STOP DAMMING THE CHINDWIN

The Burmese military government, together with the government of India, is planning to build a giant hydroelectric dam near Tamanthi on the Chindwin River in northwest Burma's Sagaing Division. The dam's flood reservoir will be almost 1,400 sq km, the size of Delhi, and will permanently displace over 45,000 people, including the entire town of Khamti. Already over 2,400 people have been relocated at gunpoint from the dam site, without fair compensation.

The Tamanthi dam will adversely affect the biodiversity and ecological balance of the entire Chindwin River, which, as the largest tributary of the Irrawaddy, acts as a major watershed for the whole country. Although the dam will bring about massive changes to the Chindwin, the entire dam building process has been shrouded in secrecy, and there has been a complete lack of public participation in decision making.

Local indigenous Kuki people have been nourished by the Chindwin for generations, and are determined to protect the river from this destructive project. We therefore urge the Burmese regime and Indian government to immediately cancel the Tamanthi dam.

Tamanthi Dam:

- 80 meters high
- Reservoir the size of Delhi (1,396 square kilometers)
- 45,000 to be permanently displaced
- 2,400 relocated at gunpoint to date
- Installed capacity of 1,200 MW
- 80% of electricity for export to India

Villagers forced to disassemble their houses and move downriver to a relocation site

Photo KSDF

Left: house built specially for General Than Shwe's visit to the dam site
Right: machines at the dam site

Project timeline

2004 Burmese regime signs MoU with India's National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) for development of Tamanthi Dam

2006 Burmese NGO BANCA carries out EIA, finds the dam will flood habitats of several globally endangered species

2007 Leivomjang and Tazone villages forcibly relocated from dam site to Shwe Pye Aye relocation site 40 miles downriver
Land cleared and housing compound built for Indian company employees near Tazone
Teak forest around dam site cleared by Tin Win Tun logging company
Teak forest at relocation site cleared by Jewelry Luck Company

2008 New MoU signed between Burma's Ministry of Power 1 and NHPC, stating that India's Department of Hydropower Implementation (DHPI) will form a joint venture with NHPC to develop the Tamanthi dam

2009 Senior General Than Shwe visits Tamanthi dam-site; a special house is built to accommodate him

2010-11 Continuous surveying by NHPC at the dam site.

Current situation at dam project site

Since mid-2011, Indian surveyors staying near Tazone have been travelling daily by boat to the west of the river to conduct tests in a hillside tunnel near Leivomjang village. Police provide security for the surveyors, and no one is allowed near their test site.

Large petrol tanks have remained deposited at Leivomjang since 2007, and are guarded by police and intelligence personnel. Burma Army troops from Light Infantry Battalion 222 at Homalin periodically patrol the area.

The area around the dam site has been completely deforested, but Tin Win Tun Company is continuing to log the teak forests on the west river bank, north of Leivomjang, using 20 elephants. Large numbers of logs are floated down the river to Monywa, where they are loaded onto trucks.

Photo KSDF

Foreign companies are partnering with Burma's Ministry of Electric Power, signboard seen above

