

Report

Empty Rice Baskets: An Analysis of the Causes and Implications of the August 2009 Flooding in Mon State

Introduction:

Once known as the 'rice basket' of Asia, Burma's long-standing reputation as a leading rice exporter has dwindled as its economy has collapsed after years of rule by several generations of military juntas. Within the country, the leading role of rice as a food product and commercial cash crop has persisted. Yet despite its significant role in Burmese agriculture, the rice paddy farmers of Mon state, who have long been the backbone of rice production in Burma, are finding it increasingly difficult to continue to provide for their own livelihoods and those of their families.

The threat to paddy farmers is twofold, due to both man-made catastrophes as well as natural disasters. Due to the poor design and management of the Win-pha-non and Kataik dams, farms and villages throughout the area have been flooded as spillways running from the dam have failed. Thanks to excess rainfall, farmers in the 6 divisions of Mon State have lost hundreds of acres of rice paddies due to flooding. However, in addition to the destruction of their cash crops, paddy farmers face further loss of income and property from the abusive economic management practices of the Burmese government's State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) agricultural programs. Despite flooding, seasonal limitations, and lack of funding, government administrators demand that farmers replant their crops to meet government rice quotas. While they are provided with no economic support, farmers are still expected to meet the quota or face the seizure of their land, and in some cases, forced manual labor.

Background

Mon state is well known for its strong agricultural output and favorable climate. Because of its value as an agricultural region, Mon state is home to 7 dams. The 2 dams responsible for the widespread flooding that HURFOM has been documenting are the Win-pha-non and the Kataik dams. Both these dams, according to sources close to the SPDC, were built to contribute to the prevention of flooding and to assist local farmers in the cultivation of rainy season and summer paddy fields.

In August 2009 particularly intense seasonal rains fell. In response, government administrators released excess water from the Win-pha-non and Kataik dams. In addition to widespread flooding from the excessive monsoon rainfall, the release of dam water has proved catastrophic, as water has been spilling over the poorly designed dam's runoff canals around the area.

HURFOM estimates that within the 6 townships of Ye, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, Kyaikmayaw, and Moulmein, in Mon state, there are about 160,000 acres that have been planted for the monsoon paddy season. Of those acres planted, over 70,000 acres have been flooded by heavy rain in August 2009.

Concentrating on the causes, effects, and the potential long term impacts of this year's flooding, HURFOM field reporters have met with nearly 100 farmers located near the Win-pha-non and Kataik dams, and throughout flood impacted areas in Mon State's 6 Townships. Mon State SPDC authorities have provided no support or attention in response to flooding or to the farmers who have lost their paddy plantations. Farmers and area residents have voiced widespread concern that they will be unable to continue living in the area, due to the financial loss of their crops and the costs of having to replant. Besides individual losses, according to accounts from several HURFOM field reporters, residents and rice traders have predicted that the fallout from this crop failure will raise paddy and rice prices over the next few years throughout the country and precipitate a widespread food shortage. Rather than providing physical or financial support for the flooded region, the SPDC has responded by pressuring farmers to prepare their lands to replant their rainy season paddies in order to meet the state's yearly rice production quota, despite the impossibility of a paddy crop ever reaching a mature harvestable state as the rainy season ends. Regardless, authorities have threatened farmers who are

resistant or unable to replant their farms with land confiscation if they fail to replant their crop.

The report will be divided into 4 primary sections, after the methodology. In the first section HURFOM details the design failures of the 2 dams in Mon state that have caused massive flooding, and the loss of farmlands that rice farmers face. The next section documents farmers' losses from heavy rainfall. The 3rd section of this report will highlight the failure of the SPDC to provide support for the civilian population in these devastated areas, and the abusive policies of forced crop growth and land seizure that it has implemented instead. The last section before the conclusion will address the opinions and expectations of area experts, traders, and farmers about the expected wide spread impact of the heavy rains and catastrophic flooding.

