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### **Large-scale land confiscation for Salween dam infrastructure in northern Shan State**

Communities in over 60 villages have lost lands and houses due to construction of access roads and other infrastructure for the first dam on the Salween River in Burma, at Kunlong in northern Shan State.

Since 2012, Asia World Company has been constructing a new 100-kilometer highway from Hsenwi through Kunlong to the Chinese border. Not only have villagers lost houses, lands and crops without compensation, but road construction has caused flooding, soil run-off into farmlands, contamination of water sources, and disruption of day-to-day village life.

A new five-kilometer road has also been completed from Kunlong town north to the dam site, where 500 workers have been employed in cement and gravel production plants, and in building a power generating facility.

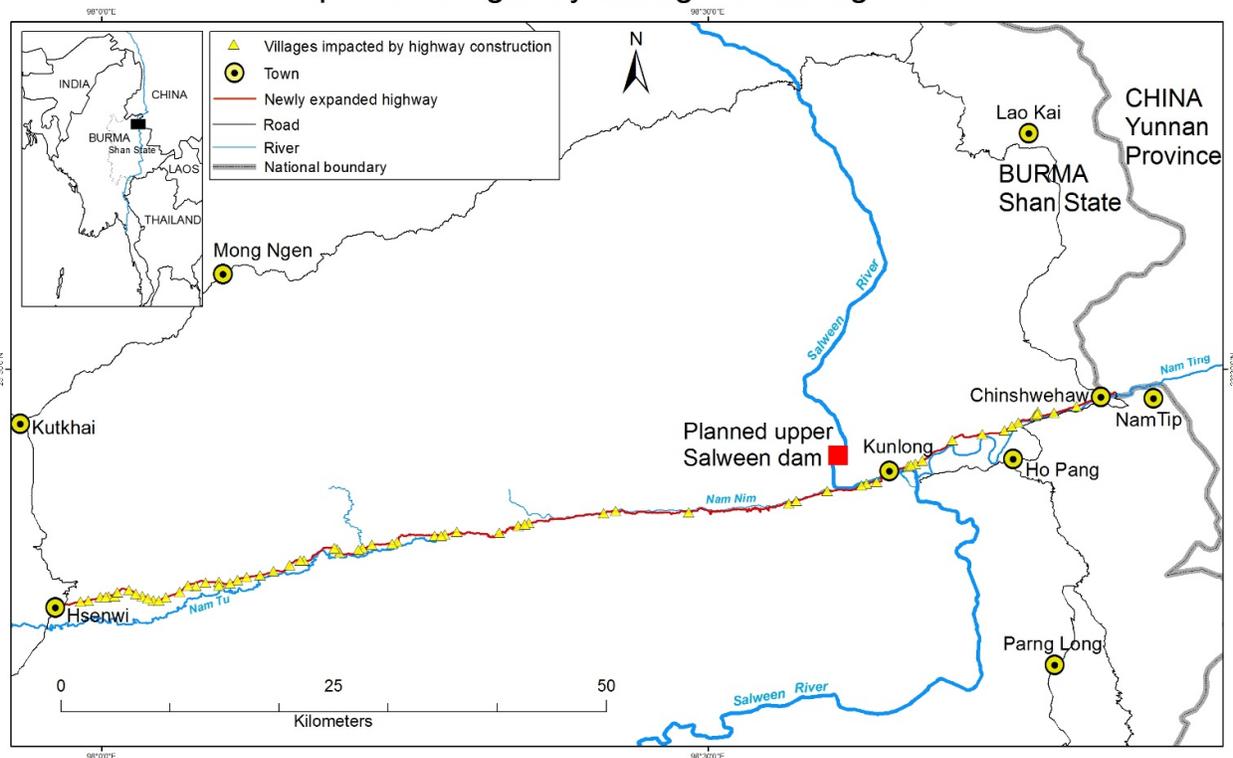
Villagers in the area have been given no information about the impacts of the dam, a joint venture between the Burmese government and a Chinese company, Hanenergy Holding Group, who will operate the project, exporting 1,200 (86%) of the 1,400 megawatts produced to China. Asia World is carrying out construction of the 100 meter tall dam, slated for completion in 2018, at a cost of US\$1.4 billion.

