, he refused to meet authorities and villagers because we believe he is a cheater.

When you say authorities, which authorities are you referring to?

I mean the village head and hundred-household leader. The project they conduct here is on the land of villagers. The village head invited Aung Kyaw Oo to come and consult with him but they refused. Village elders also invited the authorised person [Aung Kyaw Oo] of Ministry of Industry #1 to meet them, but he also rejected their invitation. He said that it was not his role to make a decision to meet with the village elder members. He said that it was the responsibility of higher authorities in the Ministry of Industry #1. Who are the higher authorities? If they have people who hold higher positions than them, why did they not come and meet with us. They should have come. I have no idea why he came but said that he is not responsible for it. By the way, we will surely fence our own land [to prevent land confiscation].

How did they sue you? Can you tell me more details? Can you also please tell us what difficulties you have faced?

We fenced our own land. But, the Ministry of Industry #1 were not satisfied with this. They also said that villagers took the bowls that store the latex from the rubber plantation. They also said that villagers trespassed on their land and fenced it. Due to these reasons, the Ministry of Industry #1 sued the villagers. The Ministry of Industry #1 reported this case to government authorities so villagers would stop doing these kinds of activities.

Naw Dq---added: Actually, we are not trespassing on their land. It is our land. They are the ones that are trespassing on our land.

Did you receive any compensation?

Naw Dq--- answered: No, I have not received any compensation at all. They destroyed our entire long-term plantation. They destroyed our bamboo. They took out our long-term plantation and replaced it with a rubber plantation.

When did you start fencing your land? How many times have you fenced your land?

Naw Dq---: We fence it almost every day. I cannot remember how many times it is fenced.

Can you tell me the possible date based on what you remember?

Saw Cn---: I think it began in October [2017].

From October until now [December 2017], how many times has the land been fenced?

Naw Dq---: I can say that it has been fenced almost every day. Villagers from each section go to fence their land almost every day.

Have you ever seen the staff from Ministry of Industry destroy the fence?

Naw Dq---: Aung Kyaw Oo himself destroyed the fence that villagers made.

What is the position of Aung Kyaw Oo? What is he doing?

Naw Dq---: I have no idea where Aung Kyaw Oo lives and what he is doing. I just know that he is trespassing on our land and he is a trouble-maker. He is a businessman.

I want to know if Aung Kyaw Oo has any other position in the Ministry of Industry #1. For example, the position of manager or ...

Naw Dq---: I heard that he is a manager. However, if he does not have the authority to meet with villagers, the person who is in a higher position than him should come to talk with villagers directly. Why does the higher authority not come? I really would like to ask this question to them.

Has there been any consultation between villagers and the Ministry of Industry #1?

Naw Dq---: They just came yesterday [and met with villagers] in the village hall. They asked us to wait. They said that they will report the case step by step.

Naw Dq---: The Township-level Commission of Land Appraisal came here on December 10th 2017.

What was the discussion about when they came to meet with villagers? Who was involved and led the consultation meeting? (Saw Cn--- answers the question)

The Township general administrator led the group.

What is his position in the Commission of Land Appraisal?

He is the chairperson of the commission.

Do you know his name?

No.

Who else was involved in this consultation meeting?

Regional Parliament Representative was also involved in the consultation meeting. His name is U Moe Ma Kha.

Is U Moe Ma Kha a Regional Parliament Representative of the NLD government?

Yes.

Who else is involved?

Land Department Officer at the township level is involved. I don't know his name.

Who else?

The consultation meeting included authorities from the township Agricultural Department of and Forestry Department.

Were there more people involved?

Yes.

When you say township, I want to know which township you are referring to.

I mean Toungoo Township.

Which township was the Township general administrator, Forestry Department and Agricultural Department officers from?

They are from Toungoo Township. The consultation meeting also included a Livestock Department officer, a representative from the Municipality of Toungoo Township, representatives from the Independent Labour Union.

What did they discuss in this meeting? What did they do for villagers? Were they coming to give any information on how they will solve this land issue?

The respective township authorities told us to submit the letter again to them and said that they will review it in order to help us get back our land.

Villagers were recommended to submit a letter again, so how will the letter be submitted?

It was recommended to us that the letter must indicate that the land that has been confiscated by the Ministry of Industry #1 is indeed villagers' land.

Did they ask for any evidence from the villagers to mention in the letter? What evidence did they ask for? For example, did they ask villagers to provide Land Form #7⁵, land titles, etc.