Methodology

4 field reporters from HURFOM traveled throughout areas impacted by the heavy monsoon, and interviewed victims who have lost their land to the flooding in August, as well as government staff in various Townships in Mon State. Interviewing and collecting personal accounts from nearly 100 farmers, field reporters have had to work covertly to avoid detection by government agents. Additionally, due to HURFOM's security concerns, this report will not contain victims' personal details (however, you can contact HURFOM directly to get more information about the individual cases).

Please note that all numbers pertaining to damaged acreage are estimates given by their farmers. HURFOM was unable to obtain the exact numbers of damaged rice paddies, as the SPDC's Ministry of Agriculture was both unavailable and unwilling to furnish such information.

The Win-pha-non and Kataik dams

The devastating flooding of Mudon and Pa'an township is directly related to the government's failure to properly design dams constructed as part of their agricultural development projects. Both the Win-pha-non and Kataik dams suffer from design flaws in their water run-off canals, which in ideal circumstances should carry water away from an overly full dam.

The Win-pha-non dam is located on a hill to the east of the motor road near Abit village, Mudon Township. The fields affected by the dam are located to the west of the motor road that runs from Mawlamyine to Ye. In the construction of the dam, The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation created artificial waterways (canals) from the dam along the natural course the previous stream runoff used to take, widening and deepening old streambeds in the process. This central canal travels through 5 villages in the area. In addition, they added artificial canals and irrigation ditches that now feed into the central canal.

However, HURFOM field reporters found that of the 70,000 acres of rice paddies farmed in the area, 17,000 are flooded. As a result of the structuring of old streams and the building new runoff canals, the newly built canal and its tributaries have blocked the natural runoff flow of water that collects in the surrounding countryside. Unable to reach its natural outlets along the old streambed, water pools around villages and in paddy fields, dumping silt and flooding crops.

Additionally, while the government has widened and dredged the new canal, it has not widened the canal and runoff channels sufficiently to allow for the volume of water that has been released from the water spillways in the side of the dam. The sides of the canal are too shallow, and during the 6-month long rainy season large volumes of water are released from the spillways that empty into the main runoff canal, creating flooding.

The Kataik dam, the construction of which was completed in February 2006, is located in Paung Township. Kataik was built to provide 28,000 acre feet of irrigation water to the 200,000 acres of rice paddies in the area. Farmers have reported that due to the faulty design of 2 spillways, named Kyone Htaw and Yinn Yein, flooding occurs seasonally from the water runoff from mountains. The spillways in question are not large enough to control the volumes water they are supposed to contain, and must routinely be opened to prevent damage to the dam's machinery. However, flooding from the spillways is worse this year due to unusually heavy seasonal rains, which have caused the sea's tides to rise, and run into the already blocked and flooded canals. As a result, 20,000 acres of paddy have flooded.

According to residents, before the Ministry of Agriculture constructed the dams the water from the area's villages and paddies drained into the old streams, and flowed out to the ocean through the central streambed.

With runoff escaping naturally, land drained and the rice farmers cultivated one crop of rice a year, during the rainy season. With the construction of dams, the SPDC has often required farmers to plant 2 crops of rice, one in the traditional rainy season, and another summer crop, using water from the dam to flood fields.

The water that has now flooded the villages around the dams is cloudy and dirty with soil erosion. Unable to drain into the flooded streams, excess water fills surrounding paddy fields. The water pools and backs up, depositing soil onto the paddy crops. The soil sticks to the plants and the plants are not able to stand with the combined weight of the water and the soil. Within about 7 days the crops fall over and die.

Dam flooding impacts

HURFOM has found that because of the failures of the Win-pha-non and Kakdai dams detailed above, crop loss from flooding in the region has destroyed the livelihoods of numerous families, and significantly threatens both the health and financial stability of area residents on the most basic levels. Of the 6 townships in Mon State impacted by flooding from dam failure and extreme seasonal rainfall, Mudon Township is the most devastated. According one member of the administration at Win-pha-non dam, another reason for the massive flooding are the fences and bamboo insulators that protect the Kanbawk-Myaigkalay pipeline in the places where it crosses the dam's canal. The fences collect debris, which blocks the canal and contributes to flooding.