Kunlong villagers downstream of the dam, who rely on the Salween for their livelihoods, are worried about unpredictable water levels, and the danger of the dam breaking in this earthquake prone area. They also fear increased Burmese troop deployment to guard the dam. Kunlong is already heavily militarized, with five battalions and a military operations command stationed along the Salween river bank opposite the town, on land seized from local villagers.

The heavy Burmese military presence is due to Kunlong's strategic location between contested ethnic areas. It adjoins the Kokang and Wa self-administrative regions, and Kutkhai township, where attacks continue by the Burma Army against Kachin and Palaung armed groups, causing ongoing displacement west of the planned dam. There has been tightened security at Kunlong since December 17, 2013, when a bomb exploded near the town, killing five people, including two Asia World workers and a Burmese soldier.

The Shan Human Rights Foundation urges an immediate halt to construction of the Kunlong dam and related infrastructure, as the project lacks transparency, violates local people's rights, and is taking place in an area of active conflict. By going ahead with this massive project before a political settlement has been reached with the ethnic groups about control over natural resources, the Burmese government also risks derailing the peace process.

Map of new highway linking to Kunlong dam



### Interviews with villagers in Hsenwi and Kunlong townships, northern Shan State (April-December 2013)

SHRF travelled to Kunlong three times between April and December 2013, documenting conditions in the area and interviewing local villagers. Below are excerpts from these interviews. SHRF tried to access villagers living upstream of the dam who would be flooded, but due to fighting between government and Kachin forces, was not able to visit the area.

## **1. Impacts of road construction for the Kunlong dam**

Below are the names of some of the villages impacted by the building of the road from Hsenwi to the Chinese border. These villages are mostly inhabited by ethnic Shan:

1. Wan Mauk Zili
2. Pang Parng Na
3. Pang Na
4. Kung Nyaung
5. Ta Da U
6. Ho Naung
7. Waeng Nang
8. Kun Kok
9. Paeng Hung
10. Wan Hae
11. Tang Khan
12. Naung Pong
13. Phai Kham
14. Tawng Kheo
15. Kaung Phar
16. Na Kong
17. Tang Saw
18. Nam Zong
19. Mawng Mawn Tai
20. Kaung Kaw
21. Murng Pon Hwe
22. Nam Ja Larp
23. Ton Mong
24. Hseng Kaew
25. Nam Oon
26. Pang Tee
27. Na Tee
28. Loi Hsai
29. Pha Hsarn
30. Ho Ma
31. Ho Li
32. Wan Nar Khur
33. Nar Oong

Residents of these villages say they were first informed by land survey officials that a highway would be built, and that all land within a 50-foot width would be confiscated, and any buildings on this land knocked down, without compensation. Construction began in 2012, and continued throughout 2013. Fleets of Asia World trucks have been ferrying in stone and sand, and bulldozers have been demolishing buildings, gardens, fields and plantations along the sides of the road.

The road, built at a raised level, has blocked drainage, and is causing flooding. Also, soil dumped along the sides of the road has been washed away by rain, causing damage to buildings and fields, and polluting water sources.



*Highway construction underway near Kunlong*

### ***Disruption from trucks, dust, flooding, raised height of the road***

Villagers from Murng Pon Hwe and Nam Ja Larb

“Since they built the road, our house shakes when the big trucks pass by. There is so much dust too. Before, we did not suffer from flooding, but now the water floods into our house compound, and also into our kitchen too. Our rice field at the back of our house also flooded, and the rice was destroyed.”

“When the big trucks come and pass in front of our house, it shakes like an earthquake. There is more and more dust along the road. When the rain is heavy, the water from the road flows into our restaurant. We have to take this water out. Now it is a little better, because they built a small channel in front of the house. But when the big trucks pass, our house still shakes like before. They brought sand to put on the road and used their big wheeled trucks to build the road. Also, when it rains, the soil dumped along the sides of the road gets washed into people’s fields and gardens, and into the stream that all of us in the village depend on. The road has been raised up now to about the height of people’s waist. It is very difficult for us take out our motorbike onto the road. In October (2013), they will surface the road, and it will be about 12 inches higher.