They did not ask for that.

Did they tell you how to submit the letter?

We have to submit a letter stating the evidence that the land belongs to us.

As I understand it, what the evidence means here is that villagers should have supporting documents such as Land Form #7 so that they can claim to the government that the land is theirs?

The land belongs to the village. There is also villagers' plantation land. When we started working on this land, the documents like land titles or Land Form #7 had not emerged yet. So, now we are fencing our own land. We will just submit a letter stating that we are fencing our own land.

How many times have you already fenced your land?

We have fenced our land more than four or five times. We started fencing our land from September until now. Now, each of the land owners is building huts on their land.

Now in 2017?

⁵ Land form #7 is the land grant required to work on a particular area of land. In Burma/Myanmar, all land is ultimately owned by the government.

Yes.

In 2017, when villagers have been setting up huts on their land, have there been any huts destroyed by the Ministry of Industry #1?

Yes, they destroyed a couple of huts, but not all of them.

Who destroyed the huts?

Their staff destroyed the huts.

What do you mean by their?

They are Aung Kyaw Oo's workers.

Who is Aung Kyaw Oo and where is he from?

According to what I heard, he is the Manager of the Agricultural Department. That's all I know about him.

Is Aung Kyaw Oo taking responsibility of the company or Ministry of Industry?

From what I know, he is a manager of Ministry of Industry #1 and #2 of the Burma/Myanmar government. But, there is no Ministry of Industry #1 or #2.

What are the other ways you have tried to get back your land?

We have not tried any other ways than fencing our own land. We will continue to do this. We will continue to act to protect our land.

Other than fencing your land, have you ever tried to submit a complaint letter or form a group that monitors the situation in order to get back your land?

We have not done that yet. We have not submitted any complaint letters yet but we have reported the case to relevant ministries in Naypyidaw⁶.

Have you ever confronted company workers directly in person?

No, how can we talk to the ones who conduct this project when they do not show up to meet with villagers.

Have there been any discussions between villagers and project manager Aung Kyaw Oo?

No. We invited him to meet with us but he refused. He said that it is none of his business.

Who invited him?

Our Dr--- village chairman [village head] invited him but he refused.

⁶ *Naypyidaw* (also spelled *Nay Pyi Taw*) is the capital city of Burma/Myanmar. This is commonly by villages to refer to the Burma/Myanmar government. In 2005 the military regime moved the capital from Rangoon to a greenfield at its present location, 320 kilometers (200 miles) north of the city. See "[Nay Pyi Taw now less of a ghost town.](#)" *Bangkok Post*, December 11th 2013.

You have said that many departments from the Burma/Myanmar government, including a township general administrator, came to the consultation meeting. Were any of the relevant members from the Ministry of Industry #1 involved?

None of the members from the Ministry of Industry #1 came to the consultation meeting.

By the way, what were the outcomes from the discussion?

They asked the villagers to submit a complaint letter and said they will take action on it.

Did you plan to submit the letter?

Yes, I did.

What level will the letter be submitted to?

The letter will be submitted to township level.

Were there any representatives from organisations that are working on land issues involved in the meeting?

Only Sayar Doh Htoo and his group got involved in the consultation meeting.

What did they recommend for villagers to do regarding the land issue?

According to Sayar Doh Htoo's suggestion, we should submit complaint letters to township authorities, the same as what the Burma/Myanmar government authorities asked us to do and to wait for a few days. In case the authorities do not respond to villagers within three to four days, they [Sayar Doh Htoo] will start taking action to help us address the issue.

You said that villagers are capable of fencing their land. Can you explain why you chose to take this type of actions? Why didn't you choose an alternative?

We can only do this so we just do things this way. We have once already reported the case to [Burma/Myanmar] authorities but there has not been any response from them. The case has been reported to them since 2012 but they have not taken any action to address the issue until now. As our reporting strategy did not work, we finally decided to fence and clear the bushes on our land.

You said that the issue or the case has been reported since 2012, but no response has been given by the authorities. Why did they not take any action?

The letter was sent to them but none of the township, district, or region authorities took action.

Did you fence your land alone or did you act as a community?

We fenced our land with as a community as a whole. All of the villagers cooperated and helped to fence each villager's land.

What have been the difficulties or risks associated with your actions?

The project implementers did not threaten us but they destroyed our fence. However, we built a fence again after they destroyed it.

