



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the period between April and June 2014, including land confiscation and access to education, healthcare and livelihoods.

- *The Burma/Myanmar government provided 1,000 kyat (US \$0.97) in A--- village for each student; however the teacher did not pay out the money to the students, saying that she had paid out the money for the cost of transporting school books.*
 - *There are some mid-wives and medics provided by the Burma/Myanmar government who visit villagers in Maung Nwe Gyi village tract, Kon Taing village tract, Leik Pya Gyi village tract and Leik Pya Ka Lay village tracts area. However, villagers report that they do not vaccinate children in a timely fashion.*
 - *Villagers report that one woman died during child birth, as the mid-wives appointed by the Burma/Myanmar government are rarely in the village.*
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Situation Update | Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (April to June 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 2014. It was written by a community member in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including one other situation update, 34 interviews, 489 photographs and five video clips.²

Intro

In Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, there are ongoing issues with farmland confiscation for military use. There are also [livelihood] problems with the civilians. The [information in this] report was collected between April and June [2014] and concerns

¹ KHRG trains community members in eastern 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 writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern 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.

the situation civilians face in regard to education, healthcare, social and livelihoods issues.

Education

In A--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, there is a government sub-middle school³ and there are 140 students and 11 teachers. There are some [school age] children who are not able to go to school. [Often] it is too far to travel in order to continue with high school after completing middle school. They have to go to the nearest town to continue their schooling. Some children stop going to school and some children cannot go to school and have to quit school as their parents cannot afford to send them to school. In the 2014-2015 academic year, the Burma government said they provided 1,000 kyat (US \$0.97)⁴ to [each] student, but the female school teacher [in A--- village], Naw Mel George, cut it out [did not pay] by saying that she paid out [that money] for the [school] books' transportation cost. The [Burma/Myanmar] government said it is free to learn [at school]. They [Burma/Myanmar] send school teachers [to the school] and moreover this year they distributed the text books freely, but they did not build the house for the teachers [to live in]. The villagers had to collect money, 3,000 kyat (US \$2.90) from each house [in the village], to support [building] the housing for the teachers [to stay in]. There are 128 houses in the village and they had to build the house for the teachers by themselves.

In Shwe Nyaung Bin village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, there are 140 houses. There is a school in the village and it operates as a sub-middle school. There are 200 students in the school and over ten school teachers. The students from the 2012 to 2014 academic year had the opportunity to study freely [with no school fees], but the kindergarten students parent's had to buy them a chair [to use at school]. Within this year [2014] one set of parents had many weaknesses [setbacks] in earning their livelihood. Their three children are studying in primary school and the school's female head-mistress asked them *"Do you want to take the [3,000 kyat] support money [from the Burma/Myanmar government] for your three children?"* They [students' parents] replied "Yes". The teacher said that *"After you take the [support] money, 3,000 [kyat], you have to pay 5,000 [kyat] (US \$4.84) for the school fundraising fee and school repairing fee."* The student's parents did not take the money and as they do not have 2,000 [kyat] (US \$1.93) more to pay for the school [fundraising and repair fee], they are having problems with that.

In Thandaunggyi Township, Leik Tho sub-township,⁵ Lay Law Way village, there are over 50 students and four teachers in the primary school. Some teachers are from other territories [village tracts or towns] so we have to provide housing for them. The teachers from other territories go home once a month and stay for one week every time they go home. Sometimes they have to go to teacher meetings [held by the Burma/Myanmar government], so the students have less time to learn [from the teachers]. Because of these issues, the students are not happy at school and spend more time with outsiders [older, non-student friends] and they are not happy in school as they have strong relationships with outsiders and they have lost the will to study or they quit school.

In Thandaunggyi Township, A--- village, three NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council] staff gather the children who cannot afford to go to school and they teach them two days a

³ Sub-middle schools operate as smaller satellite units of a central middle school, usually located in a township's administrative centre. In this instance, Shwe Nyaung Bin village's sub-middle school is likely the satellite of Thandaunggyi town's middle school.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the December 3, 2014 official market rate of 1033 kyat to the US \$1.

⁵ A sub-township is an administrative unit comprised of several village tracts, which in turn are comprised of 5 to 20 villages in a local area.

week. They try in this way, but [the students] are still unqualified [behind their peers].