“After they leveled the ground (for the road), they did not take the soil away from in front of our house. When it rained, the water flowed in and started to flood our house. Then, one of the Burmese military officers from a base on the hill came to see us. My husband asked him in broken Burmese language: are you going to let the water submerge our house? You should at least send 3 tractor-loads of sand to block the water from flooding our house. Then the Burmese officer provided us with two tractor-loads of sand to ease our concern. But then, when it rained, the soil from the sides of the road washed down near our new hut in a big pile. We said that we were not able to dig the soil away due to our old age; we are over 69 years. Our son and daughter have left us to have families. So, until now there is still a big pile. We could not remove the soil yet.”



*Highway construction through Nam Za Larb village; the buildings in the centre will be knocked down*

### ***No compensation for houses, shops, farms***

Villagers from Kun Kok , Nam Ja Larb, Murng Pon Hwe and Nar Oong:

“They have already measured to build the road. Some parts will pass through other people’s houses and some will pass through others’ fences. There is no compensation for that. Some people from the land measurement office said that all people are facing this problem, we cannot afford to compensate you.” Na Khur villager: “The authorities said they would take land from this side (of the road) about 25 feet and that side about 25 feet (measuring from the middle of the road), and it will include our shop. We don’t know what to do. Other people are facing the same

problem. They could not do anything, and are not even getting any compensation for their houses. So, it is just our shop and there is no way that they will compensate us.”

“The road has gone right up to the fence of some houses. In some places it has crossed people’s rubber farms. People lost their rubber trees, even though they were about to harvest the rubber. They said they would give compensation of 3,000 kyats (approx US\$3) for one rubber tree, but they haven’t given anything.”

“We heard the road is an ASEAN road. When they came and surveyed, the people who live opposite us were told that half of their house would be knocked down to build the road. We felt very sorry for them and so we told the surveyor to measure about two meters into our house area instead, where we have a shop to fix motorbikes. Now, they haven’t built the road up to where they have measured yet.”



*A shop by the side of the highway is now half-buried*

“When they measured (for the road), we learned it would pass through our fence. We could not do anything. Other people are facing the same problem. We just pray and rely on fate.”

### ***An old man loses his house, has to pay Asia World workers to level ground for a new one***

“When they measured the road area, they said it did not include our house. But when they came with their car to build the road, they said we would lose half of our house. We couldn’t do anything. I’m an old man. I don’t have enough strength to carry our property. I have to hire other people to do this for me. I told them: if you take my home and land, where will I have to live? Then they used their bulldozer to break half of my house. I told them: I can’t rebuild my house, can you level the ground (in the new site) for me? But the road builder answered: if we don’t get

money, we can't do it. So, I gave them 100,000 kyats (approx US\$100) to level the ground, and 20,000 kyat (approx US\$20) for the bulldozer driver. So I not only lost my home, but I had to spend 120,000 kyats of my money too. They said to us: Do not tell other people about this. Then, we told them, yes we will tell people about this because you have taken our money. It would be better for other people to know about this because you are tricky. After he had got the money from us, we did not see him anymore. We had to ask other people to make a new hut for us. It cost more than one million kyats (approx US\$1,000).



*Gravel production near the Kunlong dam site*

## **2. Interviews with villagers living downstream of the Kunlong dam**

SHRF interviewed Shan villagers living in and around Kunlong, including on the large island in the Salween River from which Kunlong (meaning “Large Island” in Shan) gets its name, about how they had been forcibly relocated (in 1992), their current livelihoods and their opinions about the planned Kunlong Dam.

