Women narratives: the life of a refugee

The nine refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border are home to people displaced by war, economic hardship, and Burmese military assaults on ethnic areas. Many refugee women are burdened by difficulties, but still holding on to hope.

“I hear that Burma is changing, but I do not trust the government…”

WCRP: Her alias is Naw La Marn and she is 31 years old. She has two sons, nine and twelve years old, and a six-year-old daughter. Naw La Marn grew up in the village of Kyaut Pyat in Kawkareik Township, Karen State, where she worked on a farm in her youth. But, when she was 14, her parents moved the family, never to return. When Naw La Marn married at age 18, her wedding was held in a refugee camp.

There are nine refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border, in towns like Mae Hong Son, Mae Sot, Mae Sariang, and Sangkhlaburi. They are home to refugees displaced by war, economic hardship, and Burmese military assaults on ethnic areas. Women struggle to protect their families and to confront the instability of refugee life, but many remain hopeful that change will come.

In 1993, fighting between Karen and Burmese soldiers in Kyine Tone Township caused the local people, including Naw La Marn and her family, to flee their villages. Naw La Marn’s family first arrived in Ka Li Ka Tha resettlement camp in Mae Sot and lived there for two years, after which they were

Reports of child trafficking and abuse prompt educational workshop on the border

WCRP: On July 7, local health and child rights organizations jointly offered a child trafficking workshop in Gu Bao village, located in the border area of Three Pagodas Pass Township. Reports surfaced that incidents of child trafficking and abuse in the village were imminent, and the workshop was quickly mobilized in the hopes of stopping violations before they occurred. The event aimed to create awareness about child protection laws and facilitate an open community forum to share opinions and concerns.

Read more on page 5 >>
Support Women’s Capacity and Listen to Their Voices

Much of the world has been intoxicated by the changes taking place in Burma over the past year. Sanctions are lifting, businesspeople are scouting opportunities, and government promises of reform and freedoms frequently capture global headlines. However, for many of the country’s residents, these acclaimed transitions amount to little more than rumor. In some areas, violations committed by the military or government are reducing, but new abuses may be taking their place as the country rushes toward democratic and development goals.

WCRP continues to receive reports of abuses impacting women and children, including ongoing threats from human trafficking and exploitation, gaps in access to healthcare and education, and obstacles to adequate income. Women IDPs and refugees often suffer from uncertainty about their livelihoods and futures, and the sudden shift in funding priorities from the border region to inside Burma has caused drastic cuts to education and social programs.

While this moment in Burma’s transition includes a number of enduring difficulties and new challenges, there is also an emerging space for women’s participation and empowerment. WCRP is working closely with the Mon Women Network (MWN) and other women’s organizations and partnerships to ensure that women are connected, learning, sharing, and growing together. Our activities aim to offer training and leadership skills, encourage women’s participation in the peace process, educate children about child rights, resolve conflicts such as trafficking and abuse through educational workshops, and advocate for women’s increased engagement in civil society.

Through this communal hard work and dedication, women can be more confident than ever to engage with peace talks, political processes, community development initiatives, and civil society movements. The rapid pace of change must be met with equally swift action in peace, democratic representation, and development.

We ask that local, regional, and international organizations answer the timely call to support women’s capacity and listen to women’s voices.

Donor cuts nearly shut down middle school in refugee camp

July 11, 2012

**WCRP:** Earlier this year, the sole donor of a middle school at the Bang Ton Yan refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border cut two thirds of its aid, nearly shutting down the school. ZOA International’s Thailand program had previously supported everything at the school from books to pencils to teacher salaries. In 2011, the donor cited a lack of funds as evidence that they were unable to maintain previous levels of aid. However, ZOA also stated that, by 2014, they plan to phase out funding in Thailand entirely to focus inside Burma. These rapid and often unexpected shifts in donor funding are taking a toll on border communities, leaving organizations scrambling to maintain services or simply to keep their doors open.