Have any of your actions been successful??

We can say that we have only had half-way success from our actions, but we cannot say that we have completely succeeded. Now, we clean our land. We fight for our land. And, we fence to get back our land. As now is the period of transparency [peace period], we are not afraid of anything. We do it bravely.

Have you ever been sued for fencing your land?

We were already sued.

How many were sued?

There were five of us.

Were any women sued?

There were three women and two men who were sued.

Why were women sued more than men?

More women were sued than men because people who did this were mostly women.

What do you mean by “who did this”?

I mean that, those who fenced the land were mostly women. As more women got involved in fencing land than men, they sued more women than men.

One thing that is still unclear to me is, you said that villagers from the whole village cooperated to fence their land. But, only five of them were sued?

They only sued those who led the activity. As I am a village elder, I was also sued. Township authorities also know about this.

How were the women?

Two women were sued because they lead the activity of fencing land but the other one was sued for dragging Aung Kyaw Oo down from his motorbike.

Can you please explain why, how and where Aung Kyaw Oo was dragged down from his bike?

He was dragged down on the road across villagers' land.

How did Aung Kyaw Oo respond to the woman that dragged Aung Kyaw Oo down from his motorbike?

Aung Kyaw Oo was afraid of her and did not dare to do anything to her. Aung Kyaw Oo embraced the motorbike rider very tightly whilst he was pulled down. There were three people riding on one motorbike and Aung Kyaw Oo sat in between two people. What I know is that Aung Kyaw Oo did not respond to the woman at all.

Have there been other problems other than this?

I think nothing more.

What are your concerns and how do you feel regarding this negative development project?

I feel like this development project will go to a private company's hands.

Can you explain more how it will go to a private company's hand?

If they do not or are not able to work on this land, they will surely sell it to a private company. Now, the Ministry of Industry #1 or Ministry of Industry #2 is not here anymore. The Ministry of Industry and Aung Kyaw Oo already held an auction event. One day, it will be privately owned.

So, you mean that the land will not be returned to villagers but it will be handed over to others?

Yes, you are right.

What are your recommendations for corporate development projects that enter your area? (e.g. how can they best respond to your concerns?)

As for us, this is villagers' land and it belongs to the village. Whatever businesses they conduct, villagers' land must be in villagers' hands. We do not want money. We just want land to grow our plantation on. This is how I feel. Other villagers also have the same feelings as me. They also want their land back.

Apart from land confiscation caused by this project, has there been any land confiscation committed by the Tatmadaw⁷?

Yes, we have land that was confiscated by the Tatmadaw. Now, we are also working to take action on that.

Can you please tell me about land confiscation incident involving the Tatmadaw?

They confiscated villages' land to conduct military trainings. We are also trying to protect our land. I already talked about this to Tatmadaw leaders.

How did they respond?

They did not respond to me.

Do they still conduct military trainings?

No, they conducted military trainings for a few days on December 7th, 8th, 9th 2017. They fired guns on the last day, December 9th 2017. They hold military trainings every four months.

What do you mean by "they"?

"They" meaning the Ba Yint Naung military.

⁷ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military throughout KHRG's 25 year reporting period. The Myanmar military were commonly referred to by villagers in KHRG research areas as SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) from 1988 to 1997 and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011, which were the Tatmadaw-proclaimed names of the military government of Burma. Villagers also refer to Tatmadaw in some cases as simply "Burmese" or "Burmese soldiers".

Were the soldiers from the Ba Yint Naung military training school?

Yes.

How many of them were in the training?

There were around 250 trainees.

Which rank was the training for? (eg. Training for Company Commander, Platoon Commander, etc.)

The training that they conducted was for Company Commander.

How did they use the land to conduct military trainings? Did they shoot artillery, or train without shooting, or how?

The training included firing artillery with military tanks. There were three military tanks.

When was the land confiscated by the Tatmadaw?

It was confiscated in 2000.

Between 2000 and 2017, has there been any land confiscation that has occurred again? Did they already set up a signboard in 2000?

No, they did not. They just came to confiscate our land.

Later on, did they come to set up any signboards that indicate they officially confiscated the land?

It just happened now. In the past, we did not have it.

When did they start setting up the signboards?

They started setting up signboards in 2016.

Do you remember which month?

No, I don't.

Have the Tatmadaw ever claimed that they will relinquish villagers' land that they confiscated?