### **Forcibly relocated to make way for Burmese military bases**

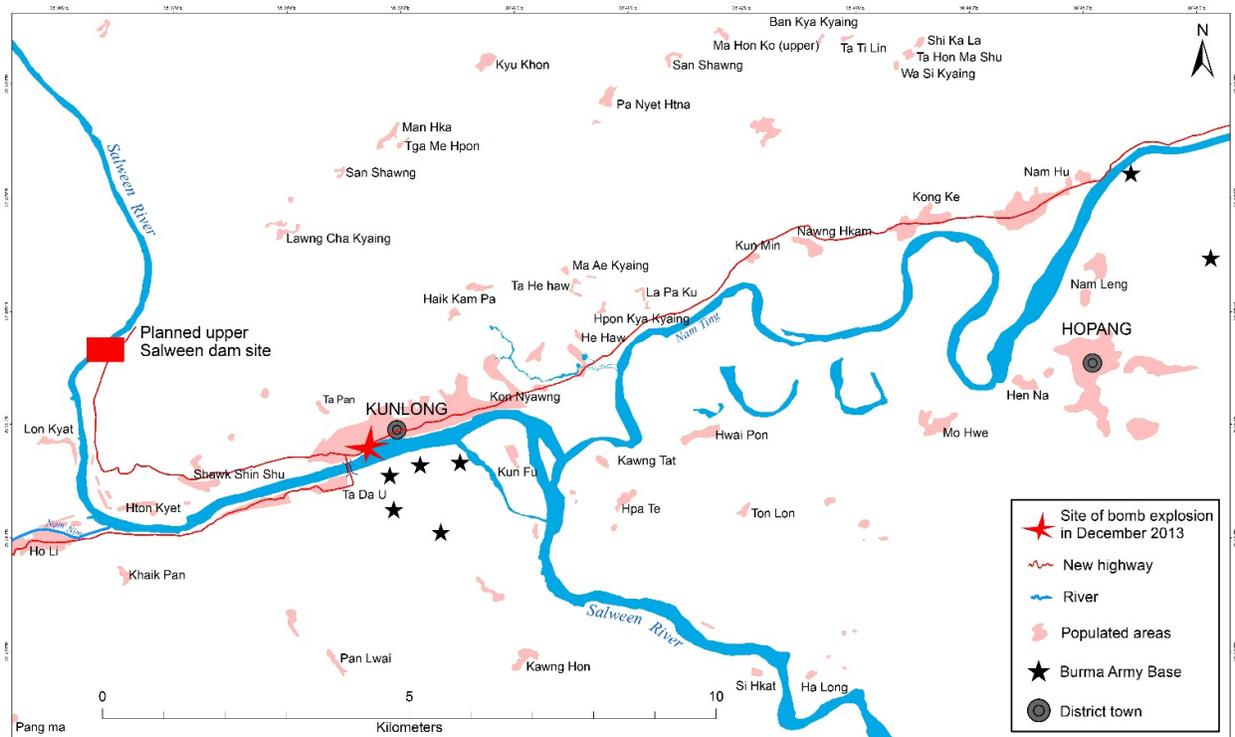
About 100 families had formerly lived in the village of Phaizarn Nam Wan Kao, on the Salween river bank opposite the town of Kunlong. However, in 1992, they were forced to move out of their village by Burmese troops. There is now a Military Operations Command and five battalions stationed on this land: Battalion 312, 626, 127 and two artillery battalions.

Kunlong villager: “We used to live below the bridge. Our village was situated south of the river. We were forced to relocate in 1992, almost 22 years now. The Burmese battalion which forced us out and confiscated our land was called the “Kachin 3<sup>rd</sup>” battalion. They were based in Kun Long at that time. Now they have changed their name to Battalion 312. They seized our village. At first

they just said that they would seize only our farm land and not include our villages. After confiscating the farms, they said they would take our villages. They seized our farms, villages and gardens, and ordered us to move out. At that time, it was during the Buddhist Lent, so we refused to move. We said, we could not move during this time. It is against our custom and religious belief. We said that we would move only when the Buddhist lent had ended. A day after the Buddhist lent ended, they immediately forced us out of our village.

Then we used rafts to float our possessions down the river and we resettled on both sides of the island (in the Salween). We just put down our belongings on this island. Fortunately, there were no thieves, otherwise we would have lost our clothes and other possessions. It was really terrible for all of us here.

Detailed map of Kunlong dam area



There were no other places to do farming or find food for everyone. Some people went to live in other places. Our old village, Phaizarn Nam Wan Kao, had over 100 houses before we were forced to move. Even though the Burmese military said they would help us move, everyone just ended up relying on themselves.

Up till now they have not allowed us to go back and farm our old lands. We also wanted to get back our farmland, but no one has enough knowledge and bravery to ask the Burmese military. They hold guns. They can do anything they like.”

Another Kunlong villager: “The Burmese soldiers said that they would confiscate our farms. We thought that we could not do anything to stop them because they had guns. So, we just let them seize our farm. After that, they cleared and flattened the land. Then they said they would seize

our houses. All the villagers were so sad and begged them to stop but did not succeed. Then they called us to their base and told us that even if you do not move to another place, you will not be able to live here anymore. You must leave here.