A supervising school officer from Bang Ton Yan said, “They cut all of their support and we felt like we wanted to close down the school and not run it anymore. We did not know how to go forward or talk to the children’s parents and the school committees. After discussion, we decided to continue and keep the school open.”

In 2012, the Mon National Education Committee

Read more on page 9 >>
Parents question strenuous student schedules

July 6, 2012

WCRP: The parents of middle and high school students in Mudon Township, Mon State, have expressed concern about the lack of downtime in their children’s schedules caused by obligations to attend “tuition” and “extra time” after school. “Tuition” is a common practice in which schoolteachers or people from outside the school system charge a fee to teach the same lessons taught during class-time, but after school. The hope is that students will gain from the added instruction, but students’ parents describe how the same teachers who provide minimal instruction during school offer more detailed information in tuition, creating a situation in which parents and students worry that without attending tuition, grades and exams will suffer.

One resident of Naing Hlon village, Mudon Township explained, “After the students arrive home from school, they have to go directly to tuition. Even though the students have no time to relax, it seems to have become a custom in the village. All students, including those in primary school, go to tuition. The parents think their children will pass their exams if they attend tuition, which is why they allow them to go. In my village, the students in grades 8, 9 and 10 have to pay 60,000 Kyat per month in tuition fees. They tuition teachers are called “guides” and teach every subject in the village.”

This year, government teachers in Duya village, Ye township, were prohibited from teaching tuition. The government increased their salaries by 90,000 Kyat per month, and asserted that this monetary boost should prevent the need to seek additional income. However, villagers who graduated from government schools but are not employed as teachers are allowed to teach tuition by obtaining a license or contract from the government.

According to an “extra time” teacher in Duya village, government teachers still try to offer tuition because they feel the salary increase did not entirely replace their dependence on supplemental pay. Therefore, the custom of teaching “extra time” has developed. In practice, extra time provides the identical service as tuition, giving students critical support that was not given to them in school. According to parents, and similarly to tuition, many schoolteachers who teach “extra time” only lecture on the basics during the day, and demand a fee for the added support after regular school hours. Government teachers negotiate with school assistants to be given extra teaching time for which there is a monthly fee of 1,000 Kyat for primary school students, 1,500 Kyat for middle school, and 2,000 Kyat for high school students, in spite of assurances that teachers will offer instruction for free.

According to a non-government schoolteacher from Duya village, “I feel sad for the students because they have no time to rest and they are always in a hurry. When they come back from school, it is already 4:30 pm and they do not have time for personal study that they could use to try to understand the different teaching methods they are exposed to every day. In school there are many students, and since teachers cannot give one-on-one instruction, they feel they have to attend tuition after school in order to get more assistance.”

The students are often exhausted by the challenging schedules because they rush to attend tuition and extra teaching time.

A student’s mother from Three Pagodas Pass, a border town where students experience similar issues to those in Mon State, said, “I pity my son, he has no time for a break. After he finishes his class time, his teacher teaches tuition in the school. I have to pay 200 Thai Baht per month for my son’s tuition fee. I don’t understand how their teacher can teach so differently in their class and their tuition. Every student from the school goes to tuition, and that is why I also allow my son to go there—to get good grades on his exam.”
Mon language study only allowed on weekends in government schools

Layiltaw – Mon language study is only permitted in Mon State government schools two days a week, on Saturdays and Sundays, according to a source from Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) Center.

During a meeting on April 11th between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and U Aung Min, the chief government peace negotiator, MNEC official Mi Sar Dar presented a Mon language program to be taught in governmental schools.

“The MNEC will negotiate with the government this May regarding future plans [for studying Mon language],” said an official of MNEC.

The main objectives of MNEC are to preserve Mon literature and culture, teach Mon language to Mon youth, and teach Mon grammar usage to Mon people.

In 1995, during a previous NMSP ceasefire, there were 109 governmental schools in Moulmein, Kawkareik, Kyakmayaw, Kyarinnseikyi, and Southern and Northern Ye Townships that allowed Mon language study.

Now, according to the official of MNEC, the Committee plans to get permission to offer Mon language in about 400 governmental schools in Mon State, and to institute the changes within three years.