In November 2004, *Bo Kyoke* [Major General] Min Naung claimed that the land would be returned to the villagers.

They confiscated your land in 2000, returned it in 2004, and again confiscated it in 2016. So, your land has been confiscated twice?

Yes.

Have they done anything to suggest they will return villages' land in 2017?

No.

How many acres of land did they confiscate?

They confiscated 1521 acres of villagers' land.

Did they inform the villagers about firing artillery before they conducted military training?

Yes, they did. They gave notification sheets to the villager head to distribute to all villagers. It stated on the papers that villagers should stay away from the place where they conducted military trainings.

Did any of the artillery that was fired injure or kill villagers?

No.

Did any of the artillery that was fired injure or kill the villagers' livestock?

No.

Did any of the artillery that was fired damage villagers' plantation?

Yes, the artilleries fell among the rubber plantation.

Has there been any compensation provided to the villagers for plants damaged by artillery?

No.

What are the ways that you can act to get back your land that was confiscated by the Tatmadaw?

We already reported the Tatmadaw land confiscation case to the Burma/Myanmar authorities in Nay Pyi Taw as well as to the Tatmadaw Senior General [Min Aung Hlaing] and the president [Htin Kyaw].

Then, how was the case addressed?

The case has not been addressed yet.

When was the case reported?

It was reported in 2012.

Have they done anything about this land issue, for instance, returning some parts of the land to the owners or relinquishing the land?

No, they did nothing at all.

Regarding land confiscation, have there been any organisations that have met with villagers?

Yes, Sayar Doh Htoo came here.

What do they do for villagers in order to get villagers' land back? How do they go about their tasks?

They helped us and gave recommendations on which government to submit our complaint letter to.

What is in it, what is the complaint letter about?

We submitted a complaint letter to get back our land.

Does the letter sound informed?

Yes, we sent an informed letter.

Since you sent an informed complaint letter [to Burma/Myanmar authorities], have there been any people who have decided to come and assess the situation in the area?

No, not yet.

Are there any villagers who are now working on the land that was confiscated by the Tatmadaw?

Yes, some of the villagers and I do work on the land that was confiscated.

By working on the confiscated land like this, have you faced any confrontation?

No.

Have you ever been deterred from taking action?

Villagers have been informed by the Tatmadaw that if the villagers touch the rubber plantation [on the land that they confiscated], they will take action.

Where is the Tatmadaw battalion from?

They are from Ba Yint Naung military camp.

Is that rubber plantation on villagers' land?

Yes. Villagers were told not to touch those rubber plants or fence around them, otherwise, there will be serious consequences.

Have there been any villagers that fenced or made rubber from the Tatmadaw's rubber plantation?

Yes, the Tatmadaw saw it so they warned the village head about not taking rubber from their rubber plantation. They said there will be action taken against people who do not obey.

How did the villagers respond?

Villagers did not reply.

Have the villagers done this multiple times?

I am not sure whether they will still continue doing this or not. I have not been to the area where the Tatmadaw warned villagers not to do this. I just go to my own land and work on it.

Have you been pressured or threatened by working on your land?

No. But, we were photographed.

Can you please explain how and why you were photographed?

They took photos of the rubber plants that had rubber sap taken from them. The Major of the Tatmadaw Ba Yint Naung military camp asked his people to take the pictures and show him the pictures that were taken.

Did they take the photos of villagers or just the rubber plants?

They just took the photos of rubber plants, but not villagers.

What else did they do?

They also came to take the photos of my land and plantation. When I told them that I grew these plants by myself, they did not continue to ask me anything or do anything to my land.

Did they also take a picture of your plantation?

Yes.

Did they take a picture of you?

No.

Did they inform or ask permission from you when they took the picture of your plantation?

No.

Did they tell you why they took this picture?

They said that the land has been leased by the Tatmadaw. The person who the land was leased to did not feel comfortable to work on that land due to the land problem. He [the Tatmadaw Major] told U Khel Thaw's son, who the land was leased to, that *"I did this not for my own benefit but for you. So, go and take pictures of the rubber plants that had rubber sap taken by other villagers."*

Were the people who took the pictures soldiers?

They two [U Khel Thaw's son and a Major's subordinate] went to take photos, but I do not know which one of them takes responsibility for taking photos.

Was the Major involved in taking photos?

No.

What is the name of the Tatmadaw Major?

