



Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

**Karen Human Rights Group press release on “With only our voice, what can we do?”
Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar**

Aug 6th 2015

The Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Thailand, Bangkok - Three years after the 2012 preliminary ceasefire negotiations between the Myanmar government and the Karen National Union (KNU), reported instances of land confiscation continue to increase in southeast Myanmar. In its 2015 report, [*‘With only our voices, what can we do?’*](#), KHRG highlights four main land use types which lead to land confiscation: infrastructure projects, natural resource extraction, commercial agriculture projects, and military activities. Based on testimony from local villagers, the Myanmar government; domestic corporate actors; and Tatmadaw and Karen ethnic armed groups (EAGs) are all identified as being complicit in the confiscation of land from local communities in southeast Myanmar. Against this bleak background, local villagers report using a variety of strategies to prevent and mitigate the impacts of land confiscation, such as reaching out to civil society organisations (CSOs) and the media, negotiating with actors involved in projects, and lobbying both the Myanmar government and Karen EAGs.

In the vast majority of reported cases, local villagers stated that they were not consulted properly by development actors. *“Development actors have claimed that they conduct consultations with both local villagers and civil society in advance of projects,”* said Saw Albert, Field Director of KHRG. He continued, *“If this was really the case, why have we received more and more reports regarding land being confiscated against the will of local communities? Why are villagers not being consulted in advance of land confiscation, and not compensated for what they have lost? Why are villagers’ voices ignored? There is a real need for meaningful consultations, and free, prior and informed consent before the implementation of any project, and not only in words, but in deeds.”*

KHRG hopes its launch in Bangkok will ensure its message reaches the wider regional and international community. The findings and recommendations found in this report are particularly relevant in the context of the on-going consultations on Myanmar’s National Land Use Policy. *“The reality on the ground is that villagers’ lands are not adequately protected by existing land laws and policies,”* said Saw Way Lay, KHRG Advocacy Coordinator. He added, *“All development actors must recognise the central role land plays in the lives of local communities, and villagers’ rights and voices must be heard and respected in all project planning and implementation.”*

KHRG is an independent, unaffiliated, locally-led organisation committed to promoting the perspective of villagers in southeast Myanmar, whose voices are often ignored. Founded in 1992, KHRG engages in field research, documentation, report-writing and local and international advocacy. KHRG also conducts workshops with villagers where they can openly discuss the abuses and the challenges they face, gain greater knowledge of protection strategies, and consider options for collective action in their local area. Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, KHRG was the 2013 recipient of the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award from the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. KHRG is the first human rights organisation working in Myanmar to win the award.

Contact:

Saw Albert,
Field Director
albert@khr.org
+66 821625199

Way Lay
Advocacy Coordinator
waylay@khr.org
+66 622508085