“The plan will start in 2012. [Mon language will be] offered from first to fifth grades. The primary school textbooks will be based on a curriculum designed by MNEC.”

Subjects to be covered include Mon history, poetry, culture, art, and grammar.

During the early years of independence under U Nu, government schools allowed the study of Mon language, and a Board of Mon Education was organized in 1954. Mon teachers were appointed to government schools and Mon language was officially allowed in primary education.

The first setback occurred in 1962, when Mon language was prohibited by the Burma Socialist Programme Party, although it was still offered part-time at some governmental schools through unofficial agreements.

Responding to growing constraints, the NMSP founded the MNEC in 1972 and provided grade-by-grade study of Mon language. The Party also formed a small, central education delegation in 1984-85.

Finally, in 1988, the study of Mon language was completely banned in government schools. Mon people, like other ethnic groups, lost the right to study their mother language.

Today, there are more than two million Mon people living in lower Burma.
moved to Nu Po camp for another two years.

Next, they spent three years in Moe Kae camp, but when the site was destroyed, they had to relocate to Umphiem camp. Naw La Marn and her family are still there today, twelve years later.

Naw La Marn’s husband works on a farm near Umphiem to earn extra income, bringing in 130 baht per day. She said, “As long as my husband has a job, we do not need to worry about food because his salary fills the gap between what we are given by the camp and what we need to feed the family. There were times when my husband did not have a job and it was so difficult for my family to live in the camp.”

When she first arrived, Naw La Marn did not know she could apply for a UN refugee card to pursue asylum in another country. UNHCR came to the camp to register refugees, but she did not enroll. Later, she saw refugees being relocated to a “third country,” and she asked them how they did it, quickly realizing the missed opportunity. When UNHCR came for another round of card registrations, her husband was not home and the chance was lost again.

Refugees have to register and subsequently interview with UNHCR to receive a UN refugee identification card. Without a refugee card, even people living in the camp are not acknowledged by UNHCR as having refugee status. It is a crucial first step to obtain the UN card before camp residents can hope to be moved to a third country.

Naw La Marn reported that sometimes she feels like her family’s lives are meaningless, because she does not know what will happen in their futures. She has lived in camp for a long time, but still has no idea when she will be able to leave.

According to a WCRP field reporter, most refugees that live in the camps have varying dreams, but dampened spirits. Some want to move to a third country to do business, believing Burma would not have enough jobs for its citizen or returned refugees. Some want to move to seek better education and health services than Burma offers. Others just hope to receive education for themselves and their children, wherever they can get it.

One Karen woman who has lived in Umphiem camp for four years said, “I am from Pa-an Township, Karen State. I came here because of economic problems. I have four daughters and two sons. I left our village twelve years ago and arrived in Umphiem camp in 2009. We are very poor and if we lived in Burma, we could not afford my children’s education. Before, my husband and I worked as day workers and made just enough to feed the family. In Burma, education costs are very high, so we want to be relocated to a third country.”

A 17-year-old girl living in Mae La camp for four years said, “Our hope is to be relocated to a third country where we can get an education and learn business skills before we go back to Burma. Even though we want to return eventually, if we go back now we will definitely face problems because we have nowhere to live and no work to do. We want to improve our chances to have a good life when we go back to our mother country.”

A 35-year-old Mon woman from Ban Don Yang camp near Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi province, explained, “I am from Yin Ye village, Southern Ye Township, Mon State. I have a 5-year-old daughter. In my village, the armed ethnic groups and Burmese soldiers were always fighting with each other, so we left in 2007. I hear that Burma is changing, but I do not trust the government and don’t want to go back. I worry for my daughter’s future.”

Naw La Marn, now going on her nineteenth year as a refugee, said, “If I have the chance to leave I will go with my family, but don’t want to be separated from them. Although I have not received any information about relocation, and we do not know if they will allow us to go, I still have hope for my children’s education and futures. I do not want to give up.”