There are about 70,000 acres of paddy plantations in Mudon Township, and HURFOM field reporters have found that over 30,000 acres were destroyed by flooding last month. Despite the extreme loss of crops, there has been no effort by either the SPDC or The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation to assist farmers either financially or in physically attempting to replant their crops. One of the Win-pha-non staff members stated that, "All farmers know that we have been facing flooding every year; so the farmers should be preparing for more planting and keep more paddy seeds to replace in the destroyed fields as the water level comes down." HURFOM field reporters documented that the villages of Kwankapwe, Hnee Padaw, Abit, Klothhort, Taungpa, Phae doe, Htaungkae and Kamawet have been hit by flooding, and farmers have not been preparing extra paddy seeds to replant again. The area's farmers explained that they can't afford the additional cost of extra paddy seeds after this year's flooding, which occurred in the middle of the rainy season, when rice is normally grown. Therefore, due to time restrictions, there is no a chance for the farmers to begin planting another crop that will be ready to harvest during the season.

Nai Thoo, a 56 years old Kwankapwe villager, Mudon Township explained that:

"The dam [Win-pha-non] makes our farmers' lives more difficult every year. When there was heavy rain, they would turn on the water from the dam. If they do not turn on the water, the dam will break. The rubbish has run into the canal, which is too small, so the water can't flow ahead easily and the water over flows into the farmland. Another reason is the authorities have placed a bamboo fence across the gas pipeline that crosses [the central] canal so water can't flow easily because [the fence] backs up with rubbish. Last year, the water also flooded over our farm but after 2 weeks the water level decreased. This year, the flooding came in the key growing stages and also took about 1 month to begin to drain; therefore, our plantation can't survive anymore. The authorities suggested that the farmers should prepare the extra seeds to replace the flooded plantations. It's easy to say that, but when you [try to] do it it that will difficult. The reality [of the situation] is that the authorities have to take responsibility for the flooding, but they blame farmers for being unprepared for the damage. Whatever they do to force us, I will not repair my plantation anymore, only 10% of my paddy plantation is left now. If we repair, we need to pay for repairing the land, buying the paddy seeds and transplanting the paddy. Estimating, the cost would be about 500,000 kyat if we replant again. I couldn't afford that cost to replant again."



One of the main canals of Kataik dam during the flooding in August in Paung Township



Photo of a dead paddy field in Paung Township

80 inches of rain were fell August 2009; therefore, more water flowed down from the mountains and the sea's tides rose into the paddy fields in Paung Township. Thousands of rainy season paddy fields have been destroyed in Ahlaik, Yinnyein, Sinkyaik, Thelkon, Katon, and Welkyi villages, Paung Township.

Nai Myit Maung, 52 years old of Ahlaik villager, Paung Township, said,

“I planted 15 acres of rainy season paddies this year but 7 acres of our paddy field totally were destroyed by flooding in August. I have lost about 800,000 kyat because of destroyed crops. I think the main reason of our paddy fields flooding is because of the dam near our plantation. Every year there has been flooding in this areas but this year is the longest float the entire my farming experience. My paddy field is located between Katon and Sinkyaik villages that are located near Kataik dam. Because the spillway couldn't control the water into the dam, the dam released the water and all around areas including my farm are floating nearly a month. The water level flown down in the first week of September; as a result, 7 acres of my farm are totally damaged after the water ran out into the field. Not only my farm destroyed in the area, but also the neighbor's farm, and the people who depend on the water also have been damaged because of the August flooding. I think, about 40 to 50 farmers had been dealing with flooding around our area, but I'm not sure how much of their paddies they lost. In some paddy field the flood water still remains. Almost a thousand acres of farm land located under the dam areas have been damaged in last month's flooding.”

The main reason for flooding in Paung Township was due to the Kataik dam. Both of the spillways to Yinnyein and Zaikkaye are not wide enough to drain water from the dam. The water from the mountains flows down, and the dam water combined with the mountain runoff, causing massive flooding in the area,

said a government official at the Kataik dam. He explained,

“Because of about 80 inches of rainfall in August, the dam couldn't control that amount of water anymore. The dam released the water. Our lands are close to the sea. With the water from the sea rising and the dam water flow around the areas. Those two ways of water line combined each other and the farm lands received huge flooding in August. The government should consider this when they build up the dam. They need to know how much the rain falls in that areas and does the dam control that amount of rain fall. The result of their not considering is that our farmers face an obstacle. I estimated over 4,000 acres of paddy field were totally destroying during the flooding. This year is the year that most of farmers are losing their plantations.”