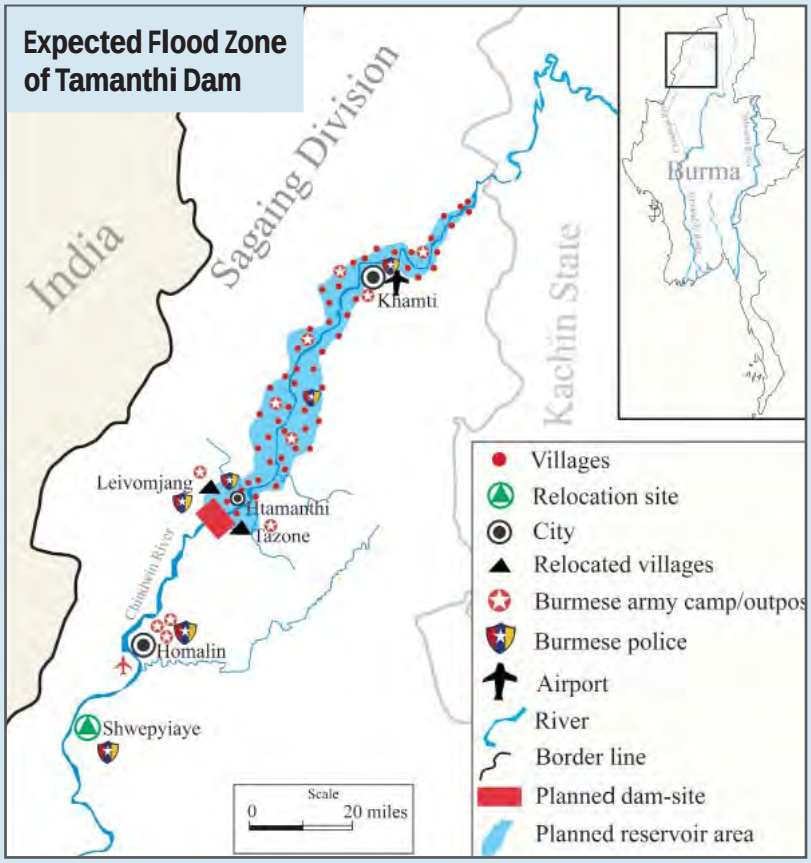
Companies Involved

Indian: National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)
Swiss: Colenco Power Engineering, Ltd. (prepared project feasibility assessment)

FLOODING: Over 45,000 face dispossession and impoverishment

The Tamanthi dam will create a huge reservoir, almost 1,400 km sq km – the size of Delhi. An estimated 52 villages, including the town of Khamti, will be inundated, causing over 45,000 to abandon their ancestral homes and farmlands. Until today, none of these people have been informed or consulted properly about the dam plans.

The experiences of the two villages already relocated from the dam site, show that the tens of thousands facing eviction in the future will suffer forcible dispossession, loss of livelihood, impoverishment and ill health.



(Flood zone based on dam details from Environmental Impact Assessment conducted in 2006)

Villages and towns that will be flooded by Tamanthi Dam

No	Village/Town	Estimated Households	Estimated Population
1	Tazone *	300	1,800
2	Leivomjang *	100	600
3	Car lan	50	300
4	Shanmaintoung	120	720
5	Kuki maintoung	90	540
6	Huloung	27	162
7	Naungyin	30	180
8	Shwelaung	25	150
9	Naungpin	200	1,200
10	Thana jang	30	180
11	Saw pakai	40	240
12	Phai kon	35	210
13	Bangala	28	168
14	Kawl kang	40	240
15	Munkai len	30	180
16	Phoilen	30	180
17	Jol Zam	40	240
18	Sinnaing	30	180
19	Mainsein	43	258
20	Awthaw	30	180
21	Thayagon	35	210
22	Manly	100	600
23	Boljang	56	336
24	Nounghto-ngo	33	198
25	Shwetagun (d)	28	168
26	Lechige	30	180
27	Tamanthi	2,000	12,000
28	Pinma	38	228
29	Nyaunggon	45	270
30	Twetwa	28	168
31	Swekawngaw	38	228
32	Letsaunggan	55	330
33	Htomalut	24	144
34	Sayetkon	32	192
35	Khomun nom	35	210
36	Shwetagun	35	210
37	Malin	40	240
38	Minsin	50	300
39	Kounghein	21	126
40	Kauktaung-anauk	25	150
41	Kauktaung- aseh	30	180
42	Mol on	55	330
43	Sinttay-taung	60	360
44	Kamti town	3,000	18,000
45	Autywalay	56	336
46	Aungmyay	32	192
47	Chaung tongkhuat	45	270
48	Charmor6	56	336
49	Letpanter	38	228
50	Manpin	31	186
51	Mansin	39	234
52	Nang out maw	61	366
Total			**45,414**

* already forcibly relocated

The Kuki people

The Kuki are one of various ethnic groups living along the Chindwin, including Kachin, Shan, Naga, Chin and Burmese. The Kukis live in the India-Burma border area. Their traditional homelands were divided between India and Burma against their will after independence from the British. Today, over 600,000 Kuki people live in northeast India in Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Assam and Mizoram States, and over 200,000 live northwest Burma, in Upper Sagaing Division and Tungzang township of Chin State. During 1967–1968, under General Ne Win's military regime, more than 20,000 Kuki people from 60 villages along the Burma-India border were accused of being foreigners and forcibly expelled from the country. Kuki people have continued to face oppression by Burma's military rulers since that time. The Tamanthi dam project is yet another instance of the violation of their rights.

Before relocation

Leivomjang was a prosperous Kuki village, close to the Chindwin river bank. The soil was fertile, and villagers grew rice, dog-fruit, bamboo, bananas, oranges, vegetables and other crops, both for their own consumption and for sale in nearby villages and towns. Crops were irrigated by water channeled from the river and from hill streams. For household use, villagers had wells near their houses. The village was also a busy trading centre, and residents could earn an extra income selling food and offering accommodation to traders.