His name is Maj. Kyaw Kyaw Lwin.

Which battalion is Maj. Kyaw Kyaw Lwin from?

He is from Tank battalion #39 under the Ba Yint Naung military unit.

What is his position?

He is a Major. He said he will resign from the Tatmadaw soon though.

What is the area of the land he is leasing?

There are around four acres.

Is any of it your land?

No. It is the land of another villager.

I know that there are 1521 acres of villages' land that they have confiscated. Do they also plant anything in it apart from this?

No. This is the first and only plantation that they grew in our village.

Did they also confiscate the plantation that was grown by the villagers?

They confiscated villagers' land that the villagers grew the [rubber] plants on by themselves, but villagers can still work on their [rubber] plantation and take the sap from the rubber trees.

Since villagers work on the land that has been confiscated by the Tatmadaw, do the villagers have to share half of the outcomes with them?

No, villagers do not have to. The Tatmadaw only charge those who use the plantation that they grow and lease to others.

Who are the people that the Tatmadaw lease land to? Are they from this village or other villages or Tatmadaw officers?

People who work on the leased land are neither from this village nor Tatmadaw. But, they are other places.

Do you know what kind of people they are?

They are Karen people from another place but they moved here.

What have been other development projects in your area that we have not talked about? Are there any? What other information do you have about development project and land confiscation?

We have U Than Myint and who confiscated villagers' land.

What did U Than Myint confiscate villagers' land for?

He planted rubber trees. He took a huge amount of land to plant rubber. He is a private wealthy person.

Did he use the land that was confiscated by the Tatmadaw?

He confiscated villagers' land before the Tatmadaw did. At first, the land was confiscated by the Ministry of Industry #1. After the Ministry of Industry #1, U Than Myint took over the land. Finally, the Tatmadaw took it over.

When did U Than Myint confiscate villagers' land?

He confiscated villagers' land in 1996/1997.

Did he provide compensation to the villagers?

Honestly, I did not receive anything from him. I also have no idea where the compensation went. Our villagers did not receive anything.

Ok, I might not have asked you questions that you would like to answer. So, is there anything else that you would like to add? You can talk about your feelings.

I would like to say that villagers have been suffering from land confiscation. Their land has been confiscated by private individuals, companies and the Tatmadaw. The Irrigation and Agriculture departments also confiscated our land but we have not received any compensation. The Ministry of Industry #1 and #2 confiscated our land but we have not received any compensation. The Tatmadaw confiscated our land but we have not received any compensation, because we are not able to show them any documents related to land titles that they ask for. We have not received any compensation from U Than Myint as well.

We want to get back our land. We do not want any compensation though. We only want our land. We, villagers, want our own land to secure our livelihoods. We don't want compensation. This is my feeling about my land. Other villagers also would feel the same. Regarding our land, we have suffered for 20 years. That is why we want to get back our own land. When some people lost their land, they left the village to find work in other places. Some have gone to other countries. Some villagers disappeared and have not yet come back home, for instance, people who work as mahouts in the jungle. Some ladies and women have to work as domestic workers. Some children also cannot study well.

Because of land confiscation, are there any villagers from here who seek for employment in restaurants or something like that?

Yes, there are. They work at restaurants in places like Toungoo Town and Yangon City. There are also villagers who go to Malaysia and Singapore.

Who are mostly working in other places and abroad? Men or women?

Both men and women, as well as both married or single women and men.

Finally, what recommendations would you like to give?

We would like to get back our land that has been confiscated. Now, we do not have any opportunities compared to other places. In other places, people have access to electricity, water and good quality roads. In the summer, we do not even have a drop of water. In the rainy season, there is loads of mud on the road and it is not comfortable for students to go to school. I mean, we have nothing. We would like to recommend the above authorities to take us into consideration.

In our village, there is a lack of healthcare and education services. The above government officials should take sympathy on our situation and return our land to us. Open a clinic for us as well. For the development of the community, open a library for us. Now, our school is self-funded, so support our school. The quality of education is also not up to standard.

So, these are your recommendations that the government should carry out. Thank you so much for your patience and taking the time for this interview. Do you allow KHRG to use this to publish?

Yes.

Can I also take a picture of you?

Yes.

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

- “Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, February 2017,” (January 2018)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, March to May 2017,” (December 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Naw Ka---, October 2016,” (June 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, January 2016,” (February 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, November 2015,” (February 2017)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)