According from Mi Sein Htay, 40 years old of Katon villager, Paung Township,

“I planted 8 acres of paddy fields this year. My paddy plantations are starting to bud and we just finished putting fertilizer on our paddy plantation in the last week of August. Because of flooding in August the dam water has been flowing day and night, all our paddy fields are flooded and nothing can be harvested from our plantation. Our paddy fields have been flooded about 28 days, so all the rice plants are dying. After the water level decreased the Myanmar Agriculture Service's manager came and told us to replant again. If we don't have water he will allow us to use the dam water. You can say that to replant is easy, but we can't afford fertilizer or to hire people to transplant the paddy plantation. Although we are afraid of the authorities, this time I don't care anymore. If they would like to confiscate my land, they can do that. Whatever they say, I will not replant anymore.”

HURFOM estimates from its interviews that there are 20 farmers in Mudon Township alone who have totally lost their crops to this year's flooding and are being threatened with losing their land

because they cannot afford to replant.

Paung Township was affected by the same problems as Mudon and Kyaikmayaw Townships. HURFOM field reporters estimated that heavy rains in August caused over 7,000 acres to be flooded in Paung Township. Our field reporters collected information about the difficulties of Paung Township farmers and documented them in our report.

Rainfall Flooding

Rice farmers traditionally plant in what is known as the 'rainy season' The full development of a rice crop is contingent on several steps. In June rice farmers first plow wet soil and then scatter rice seed in fertilized fields. After a few weeks, the rice seedlings sprout and are then replanted, and then the field is flooded at low levels for an average of 150-170 days. Rice crops need a large quantity of water to grow; about 50% of the plant can be seen above water, and the other half is rooted and submerged. In a normal agricultural timeline the rice can be harvested after 5 months.

The month of August saw record rainfall in Mon State. While seasonal rainfall normally measures an average 220 inches a year, rainfall for August 2009 was recorded as being nearly 80 inches. While flooding does occur every year during the rainy season the extreme and continuous volume of rainfall, this year farmers were unable to drain off their fields before their crops drowned. Farmers throughout the area claimed that this year's flooding lasted about 5 weeks, after which all submerged paddy plants had drowned. According to an agriculture expert from Mudon township, losing their crops so far into the growing season means that farmers do not have enough time to replant and harvest a crop during the rainy growing season, as the hot season commences January; there is not enough time to clean out the paddy fields of debris, plough, sprout, replant, *and* re-grow a rice crop in such a short amount of time.

Rainfall Flooding Impacts

Farmers in Mon state invest a great deal of money in planting their crops on a year-to-year basis, spending their savings from the previous harvest on labor, seeds, and fertilizer. Therefore, the loss of farmers' rice crops in the August flooding is more than the loss of a year's income – it represents the loss of Mon State's farmer's savings. With their financial safety nets gone, farmers are unable to afford the costs of replanting, and have no choice except to face potential punishment from the Burmese government.

The six townships of villagers have all been farming their lands for generations, and some have been farmers for 40 years themselves. These villagers rely on farming as their primary means of survival. In particular, Mudon, Paung, and Kyaikmayaw Townships are the main rice producers in Mon State. Most of the residents in those townships survive by farming. They can't afford to replant again after the water level decreased on their farmlands. In addition, about HURFOM's sources estimated 70% of plantations have also been destroyed by flooding in the lowland areas of Ye, Thanbyuzayat, and Moulmein Townships These three areas have been producing a small amount of rice in Mon State. Between this year's flooding, and rising rice and paddy land prices, farmers in these areas are facing near-destitution. In addition, the farmers also face forced labor, money extortion, forced assistance in planting of the Burmese Army's paddies, and confiscation of property by



Hundreds of rainy season paddies were damaged due to flooding from the dams and heavy rains in Mudon Township, Mon State

the local authorities and troops.