If villagers needed medical treatment, they would travel by boat to the government hospital at Homalin town. There was a small malaria centre in the village, set up by an NGO. Children attended the government primary school in the village, and for high school were sent to study in Homalin town. Some parents even sent their children to study in Mandalay or Rangoon.

Forced relocation from the dam site

Two villages at the dam site – Leivomjang, population 600, and Tazone (more than 1,800 people) – were forcibly relocated between January and March 2007 to make way for the dam construction. Villagers were ordered to move forty miles south to a relocation site called Shwe Pye Aye "new town."

The villagers were forced to sign that they moved "voluntarily" but in fact were evicted forcibly by soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 222 at Homalin. Bulldozers knocked down the cement buildings and flattened fields and gardens around the villages. In Leivomjang, the church and cemetery were also razed. People from nearby villages were forced to come and help tear down the buildings. Villagers received paltry compensation, as little as 5,000 kyat (US$5) for the loss of their houses and farmlands. Leivomjang villagers lost a total of 2,500 acres of farmland, and Tazone villagers lost 3,500 acres.

Villagers had no choice but to move to Shwe Pye Aye relocation site. They were threatened with punishment if they moved anywhere else. Soldiers arranged boats to carry the villagers and their possessions to the new site.

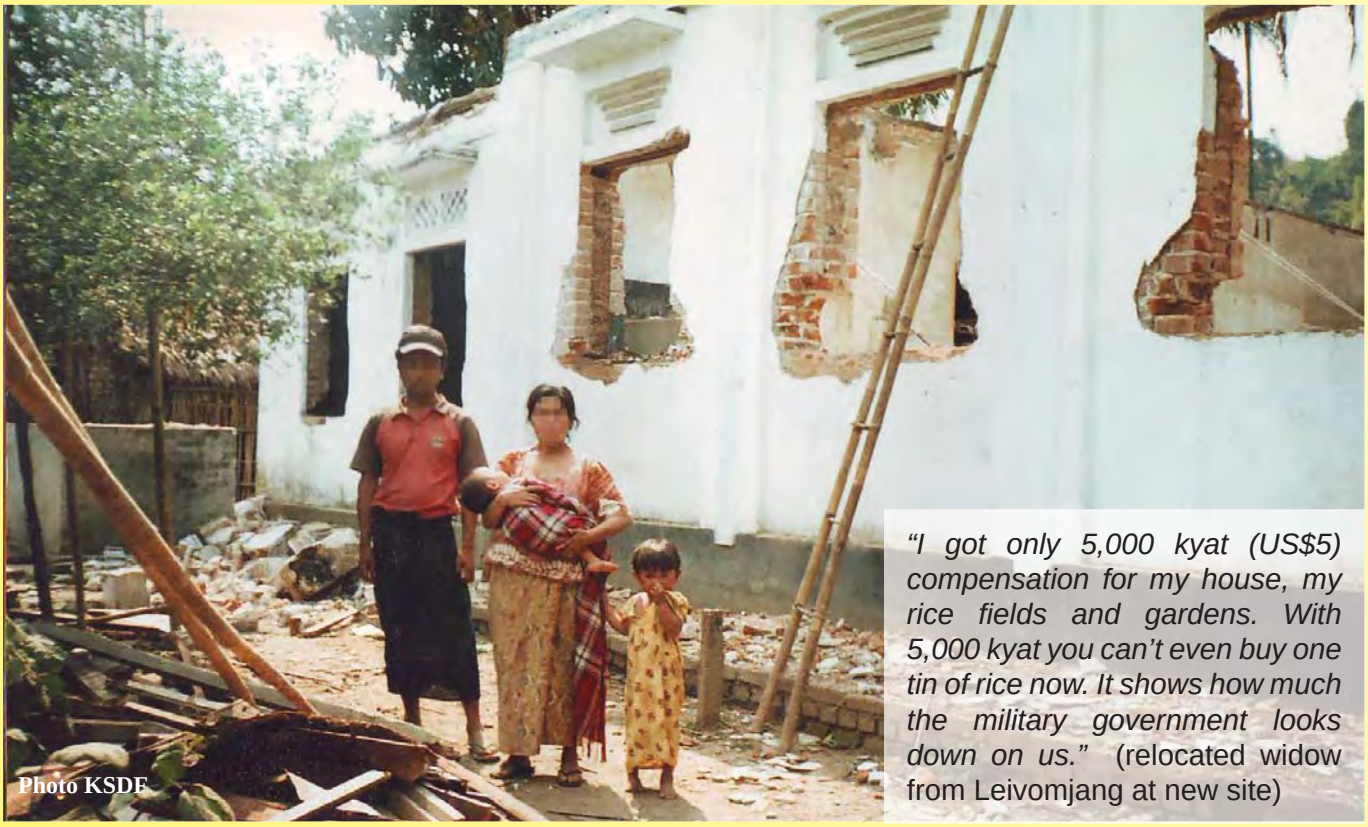


Photo KSDF

"I got only 5,000 kyat (US$5) compensation for my house, my rice fields and gardens. With 5,000 kyat you can't even buy one tin of rice now. It shows how much the military government looks down on us." (relocated widow from Leivomjang at new site)

After relocation

"I only want to live in our old village. They said we would not lose anything. But we have been staying here in a new village for four years already. For food, we don't even have enough rice to eat. We are facing hardship." (an elderly woman in relocation site explained while crying)

The Shwe Pye Aye relocation site was set up in a forested area high above the river bank, about half an hour's walk from the river. The site was cleared by loggers of the JLC company, which continues to log the surrounding forests.

People were allocated housing plots in the new area, but were given no support to build houses. They had to use old housing materials brought from their villages. As bamboo and thatch was scarce in the new area, many had to use plastic sheeting for roofing.

Water is scarce in the relocation site. The authorities have built water tanks in the site, supplied by pipes from a hill source, but these dry up in the dry season, and women must walk for half an hour down to the closest stream to fetch water in jerry cans for household use and for drinking. The water is dirty, but due to scarcity of firewood, people often do not boil it. This has frequently caused diarrhea.

There are few livelihood opportunities in the new site. Plots of farmland were available for the relocated villagers, but due to lack of water (the land is too high to be irrigated from the river) and the infertility of the soil, which is sandy and full of stones, people have been unable to grow sufficient crops, either to feed themselves or to sell. The farmlands are also very far away from their homes.