<< From Page 1, Women narratives

voices
Women IDPs and refugees continue to face challenges to livelihood

June 6, 2012

WCRP: Women’s livelihoods in resettlement areas remain insecure due to shortages of food and employment. Although female internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees face demanding environments in their respective camps, most of them do not want to go back to Burma. They worry that they will not have a place to live and do not trust the government to assume responsibility to help them resettle.

In Halokhani, a camp for Mon IDPs in the New Mon State Party (NMSP) controlled area along the Thai-Burma border, women work hard to generate income, but often do not make enough to feed their children. There are three IDP resettlement sites inside the NMSP area of Mon State—Halokhani, Bee Ree, and Tavoy—and many IDPs have lived in these sites since 1995 when they were displaced by conflict. Even after ceasefire agreements were signed, IDPs often had no home to return to, or feared leaving and being displaced again.

One 40-year-old woman in Halokhani camp said, “The support from donors is not enough to feed my family. I divorced my husband over two years ago and I need to care for and feed my children, who attend school while I try to find work. In [the camp] many people work on the farm, but farm owners do not hire female laborers because they think women cannot work as hard as men. The male workers get paid 150 Baht per day, and women should be able to work the same job for the same salary. It is very difficult for women who do not have a husband to get a job on the farm. If we could just get enough rice, I think we would not face such difficulties.”

She added that, to generate income, some women are given vegetables in nearby Blehdoonphite village to sell in the Halokhani resettlement site. They use the earnings to pay the vegetable farmers back and can keep whatever money is left. Many women work hard and still only have enough money to buy food, but nothing extra.

Some families would like their children to attend school, but when they reach 3rd or 4th grades, the students must migrate to Thailand to work and send money home.

A few IDPs rely on their own local businesses for income, but most have no money or relatives and depend on donated food that amounts to two meals, mainly of rice, each day. These IDPs are at the mercy of sporadic income from seasonal work—cutting bamboo shoots, working in orchards or rubber plantations, and cutting long grass to make brooms.

One prominent donor in the region supplies IDPs with rice three months out of the year, but previously provided rice year-round. Cuts in provisions as part of a reduction in funding to IDPs has compounded an already unstable situation.

Refugees face similar challenges to IDPs in relation to food and livelihood security. Women refugees from Umphiem Camp in Mae Sot, home to almost 16,000 refugees including Mon, Karen, Palaung, Kachin, Chin, Shan, and some ethnically South Asian people, report that they are not adequately supported by the donor, and have also experienced reduced provisions. Donors who once provided 13 kilos of rice and one liter of oil to each adult (children receiving half that ration size) now supply 12 kilos of rice and 0.5 liters of oil.

One woman who has lived in Umphiem camp for five years said, “I would like to be relocated to a third country because life is so difficult here and I worry about my children’s education and future. Jobs are not available and most people have to seek income outside the camps. Women find work picking chilies or cutting grass to earn around 80 Baht per day. During rainy season, the situation becomes more difficult as women fear for their safety while travelling outside the camp. Some children cannot attend school because they care for younger sisters or brothers while the parents are away working.”
First ever Women and Peace Workshop held in Mon State

June 29, 2012

**WCRP:** On June 17, the first “Women and Peace Workshop” was organized by the Mon Women Network (MWN) at Nai Shwe Kyin’s library in Moulmein, Mon State. The workshop advocated for women’s participation in peace talks and created a space for women seeking to connect with Burma’s reforms. Attendees were invited to share with each other, learn key concepts, and strategize for the future, representing an important milestone for Mon women.

The MWN organizer said, “I feel very good about this workshop because more prominent participants attended than we planned for or expected, so we were able to learn about and discuss peace and women’s issues with many of our Mon colleagues. I would say the workshop was successful even though many things had to be hurriedly adjusted leading up to the event. The workshop was successful in that it was the first workshop organized by MWN and it achieved the intended outcomes, despite being held during the heavy Moulmein rains in Mon State.”