Nai Phae', of Kamawet village, said, "I planted 20 acres in this year; therefore I need to hire two people to help with my farm [full time]. I pay one of them 100 baskets of rice for a year, and I pay the other one 75 basket of rice for a year. I invested 1,200,000 kyat in my farm this year. I hired 25 people to transplant my farm over 10 days. I paid them 3,000 kyat for each per day. Last year, I could produce 1,200 basket of rice. I think this year this probably will decrease. In our area, there are about 3,000 acres of paddies flooded."

Nai Thein Mong, Thoemia village, Mudon Township, said, "I owned 24 acres of paddy field. I hired two workers to help me with my rainy season paddy plantation. I agreed to pay them 125 basket of rice per year. I invested about 600,000 to plant the rainy season paddies, that included fertilizer and hiring the people who were transplanting. Because of flooding, 5 acres of my paddy field have been destroyed."

Nai Win Oo, a Kwankapwe villager in Mudon Township, said, "I hired one worker to care for my paddy field. I invested about 500,000 kyat; that included hiring transplanting workers for 3,500 kyat a day and a package of fertilizer for 20,000 kyat to start my rainy season paddy plantation this year. Last year, I got 500 baskets of rice from my farm. 5 acres of my paddy had been destroying this year so I can't know how much rice will we get."

Nai Htaw Rot, Pharouk villages, Moulmein Township, said, "I had 10 acres of paddy field. I hired one worker and gave him 80 baskets of rice. I bought 3 packages of fertilizers for 20,000 kyat each. As for the 15 paddy transplanting workers, I paid 3,000 kyat for a person each day. It was ten days until we finished transplanting. Last year, I produced 450 baskets of rice I don't know how many basket of rice we will get for this year. About 700 acres of paddy field are still left around our area, others were flooded."

Nai Win, Kwantar villager, Mudon Township, said, "I hired two workers to develop my 15 acres of paddy fields this year. We had agreed to pay 100 baskets of rice for each worker for the year. I invested 700,000 kyat for planting the rainy season paddies this year. I harvested 1,200 baskets of rice last year. I don't think we will get the same amount of last year. This year we wasted more than previous years. I had paid 2,500 kyat to hire transplanting workers, but I agreed to feed them breakfast and lunch. In our areas, we about 500 acres of paddy fields flooded."

Nai Nyut Mine, a Kowkapone villager from Mudon Township, said, "I planted 10 acres of paddy fields this year. I hired two workers for 300,000 kyat per year. In addition, 500,000 kyat was spent on fertilizers. Last years, I harvested 450 basket of rice. I also had to pay 2,500 kyat to hire transplanting workers and fed them breakfast and lunch."

Said Nai Khun Bo, 47 years old, Kohdon village, Kyaikmayaw Township.

"The main reason for flooding was heavy rain and the water overflowed onto the paddy field. The water in the Artaran River was rising up and could not flow out easily, therefore our plantation flooded for about 35 days. Last year there was also flooding, but it was just a few days long and the water run out drained out from the plantation fields. Also this year flooding is exactly in time for paddy pollination steps so the paddy was easy to destroy. I wasted about 400,000 kyat on fertilizers and hired the workers. I just put fertilizers in a week before the flooding. The agriculture manager in the areas ordered us to replant our plantations. But, we don't have any money to re-start our farm project again. I just hope to get enough rice for our family to survive. We also have been loaned others people's money. Now, I don't know where will we get the money to pay them back. It's impossible to replant again because now is September, where do we get enough rain to replant our paddy again. Even though they will arrest me, I won't replant again."

Paung, Mudon, Kyaikmayaw Township are the main rice producers in Mon State. Because of heavy rain in August, most of the paddy field in those areas was flooded. Most of the townships' farmers hope to get enough rice for themselves and their families, but this year's terrible circumstances are making even the possibility of basic survival questionable. Most of the farmers in Tarana, Kawdon, Kawpanaw, Maekaro, Kawone, Khonemanin, Kyoneone, and Nedon villages, in Kyaikmayaw township had been facing the same problems as Nai Khun Bo. Most of farmers in the area have had their paddy fields destroyed by flooding.