Healthcare

In Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township area, there is the civilian Number Two hospital and the Bu Yin Naung military hospital. There are no clinics in [most] village tracts in that township [Thandaunggyi, however] for village tracts that are situated close to the road, they [Burma/Myanmar government] built a clinic for them. There are some mid-wives who come to the local areas [remote villages], but they do not come into Maung Nwe Gyi village tract, Kon Taing village tract, Leik Pya Gyi village tract and Leik Pya Ka Lay village tract areas. They [mid-wives] do not vaccinate [the children] in a timely fashion.

In some villages, there is a clinic, but there is no medicine and it is a difficult and problematic to treat the patients [when they come to the clinic]. Because of this, the duty medics [from the government] buy the medicines personally and treat the patients. There are also some medics who cannot afford to buy medicine to treat the patients. In some villages, they treat the patients [despite the fact that they have no formal training] and it causes unexpected additional problems.

On June 4th 2014, in Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township, a pregnant woman in Meh Thin Hka Gyi village [became sick]. She did not take any pre-natal medicine and she had never taken [pre-natal] vitamins [during her pregnancy] or when she was sick. There is no clinic, hospital or medics [mid-wives] to treat her so they [a local villager] treated her [in Meh Thin Hka Gyi village] to the best of their abilities and there was a shocking [adverse reaction] with the injection. There was no medicine to stop that [reaction]. The woman was pregnant and because of the [wrong] injection, sores began appearing in her mouth and she was taken on a two day trip to the hospital. When she arrived at the hospital [the staff] asked the medics about the woman's situation and they [medics] knew the woman situation [and told them]. They [hospital staff] said she [the medic] can take [legal] action against the person who treated her [the pregnant woman]. After, they [medics] said that they [the hospital staff] did not treat the patient, even though the patient was in the hospital for a week. The patient had to come back without having medical treatment from the hospital [as she could not afford to pay for treatment].

On May 29th 2014, in Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township, a villager from A--- village delivered her baby. There were mid-wives appointed by the [Burma/Myanmar] government, but they were never in the village. She had to deliver the baby with a hired [non-formally trained] midwife. Because she delivered the baby with a hired mid-wife, it took so long that her placenta did not come out and the hired mid-wife [had to] cut her placenta out with scissors. The blood ran without stopping and she died. If there were mid-wives [from the Burma/Myanmar government] and medicine, we could have saved the pregnant woman.

Some patients who are doing well [in business] and who have dignity [wealth] go to Bu Yin Naung military hospital for their medical treatment. The Bu Yin Naung military hospital has expertise in surgery and they have plenty of different medicines. For Thandaunggyi town hospital and Thandaung Myo Thit hospital, there are medics there for healthcare, but there are no medicines [in the hospital]. Some medics in the hospital buy medicines and do medical treatment for the patients, but it has become a business [for the medics] at the expenses of the patients, so that it is difficult for the people who are not in good health to go to the hospital [for medical treatment]. The civilians from the local side [Karen villages] requested that the [Burma/Myanmar] government set up a clinic in the villages for healthcare, but the government did nothing with the request and they [villagers] are facing problems.

They [Burma/Myanmar government] should do work that benefits the local people instead of supporting unnecessary work [that does not benefit villagers]. If they do it that way, it will lift up the social standards of the local people.

Social problems in Toungoo District

In Thandaunggyi town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, the [Tatmadaw] Bu Yin Naung military camp came and opened [a base in] the town. In the town there is the military for the security [of the army base] and there are other troops from different military departments. Some of the military officers from different areas [around Burma/Myanmar] are familiar with the local people and there are some unnecessary problems that happen between military officers and the villagers. Recently, in A--- village near Thandaunggyi town, an unknown deserter⁶ from Tatmadaw Military Operations Command (MOC)⁷ #1, Light Infantry Division (LID)⁸ #506, Taunggyi troop, attempted to rape a woman from A--- village who was coming back alone to the village from buying things from Thandaunggyi town. But when she tried to push away the deserter her clothes were torn off and she had to face him with shyness [shame]. She did not want to face this situation, but as long as the government troops [Tatmadaw] are in the area [village], there will always be something to worry about.