There are some jobs available at a saw mill in the site, carrying wood and cutting planks, but the work is poorly paid and dangerous. Some villagers have resorted to making charcoal in remote areas, but there is little wood available.

It is very difficult for widowed or elderly women to earn enough to feed themselves, and some rely on food donations from other villagers.

There was a new hospital built at Shwe Pye Aye, but it is located about one hour's walk from the main site, along a road that becomes muddy and impassable during the rainy season. It is staffed by two nurses, but has few medical supplies.

There is a high school at the site, but not enough teachers. Parents can't afford to supplement the low salaries of the teachers, as they did in their old villages, so teachers neglect regular classes and earn extra money through tuition.

"It is so hard for women to start their lives again in this new place. Many have felt like killing themselves. Me too, I often think it would be better to die than live like this." (69-year-old widow in relocation site)

Villagers defy relocation orders

Despite the relocation orders and destruction of their houses, a few brave residents of Leivomjang have refused to abandon their homes. They have erected temporary shelters and are surviving on crops grown in areas that were not bulldozed. Soldiers have repeatedly ordered them to move out, and even torn down their huts, but they still refuse to move. Although their original cement church was razed, the villagers have built a small bamboo church where they continue to worship.

"I will never leave Leivomjang. My family has been living here and cultivating the land since my grandparents' time. My house, which cost 30 million kyat (about US$30,000), was knocked down. I have built a hut in its place. The soldiers have come and destroyed it three times! But each time I've rebuilt it. I lost so much when they destroyed my fields. I got almost nothing as compensation. This Tamanthi dam has made all of us here poor." (70 year-old woman from Leivomjang)

Some villagers have refused to move even after their houses were torn down. They have built a small bamboo church and continue to worship.

Logs are piled up along the banks and awaiting transport downriver

"Soldiers told us that we would get electricity. How can we believe them, when the government didn't even want to compensate us for the houses, lands and farms that we lost?" (widower in relocation site)

Danger of earthquakes

The Chindwin River runs parallel to the Sagaing Fault Line, traversing central Burma. The area around the Tamanthi dam site has experienced several earthquakes over the past two years, including one of 6.2 magnitude in February 2011, which caused damage to buildings across northeast India. Rupturing of the dam by an earthquake could unleash a massive flood, threatening countless lives downstream.

Environmental impacts

More than six percent of the Tamanthi Wildlife Reserve will be inundated by the dam, including the vital habitats of globally endangered large mammals like tiger Panthera tigris, elephant Elephus maximus, and the endemic Myanmar's Roofed Turtle Kachuga travittata, which may be lost forever as no other habitat for this species is currently known.