Said Ko Kyaw Aye Htun, 40 years old, Kawpanaw villager, Kyaikmayaw Township.

"Because of heavy rains in August, the river overflowed onto our paddy field. If we look at around our paddy field, we didn't see our rice plants just water overflowing onto it. I'm very unhappy about that. I planted 10 acres of paddy fields but after the water level decreased only one acre of paddy field was

growing, all the rest died during the flooding. I had invested about 70,000 kyat per acre. I didn't have the money to invest that amount so I borrowed other people's money to start farming this year. Now, nothing left for me. I am in debt about 500,000 kyat to other people. I don't know how to get that a mount of money to pay them back. My wife is forcing me to work in Thailand."

According Ko Kyaw Aye, about 200 farmers and 1,500 acres of rainy season paddy fields had been flooded in that area. "Don't tell us to replant again, the rice was destroyed in the field and we don't want to clean it. We are depressed by doing farm work this year," he added.

Burmese Government Abuse

Despite the losses of Mon State's farmers, the SPDC has instituted a policy of repairing lost paddy fields, in hopes of meeting last year's production quota and because of possible governmental surveys from high level agricultural administrators in heavily farmed areas (regardless of flood losses).

In the first week of September, the Township Pace and Development council (TPDC) held a meeting with the Burmese government's Agriculture Manager. They analyzed how the flooding affected the area's rice production, conferred with the Burmese Agricultural Department, and analyzed how much rice Burma was expected to produce and sell this year. After surveying the dismal production numbers, the TPDC ordered the farmers to achieve the agricultural output the government had previousl expected for the year; the farmers were forced to replant.

Said 70-year-old Oo Myint Kyaw who owns 25 acres of farm fields in Tarana villager, Kyaikmayaw Township:

"The situation created more problems for the farmers. Although the farmer faced the flooding of their paddy fields and losing their plantations, the local authorities never came and asked us if we needed support and help." Oo Myint Kyaw's paddy plantation is the township where Burma's agricultural department likes to lead plantation tours, because the paddy fields are located near the motor road.

Oo Myint Kyaw also said,

"They [agriculture committee] are irresponsible. They just know how benefit to themselves. Because they forced me to be "show" my paddy plantation, I patiently drew the planting lines get them to be straight lines and to look beautiful. I owned 25 acres of land but 10 acres of land I needed to plant to "show" the plantation to the Agriculture committee. I spent 80,000 kyat per acre. I also used 3 to 4 packages of fertilizer per acre. In August, when the heavy rain occurred, no one from the Agriculture committee came to look at the field. Two day ago, they came to look around but they didn't give any help and support."

One of the government Agriculture managers in the area claimed that there have been about 10,000 acres of rice paddies destroyed by flooding between Kamarwat and Naine Hlone village. He said, "I feel sorry for the farmers. If we look at the current commodity prices now, it will cost a lot of money to restart their farm to produce enough rice to please the state. We can estimate how much money they lost on their farms this year. Next year rice prices will rise and our consumers will also face difficulties; therefore, the government should give support to the farmers to replant their plantations again. However, the local authorities have forced farmers to replant to boost production in the damaged areas."

A famer from Mudon Township went on to explain "Now they force the farmers to use Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) seeds to replant the destroyed plantations. It will cause more problems for the farmer. The local authorities just want to achieve their desired production amounts." Despite the fact that it grows quickly, many farmers are hesitant to use GMO rice, as it is not as popular with consumers. Farmers also have to keep their seeds for replanting, which means that once they start planting with GMO rice, their future crops will be compromised.

According to U Yone, 65 years old from Kohdon village, Kyaikmayaw Township, "I have been farming the whole of my life, but I never was satisfied with outcome of farming. We rarely had leftover money from selling our rice. The reason we did not make money from our farming is because a couple of years ago, we took out loans from the government to pay for paddy fields. We also have to pay for extortion money for local authorities, forced labor, and village security. The money that we get from selling our rice was used as extortion money. This is the same situation with the paddy purchasing loans. With the heavy rains in this year, we lost 15 acre of our farm. We can't afford the money and human resources to replant again. I think our family will be starving in the coming years. Hopefully, the Township agricultural committee will not

forced us to plant again.”