The Women and Peace Workshop centered around MWN’s objectives of linking different participants in order to gain education in peace building, negotiation, and mediation. The workshop also addressed and promoted UNSCR 1325, the first formal and legal document from the United Nations Security Council that requires parties in a conflict to respect women’s rights and to support their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Participants were exposed to international practices and discussed engagement with the Burma peace process. The workshop encouraged both representatives from organizations and individuals to strengthen and grow the network.

A woman from Moulmein who attended the workshop said, “I have never attended a workshop like this before. This workshop is very important to me and for all women who can participate in peace talks because we can understand how to talk about peace in the community and in government. We can also better understand the process of peace talks. Right now, a peace-building workshop is important for me but is also important for people all over the world. Without peace it is difficult for us to accomplish our work. Some talk about peace but they don’t understand what it means. We all should reflect about how we are going to talk and build trust with each other. I am very glad to attend this workshop because we can learn the strategies of peace building. We can understand the way to talk peace”.

The workshop discussions covered mediation and negotiation, female roles in negotiation, women’s participation in the peace talks, UNSCR 1325, developing strategies for political engagement, and analyzing relevant lessons from Nepal and Sri Lanka case studies.

In total, 23 women from Mon State attended the Women and Peace Workshop. The event was facilitated by the Shalom Foundation (Nyein Foundation) and organized by the Mon Women Network, a group established in December 2011 by Mon women from Mon State and the Thai-Burma border. ■
Mi Sauh Ta Jo, coordinator of the Women and Child Rights Project and workshop organizer, said, “In recent years, we just collected and documented issues of abuse. But this year, because villagers informed us that child trafficking was ongoing, we wanted to hold a workshop to promote education and the exchange of ideas. For this reason, we rushed to hold the workshop to prevent any problems. We also announced that we would take responsibility for prosecuting any person who commits child trafficking.”

The International Labor Organization estimates that, worldwide, 1.2 million children are trafficked every year, and between 200,000 and 250,000 women and children are trafficked in Southeast Asia alone.

Child trafficking and abuse in Three Pagodas Pass Township often occurs due to gaps in education, awareness about legal implications, and law enforcement. The absence of consistent work and adequate salaries in the area also exacerbates the problem, creating an environment in which families may see children as the means to elude extreme poverty or family turmoil. The following three cases, reported shortly before the workshop was organized, detail some of the frequent challenges to child rights and protection faced in border regions.

**Potential child trafficking**

In May, a local 15-year-old girl arranged to be smuggled to Bangkok to find work. Since the day she left for the smuggler’s house, her parents have not received any word from her. The parents, along with local members of the Mon Women Network (MWN), went to the smuggler's house to search for her, but the girl was not there. The smuggler acted aggressively towards them, frightening the group into not asking about the girl. The parents believe their daughter had no money when she left home because they had forbidden her to leave and gave her no financial support. The village chairman was informed about the missing girl, but did not actively pursue the case. The girl’s parents continue to contact MWN in the hopes that information may come to light.

**Unregulated adoption**

On June 2, 2012, a local woman gave birth to a son two months prematurely. The boy was immediately given to a broker who was to facilitate the baby’s sale to a childless couple from Su Rak village. When MWN learned of the exchange, they became concerned about the baby’s chance of survival after being taken from his mother before ever being breast-fed. MWN members visited the broker to entreat him to give the baby back to his mother, and also called the village chairman to aid with the child’s return. The mother had decided to sell her son for 50,000 Baht to pay a debt, and although her husband opposed the sale, she planned to sell the child while the father was away. MWN members eventually persuaded the woman to care for her son for a few days before the couple arrived. When the couple came to take the baby four days later, MWN members tried to dissuade them.

According to MWN member Ma Aye Myint, “When I asked them what they were going to do with the baby, they said that they have no son or daughter and want to look after the baby. I told them that if they really want to support the baby, they should not make a deal like this and should use that money to support his future. If you purchase the child with money, you are not far from the law. When I explained it to them like that, the couple confessed fault because they did not understand the law. They thanked me because now they understand the issue. They left with their money and without the baby. Later, the baby’s father arrived and now they can live peacefully.”