They said, in the future, you can live anywhere and do anything, as long as you don't leave for another country. We won't ask any tax from you. So, we had to move. They ordered us to move during the Buddhist lent, so all of us begged them to let us stay until the end of Buddhist lent. As soon as the Buddhist lent ended, they ordered us to leave right away.

Then we dismantled our houses and moved our belongings and clothes. We put them on rafts and went to settle on the island. When we arrived on the island, we built small temporary huts. One year later, when we needed wood and bamboo to repair or rebuild our huts, we went back to our old village to collect our old wood and bamboo. But they (the Burmese soldiers) said: why have you come here? We said: to take back our wood and bamboo to rebuild our houses. They said you are not allowed to. We could not do anything, so we just returned home without any wood or bamboo. Until now all of our former wood and bamboo is not being used. They just keep it like that. Later, when the big flood came (some years earlier) and destroyed everything, we thought it must be the spirits, because the Burmese forced us to move even though we had not harmed them."

### **Current livelihoods of villagers downstream**

Kunlong villager: "We live and grow crops here along the river. We do not have a high education like others. Some of us just passed grade 4 or 5, as we thought we could not use our education and so we left school and are living from hand to mouth. So, we just carry out our livelihood like this day to day. It is difficult to earn a living. It's bad in the rainy season. The water gets very high and so men have to accompany women and children (in boats) when going anywhere, especially for food.

The villagers mostly grow pumpkin, because there is not a good market for other crops. Before, we grew corn, chili, and soy bean, but after the Chinese came, they brought seeds of various crops, including pumpkin, and encouraged us to grow them. Most villagers like to grow pumpkin because it is very easy to grow it. However, if we use our own seeds, we can't sell pumpkin to the Chinese. They look at the size of the pumpkin. Therefore we have to buy the seeds from the Chinese and fertilizer. Then we have to take care of the pumpkins to protect them from insects. When the pumpkins have grown about 12 inches, we have to put on fertilizer. We use a lot of insecticide. We put on insecticide when the plant starts to flower, and when the pumpkin is small."



*View to the north along the Salween River, about 3 kms downstream of the Kunlong dam site*

### **Opinions on the Kunlong dam**

Kunlong villagers:

“We love the Salween River like our parents. All people and living things here depend only this river. Without the river, how shall we survive?”

“The Burmese authorities said they would block the water upstream, and nothing would happen downstream. But someone said, if it collapses, all of us will be gone. The authorities said it would not collapse. Anyway, we don’t know what will happen. Others said: let’s wait and see when it happens.”

“If the dam breaks, if the Buddha image (on the island) is washed away, we will give up our lives too. We don’t want anyone to force us to move again.”

“No one came to inform us that the dam was going to be built. They just came and started working themselves. We heard that they will build a new bridge over the Salween. Also, when the road (from Hsenwi to Kunlong) was going to be built, no one informed the villagers. When they were surveying for the road, they just put the survey line right through people’s houses.”

“We do not want the Kunlong Dam. We are farmers. We have never heard about the good or the bad impacts of the dam. When the Burmese military forced us to move (in 1992), we just had to move as they ordered.”

“We worry about flooding. When the big flood (several years ago) came, it submerged the Burmese military base as well. Only the island did not go under the water. It flooded right up to Hopang market. It did not submerge the big bridge but the roads were under water. In my life, I have seen this kind of huge flood only 6 times. However, this latest one was the worst. On the island, only the place where the stupa was situated was left. All the Burmese bases were under water.”

“We want land to plant, and a place to stay. If the dam is built, we worry that all of us who live around Kunlong will be gone.”

### **Demands to the government and dam builders**

Kunlong villagers:

“We don’t want the company to build the dam. If the dam goes ahead, all of the living things including wildlife here will be killed by the flood if the dam breaks.”

“All people and living things here rely on this river. We have no extra income like getting salaries. We are happy with our livelihood which is relying on forest, water and our farms. We don’t want anyone to oppress us.”

“We want a guarantee from the government that the project will not harm the people living here. The government just thinks of themselves, they don’t give anything to the Shan, Kokang and other ethnic groups. We are the majority here, so they should listen to our voice.”



*Asia World construction truck; the small sign says “Salween Hydropower Road Construction Project”*