Additional Burdens for Mon State’s Farmers

Forcing Farmers to Guard the Gas Pipeline

In addition to forcing farmers to deal with the repercussions of this year’s flooding and the trails of replanting without governmental economic assistance, the Burmese government has placed additional burdens on the shoulders of Mon State’s agricultural communities by forcing farmers to assume responsibility for the maintenance and security of its Kanbauk-Myaigkalay gas pipeline; farmers are also expected contribute their labor to the Burmese government-owned rice paddies.

To avoid a possible explosion and leak of the Kanbauk-Myaigkalay gas pipeline, or attacks from armed groups, the local SPDC Township authorities have ordered the village civilians between Ye and Thanbyuzayat Townships to guard the pipeline. The gas pipeline starts at the Kanbauk gas field in Tenasserim Division, runs through Mon State, and eventually provides gas to a cement factory in Pa-an Township of Karen State. The pipeline route passes through into many townships in Mon State such as Ye, Thanbyuzayat and Mudon townships; it cuts through many of the townships’ orchards, rubber plantations, and paddy fields. The poorly constructed pipeline has occasionally burst or been damaged by rebel forces. Due to this damage to the pipeline, the Burmese Army in the area concerned has instructed local civilians to increase security in the area. Each household is forced to guard the pipeline for 24 hours as part of a rotating schedule, and village headmen order households who miss their turn to guard the pipeline out of their villages.

According to Maung Aye, 34, a rainy season paddy farmer from Waewinkara village, farmers in the area have been ordered by the Burmese Army to fence the pipeline, to cover the pipeline with soil, and to maintain security around it. Farmers who fail to perform these duties are punished, even during the emergency situation of the August floods.

Due to the army’s orders, some farmers have to hire day-laborers from the village and pay them to handle burying duties; the greater the length of pipeline that passes through a particular farm, the greater the labor costs for that particular farmer. The labor cost for one day is about 3,500 Kyat and the farmers have to pay for all labor costs (Maung aye said he spent 7,000 Kyat for two days hiring day laborers to complete his pipeline duties). After spending extra money to hire laborers to handle their shares of the pipeline duties, farmers are even less able to pay for the costs of replanting their rice paddies after the flooding.

Nai Bloh, 56, a paddy farmer from Doma village in the southern part of Mudon Township, said he has to spend a lot of money in labor costs to cover the gas pipeline with soil and bamboo every year. This year, he had spent almost 70,000 kyat for his share of pipeline maintenance. “It is too much for me to spend this money on fencing and covering the gas pipeline but I have no courage to act against their orders. Otherwise, my five acres of paddy lands will be confiscated,” Nai Bloh explained.

Farmers Forced to Work on the Burmese Army’s Farms

Farmers whose lands are situated near those owned by government authorities, or land owned by the Burmese Army, are always forced to labor on these lands as well as their own.¹ The farmers are constantly forced into performing a variety of activities on the government’s or army’s farms for entire cultivation periods. When the authorities or army celebrate an important occasion related to agriculture, the farmers are again forced to contribute their labor. For example, in the second week of June 2009, Army officers from Waekali based No. 4 Military Training Center ordered Waekali village committee to send 45 farmers (both men and women) to plough and plant rainy season paddies on 15 acres of land owned by the battalion.

“Our village had to send 45 farmers to work for No. 4 Military battalion owned paddy fields with no payment. It took two week to finish our duty of ploughing and then planting the paddy seeds. I heard that farmers from other village were forced to work in the battalion’s paddy farms as well.” Nai Kon Blai, a Waekali resident reported.

During the entire cultivation period of various crops – rice, peanut, corn, cane and others – local authorities

Dear Readers,

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995 by a group of young Mon people. The main objectives of HURFOM are:

- monitoring the human rights situation in Mon territory and southern Burma,
- protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma

To these ends, we produce the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletter. We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or know someone who might like to receive the newsletter. Please email or mail us a name and address; our contact information is on the back page.