**Child Abuse**

Mi Khing, the mother of 6-year old boy Mg Thu Ra, decided to give her son to villager Nai Pan Nyoke on July 5, 2012. Mg Thu Ra was Mi Khing’s son from a previous marriage, and her new husband was extremely abusive toward the boy. Nai Pan Nyoke accepted the child as his son, without offering payment, and planned to raise the boy to become a monk. At that point, MWN members intervened to ensure that Nai Pan Nyoke would treat Mg Thu Ra with respect and would give the boy to his biological father, without requesting payment, in the event of his return.

**Conclusion**

To improve awareness and strengthen community dedication to child protection, workshop facilitators explained international laws on child trafficking and the criminal sentences mandated by Burmese and Thai trafficking laws. Burma’s human trafficking law dates to 2005 and penalizes any person convicted of child trafficking with a minimum of 10 years in prison, a maximum of life in prison, and a possible fine. In Thailand, if a child under the age of 15 is trafficked, the sentence for the trafficker is between 8 and 15 years in prison, with a fine of at least 160,000 Baht and up to 300,000 Baht.

Attendee Ma Aye Myint said, “For me, the workshop was very helpful because we rural people have not attended this kind of event held in our area before. Now, since there is a workshop that promoted education for rural people, there are positive expectations for us to improve our actions and knowledge.”
Shin Saw Puu Association represents important step in women’s leadership and civil participation

“This Association really encourages women to participate in leadership roles, and they inspire many women to get involved.”

WCRP and IMNA – Women across Mon State are eagerly applying to the Shin Saw Puu Association for Mon women, founded earlier this year. The Association mobilizes members to work on social programs and help vulnerable women, and many community residents report that the group exhibits a sincere effort toward developing women’s leadership skills and financially assisting poor women and youth education. Despite the membership fee of 1,000 kyat per month, women from urban and rural areas alike are readily signing up.

Shin Saw Puu Association’s mission statement describes four primary objectives in economic development, healthcare, education, and social welfare for women. According to Chairman Daw Kyin, the group’s priority is to encourage Mon women who lack confidence because their husbands and children work abroad—these projects strive to assist women generate income to prevent their family members from ever leaving the country.

The Association is rapidly gaining new members—even the second meeting in early June attracted more than 500 Mon women from Rangoon and Pegu Divisions, and Mon and Karen States.

At the meeting, committee member Mi Moe Moe said, “For an economic project, [the association] is currently selling Shin-saw-Puu brand fertilizers. Later, the association plans to market rice and clothes, especially Mon dresses. Educational assistance will be provided. As a health project, free health care by three doctors per month will be available. Negotiation with the doctors is already complete. Thirty thousand (kyat) per funeral and ten thousand (kyat) per occasional well-being ceremony will be supported. Moreover, association members will offer personal assistance.”

Locals can establish Shin Saw Puu Association offices in their home village or city after receiving permission from the main office in Mawlamyine. Women from Rangoon, Karen State, and most villages of Thangebyuzayat, Apoung, Ye, Mudon, and Pegu Townships in Mon State have already set up small branches of their own.

Member Mi Yin Mon from Chao Palaing village in Thangebyuzayat Township said, “I was first interested in joining because the organization is named after Mon queen Shin Saw Puu. This Association really encourages women to participate in leadership roles, and they inspire many women to get involved. They provide for children who cannot continue school or who may not have a chance to study. I like their mission, especially the focus on women leadership, so I applied to be a member. For me, I think this foundation is very useful to women and I was happy to apply.”

The Association does not currently accept members who cannot pay the monthly dues, which are used to support community programs and services. Some local women expressed disappointment at being unable to afford the cost, and said they hope to eventually join.

“I will apply to be a member of the Association soon. I like their activities and, since many women apply, I want to join as well,” said a Mawlamyine resident who works with a community women’s organization.