Livelihoods

In Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township area, most people do plantation [work for their livelihoods]. In Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township, A--- village, in the plantation between Nan Khyein Khwin village and Shwe Nyaung Bin village, [Tatmadaw] Bu Yin Naung troop from [Thandaunggyi] town did a heavy weapons target exercise for military training and it was very difficult for [the villagers] to conduct livelihood activity on the plantation. On that land [the villagers] had been working since their ancestors' time. Since 2000, it was confiscated as military land.

In Toungoo District, in ten villages in Thandaunggyi Township there is a Mya Sein Yaung company project called Reducing Poverty. For that project they will provide 30,000,000 [kyat] (US \$29,041.62) for each village. They gathered ten villages and explained about the money that will be provided to the villages [for this project]. The village representatives attended the meeting and when they explained it to the villagers they were happy and they expected for it [to happen]. The reason why they accepted [this support] was because this year [2014] the plantations produced fewer products. During this year, because of the natural disaster [strong] winds, the plants that the local people mostly rely on [for their livelihoods], such as cardamom trees, fell down on the ground and were damaged.

Mya Sein Yaung Company project provided support [money] to the local villages. For the villages that accept the support, some village representatives prioritize [the money] to their relatives and friends and they threaten the local people in many kind of ways [if they complain]. The amount of money that will be sent is 30,000,000 kyat and there are over 160 houses in the village. Most people in Shwe Nyaung Bin village do odd-jobs and the committees said if they [villagers] want to request money from the committees that provide money, they [villagers] have to pawn something for it. They prioritize [the money]

⁶ In a previously published report the perpetrator is identified as Tun Thein form Light Infantry Battalion #506. For more information on this incident see "[Toungoo Incident Report: Sexual assault in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013](#)," KHRG, May 2014.

⁷ Military Operations Command. Comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁸ Light Infantry Division (Tatmadaw); commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs and organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

to those who have a good income. For the interest, they charge 50 pya (US \$0.0004) for 1 kyat (US \$0.0009). It is difficult for the people who do not have money. It is difficult for them to go on with their livelihoods if they do not borrow money and they are facing many kinds of difficulties. The government proclaimed it “Reducing Poverty”, but nothing has changed for the poor.

In this year [2014], the [amount of] crops produced is less [than normal] and the crop [output] is low. For dog fruit,⁹ the villagers sell 2,500 (US \$2.42) or 3,000 kyat (US \$2.90) for one big tin¹⁰ of dog fruit. And if a person spends time picking and cracking the dog fruit all day they can make only one or two big tins of dog fruit. The price of goods is high and the livelihoods for the families are not going well.

The price of the goods is high and this year [2014] for the workers their daily income is 2,500 to 3,000 kyat. The current goods’ price is based on the income of local government officers. For the plantation workers and rubber tapping workers they have problems. One pound of rubber is [worth] 500 kyat (US \$0.48) and is never sufficient for the family livelihoods. Because day labour work is unavailable [difficult to find], it is unavoidable to work on rubber plantations for a family’s [livelihood].

Perspective and opinion

In Thandaunggyi Township, some development projects that the government does benefit the people, and some projects do not benefit the people. If the government effectively handles the hospitals, clinics and education that benefit the people, there will be benefits for the civilians.

Land Confiscation

There has been land confiscation from local people for the purpose of unnecessary things like government buildings and land for the military. They also use [the land] for military target practice and they confiscated over 5,000 acres of land from the local people in Thandaunggyi Township area. It includes the local people’s plantations and it is difficult to solve their livelihoods problems. My statement [opinion] is if they returned the confiscated land [from the civilians] to the civilians, it can be helpful for the [civilians to be able to work for their livelihoods].

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

- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July 2014,” (December 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Arbitrary arrest and detention, and violent abuse in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2005,” (October 2014)
- “Toungoo Field Report: January to December 2013,” (August 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Stone mining in Thandaunggyi Township, June 2013,” (August 2014)
- “Compensation for land flooded by Toh Boh Dam operations in Toungoo District, August 2013,” (July 2014)

⁹ Dog fruit, also known as jengkol, is a bean containing sulphur and a mildly toxic amino acid. It is native to Southeast Asia and is commonly eaten with rice and fish paste.

¹⁰ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice, seeds and dog fruit.

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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