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

or the Burmese Army's battalions always use the farmers or the civilians in the area as laborers. The villagers or the local civilians are forced to work on a rotating, unpaid basis. Normally, this type of forced labor starts in June when the rainy season begins, and ends in November or December of harvest season. Between their duties on SPDC-owned farms, farmers in Mon State have little time to undertake the the arduous process of cleaning and replanting their paddy fields after the August floods.

Opinions

Despite the SPDC-ordered replanting efforts, many area farmers believe that such widespread flooding and loss of paddy crop will have long-term negative consequences for farmers and their families throughout Mon state. HURFOM field reporters spoke with region's farmers, many who voiced their expert opinions on the widespread impacts would be of the destruction of this year's rice crop.

Ye Win, 35 years old, Burmese, said to reporter:

"For sure, in 2010 there will food crisis in Mon State. Farmers cannot produce enough rice for people in this area. Another thing is that if there is not enough rice from Mon State, people will import rice from other states. Prices will increase from transportation and resale costs. Also, there are more people here. The population has been increasing in Mon state. Middle Burma people are coming to Mon state to find work.

According to U Nyein Ngwe, who owns 15-acres of rice paddies, al totally damaged by flooding, he has never faced this level of damage the whole of his career as a farmer life. He estimated that this year flooding will cause huge problems for the farmers in Mon State.



Many paddy farmers lost their crops after flooding in August in Kyaikmayaw Township

"I spent about 70,000 kyat per acre. I planted 15 acres for this year. I really hope for a good outcome for this year. About 70,000 kyat is including fertilizer cost, paddy-transplanting workers cost. If the authorities forced us to replant again, I can only afford two acres. If I combined all the costs of what we lost for this year, it would cost about 1,000,000 kyat. Although they want us to replant our plantation, it's too late to replant our plantation. If we replant again we must wait for another 5 months to get to this step again. It's possible to replant again. We don't want to loose a



Photo of a damaged rainy season paddy after flooding from the Yinn yein spillway in Paung Township

second time of our plantation.”

“For this years plantation, we had been borrowing some money to buy fertilizer and rent some people for transplanting for the 15 acres of plantation. This year we lost everything,” U Nyein Ngwe added.

Other villagers around Paung Township also have been facing similar problems.

A Paung Township rice trader claims:

“Next year rice prices will rise, and that this year’s harvest will not produce enough rice. If there is not enough rice from Mon State, rice from Pegu Township and Thailand will have to be imported into Burma. If we estimate all the transportation costs and trader benefits, the rice prices will rise

enormously next year, I think. Even the farmers will need to buy rice for themselves.”

Conclusion:

As a crucial part of Burma’s economy and a key element of peoples diet’s throughout the region, the widespread loss of rice crops in Mon state has and will continue to be devastating to the region. Not only have the livelihoods of numerous farmers been destroyed, but the loss of a crucial crop will be a dire knock to the region’s economic stability and will threaten Burma’s people with widespread malnourishment and starvation.

While the extreme seasonal rain is clearly the fault of no one, the losses caused by the subsequent flooding, and the failure of dams designed specifically to prevent such flooding, are the responsibility of the Burmese government. Rather than meeting this disaster head-on, and addressing the current and potential future consequences of this catastrophe, the SPDC has pursued of a policy of deluded ignorance. By forcing villagers to replant a second crop that they cannot afford to plant, in season that will end before the crop can mature, the SPDC administration has demonstrated its characteristic lack of comprehension of the most basic domestic and economic processes. In addition, forcing farmers hard-hit by the crop loss to turn their attention to repairing and guarding the Kanbauk-Myaingkalay natural gas pipeline drains what little money farmers might have saved, and undermines farmers’ efforts to recover from this year’s loss.

A clear-cut solution to this disaster is not forthcoming, and tragically it will negatively impact thousands of lives across Mon State. For this reason HURFOM hopes to emphasize the significance of the Burmese government’s responsibility in exacerbating the effects of the flooding in Mon state, and its culpability in future negative domestic and economic developments.

HURFOM
P. O. Box 2237
General Post Office
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
<http://www.rehmonnya.org>

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