One member of the central Shin Saw Puu Association in Mawlamyine said, “Any woman from anywhere can apply, and we simply strive to help women and children in the community. We have a lot of future plans, particularly supporting children who cannot attend school and providing yearly academic scholarships to two children from each participating township. We also intend to create an open study area for high school students.”

The Shin Saw Puu Association has three delegated representatives from 15 townships, and is led by Association Director Daw Kyin Than, second director Mi Kon Chit Chit, and secretary Mi Than Shin.
Young women leading community development projects

June 1, 2012

WCRP: For the first time, villages in Ye and Yebyu Townships are receiving community development projects led by women. Traditionally, most women in these Townships do not participate in leadership roles, and communities may doubt women’s ability to achieve development goals. However, these recent projects developed new infrastructure and became a source of pride for the young women, and, most importantly, changed the way villagers think about female roles in the community.

In early 2012, four young women began leading community development projects to assist their home communities. The four projects were each initiated in a different village and included cleaning the town well, building two new toilets for a state primary school, insulating a school’s metal roof, and replacing an old roof for a primary school.

The projects were designed to address the specific needs of each village. For example, the project to wash out the well was endeavored to improve local health by making clean drinking water accessible to the community. The project to insulate the school roof was developed to allow students to be able to study in the rainy and dry seasons. Now, teachers and parents do not need to worry about students getting heat sickness under the hot metal roof, and students will clearly hear their teachers speaking even when heavy rains pound the zinc sheeting.

The young woman who led the roof insulation project said, “I faced many problems during my project because I needed to involve the villagers, village headman, and monks. Sometimes they had disagreements with each other, and I found I needed to help resolve the issues first before we could begin working on the project. I had to determine how to motivate or encourage them when we faced problems, or explain our goal and the project’s benefits to the community in order to ensure we were successfully working together without any difficulties.”

She added that even though her project was implemented, she could not insulate the entire school roof because her budget was not sufficient to cover all the materials needed. Now, she and the village headman are collecting money from the villagers to complete the project. They also plan to paint the roof with a protective coating to keep insects out and safeguard the primary school for years to come.

Another of the project leaders, the young woman who installed two new toilets for a primary school, said, “My biggest challenge was that I am a younger woman, and in the beginning of the project some people who were older than me did not trust or respect me. But when they understood what I was actively doing for my village, they decided to help me and participate. They even came to me to discuss any problems they had. I am very excited and happy about my project because I overcame the obstacles to accomplish the work. When the project started, I was also worried that I would not reach completion because I was managing every aspect of the project—the budget, construction, scheduling, traveling, and even providing foods to the local people. I am proud of myself because some people doubted that I could help my community until the project was completed successfully.”

One villager reported that this was the first time the village had undertaken a community development project and thanked the young woman who led the endeavor. The resident said that the project outcome is very useful to the villagers and their children’s education and health.

The four projects were each scheduled to conclude in April, and while three are completed, one remains yet to finish due to complications.
KWAT Demonstrates Persistent Abuses and Impunity in Kachin State

June 14, 2012

HURFOM: This month, the Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (KWAT) released its report “Ongoing Impunity,” documenting firsthand accounts of human rights abuses in armed conflict-affected areas in Kachin State. The publication presents updated information about atrocities committed over the past year by the Burmese Government Army against ethnic Kachin and other local inhabitants. According to the findings, the Naypyidaw Government and its Army continue to commit serious human rights abuses without consequence.

“Ongoing Impunity” provides strong evidence for how the Burmese Government Army systematically uses rape as a weapon of war during conflict. KWAT field researchers documented the rape or sexual assault of at least 43 women and girls, 21 of whom were killed, since the outbreak of violence in June 2011. The report demonstrates how sexual violence against women has been widespread, occurring in thirteen townships of Kachin territory and committed by ten different battalions. Women have been gang-raped, inside a church in one case, or kept as sex slaves by military officers.

The report also addresses women forced to serve as porters. Women porters, unlike their male counterparts, have the added risk of being gang-raped in the armed conflict areas of Kachin State.

“Well, we used to work in the fields and gardens, but this year, the soldiers光学ed us not to work in the fields, and we had to stay home. We don’t know why they did that, but we heard that the soldiers光学ed them not to work.”