An EIA was commissioned by the Burmese government in 2006, but the assessment team reported that it was incomplete because they were not given enough time. Nevertheless, they documented 332 species of birds, 59 species of mammals, 333 species of insects, 57 species of reptiles, 67 species of fish, and 526 species of plants in the dam's flood area. The assessment team advised mitigation measures for critical species.

Loss of fisheries

Of particular concern is the impact to fisheries, as construction of the dam will block migration and spawning of fish, and cause a reduction in endemic fish populations. Studies by the World Commission on Dams on the Pak Moon Dam in Thailand showed how dam construction caused a loss of 60-80% of the Moon River's fish yield. Of 265 fish species,169 had disappeared after the dam was built.

Deforestation

The clearing of the Tamanthi dam project-site in 2007 has precipitated large-scale logging along the banks of the Chindwin both upstream and downstream of the area, which continues until today. If construction of the dam proceeds, even more logging will ensue, causing further destruction of forest resources and wildlife habitat, and causing increased erosion and desertification.

The Chindwin is a vital transport link in Burma but once the dam is built, water levels downstream will be unpredictable.

Water shortages and surges downstream: threatening agriculture and transport

The flow of water from the dam will be regulated by the dam operators, depending on electricity needs in India, not on livelihood needs of communities living downstream. In the dry season of 2011, waters fell to unprecedented low levels in the Chindwin, making passageway and loading difficult for both cargo and passenger boats.

Once the dam is built, water levels downstream will be unpredictable. There will be periods of water shortage, impacting riverside agriculture, as well as boat transport and trade, while releases of water from the dam will cause sudden surges, threatening the safety of those carrying out daily tasks along the river banks.

Paddy fields near the dam site will be inundated

"Since only people from India came to work here, I think this will only benefit India. For us Kuki people, we will lose our ancestors' villages, land and farms." (local woman near Tamanthi)

Calls of Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization on Tamanthi Dam Construction

Due to the irreparable social and environmental damage that will be caused by the Tamanthi Dam, the abuses that have already been inflicted on local communities, and the complete lack of public participation in decision making and equitable benefit sharing, we make the following calls:

To Burma's military government:

1. Immediately cancel plans to construct the Tamanthi Dam and allow all people forcibly relocated to Shwe Pye Aye to return to their home villages, and provide full compensation for the damage to their houses and farmlands;
2. Once villagers have returned to their homes, proper medical care should be provided to restore them to good health, and special support should be given to women and children, to enable them to rebuild their lives.

To India's NHPC Limited: Immediately cancel plans to construct the Tamanthi dam.

To the Indian government:

1. Cancel plans to proceed with the Tamanthi dam, and order NHPC to immediately withdraw from the project.
2. Review India's policy on Burma which is impoverishing ethnic peoples such as the Kuki while enriching high ranking military generals and their cronies.

To local communities: Stand up for our rights against the military government.

To the international community: Support local communities resisting development projects that only benefit the top leaders of Burma's military regime: join us in saving the Chindwin.

The Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO)

The KWHRO was set up on 1st Jan 2000 near the Indo-Burma border by Kuki women exiled from Burma after the 1988 student uprising. It aims to expose and end human rights violations against the Kuki people, oppose military rule and restore democracy in Burma, and work for the empowerment of Kuki women. It is a member of the Women's League of Burma.

SAVE THE CHINDWIN

STOP TAMANTHI DAM

The Chindwin River

The Chindwin River, at 1,207 kms long, is the largest tributary of the Irrawaddy River. It originates in the Hukawng valley of Kachin State and flows the length of Sagaing Division before joining the Irrawaddy at Myingyan. Its catchment area lies within the Mizoram-Manipur-Kachin Rainforest Ecoregion, categorized as globally outstanding in biodiversity. It also runs through the Tamanthi Wildlife Reserve, home to tigers, elephants, leopards and bears.

The waters of the Chindwin are a vital source of irrigation for river-bank agriculture, and plentiful fish stocks provide daily food for communities along the length of the river. The Chindwin serves as the main transport route in Sagaing, and is travelled daily by hundreds of passenger and cargo boats.

Join us in saving one of Burma's major rivers from the impending Tamanthi Dam, a joint venture between Burma's military-backed government and India's state-owned hydropower company that will have devastating consequences.

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The Chindwin River near the Tamanthi Dam site

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