“Whenever war comes, many women and children are raped by the soldiers. We say that the government has a secret policy for soldiers to use rape as a weapon of war. This means that the government creates an environment of impunity for the soldiers,” said Moon Nay Li, a coordinator at KWAT.

KWAT calls on the international community to denounce human rights violations, maintain pressure on the Burmese government to implement a nationwide ceasefire and peace process, pull Army troops back from ethnic areas, and start dialogue with the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) in accordance with legitimate political reform.

The Kachin Women’s Association Thailand is a non-profit organization based in Chiang Mai that has worked on behalf of Kachin women since 1999.

<< From Page 2, Donor cuts nearly shut down middle school in refugee camp

(MNEC) increased its donated materials to include all necessary textbooks and workbooks for the school’s students, and many children’s parents collected money in the refugee camp, gathering over 2,000 baht in donations. But the contributions were not enough to cover teachers’ salaries, and the school committees had to continue seeking new funds.

“We faced such difficulty because of these situations. We have the teachers’ salaries for this month but, for next month, we have no idea where we will get school expenses or teacher salaries. We constantly have to think about how to get funds to continue running the school. We meet with the students’ parents and discuss together how to solve the problem. The parents give some money and some other people give donations to the school. We are grateful to the MNEC because, luckily, we got some support from their organization based in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand,” stated the school officer.

The Bang Ton Yan camp school currently employs seven teachers and serves 92 students. Known as “PAB-POC (Persons Admission Boards – Persons Of Concern) basic school,” the site has been operating since 2005 when the founding political refugees arrived at the camp. The school offers 1st through 6th grades and targets children of Mon and Tavoyan ethnic groups. Most teachers are camp residents who completed at least 8th grade in Burma, and now work full time, from 9 am to 5 pm, for 1,000 Baht per month. Instruction is given in Burmese, and children from Halokhani and Tee Pa Do refugee camps also attend.
July 24, 2012

WCRP: Since last month, the American Specialist Children’s Hospital in Moulmein has been overflowing with children stricken by dengue fever. The hospital, which mainly treats children from Mon State, is managing a dengue outbreak that has resulted in rooms crowded with child patients, overfull treatment areas, and frequent bed sharing. Children between the ages of three and ten are the most common victims of the disease, and there may be little respite from sickness until the rainy season concludes.

Children suffering from dengue fever are often turned away from village clinics, where health workers who are doubtful about satisfactorily treating the disease suggest patients visit the nearest hospital. The woman relative of a child with dengue fever explained, “The 7-year-old was getting sick and her mother took her to the clinic in Moulmein, but she did not get well. Five days later, she went to clinic again and the clinic doctor told the child’s mother to go to the hospital. When they arrived, the hospital staff ran a blood test and gave her medicine that cost the mother 12,000 kyat. The child stayed at the hospital for one week, but she got better and was able to go home.”

The relative added that, when she visited on July 14, the hospital’s communal patient room was exceedingly crowded and patients who wanted a private room had to pay 1,000 kyat per night. While the hospital employs many young doctors who recently finished their medical studies, most patients choose to wait for treatment from a doctor with more experience. Due to check-up and treatment times of roughly an hour and a half, the hospital quickly fills with patients waiting to be seen. According to the relative, while the hospital was overcrowded, the staff did separate sick and recovering patients to prevent disease from spreading.

Last year, the American Specialist Children’s Hospital faced similar crowds during the rainy season, which usually parallels an increase in cases of dengue fever. At that time, Myawaddy and Kawkareik Hospitals in Karen State also reported insufficient bed space to keep up with the influx of patients. This year, illnesses are projected to increase as the rainy season continues, and for now, there may be little to curb hospital overcrowding and child sickness.

“We always appreciate feedback from our readers. Please feel free to contact our mailing or email address.”

Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP)
P.O Box (35), Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi 71240
Thailand

Email:wcrcpcontact@yahoo.com
Website:http://reohmonnya.org