



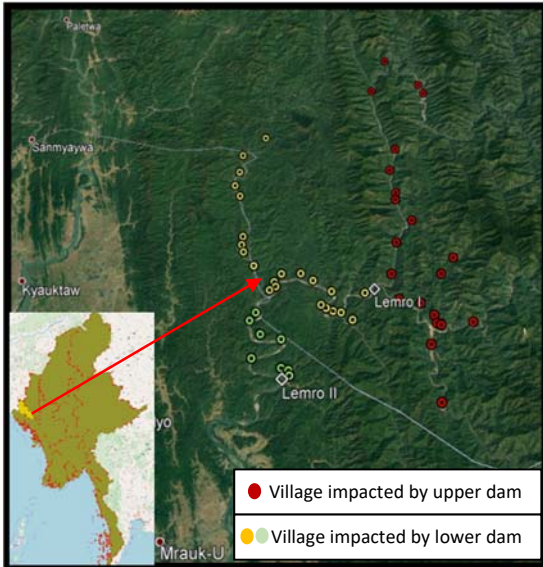
## Brief Background

In 2007, the Burmese military government reached an agreement to provide electricity to Bangladesh through construction of a hydropower project comprising two large dams on the Lemro river in western Burma. The dams would be constructed by Datang Company of China: one above Ko Phe She village in Paletwa township, Chin state, and one near Sai Din village of Mrauk U township, Rakhine state. In 2009 the agreement with Bangladesh was withdrawn, but the project continued.

Problems occurred from the outset of the project feasibility study, when Burma Army soldiers from Infantry Battalion 540 providing security for the Chinese surveyors, killed a cow owned by a villager of Ko Phe She village. Machinery was placed on the farmlands of Ko Phe She villagers, but no compensation was given. Workers from elsewhere were hired. No information about the project was provided to locals. When tensions worsened, the company submitted a complaint letter to the President of Burma, alleging falsely that local people were using violent means to oppose the projects. The District Police Officer even came to the site to investigate the complaint. Chin state Chief Minister U Hung Ngai also visited the site and carried out an investigation.

Due to local opposition, the Burmese government suspended the project in 2014. However, they resumed it in July 2016, with the backing of France, which pledged US\$ one million for the feasibility study. Surveying then continued by Belgian company Tractebel-Engie, with findings submitted in a workshop held in Naypyidaw on 18 March, 2018. Local villagers reported that Tractebel-Engie was continuing surveying in mid-2019, despite fighting between the Arakan Army and the Burma Army near the planned dam sites. Local people say they have still not been informed or consulted about the project.

In early 2019, the Chin State government signed MOUs with foreign investors for eight medium sized hydropower dams, of under 30 megawatts: with Norway Power Co. Ltd. for three dams, and with Power China International (Sinohydro) for five dams, including on the Mee Chaung, the largest tributary of the Kaladan River, joining it at the boundary line of Chin State and Rakhine State. The planned site of the Mee Chaung dam is near the current conflict area in Paletwa township, and has the potential to produce 200 megawatts of electricity.



4000 IDPs in Paletwa Township

### Villages to be impacted by the Lemro dams

The source of the Lemro river is at the Bungtla waterfall near Matupi town, so the local inhabitants call it “Phung Long” meaning the river which fall and flow. The Rakhine (Arakanese) call it “Lay Myo” river. The river passes through Matupi and Paletwa townships of Chin state and Mrauk U and Myae Bon townships of Rakhine state.

The upper Lemro dam in Paletwa township was originally planned with an installed capacity of 500 megawatts, but this has been increased to 600 megawatts. The capacity of the lower Lemro dam in Mrauk U township has also been increased from 75 to 90 megawatts.

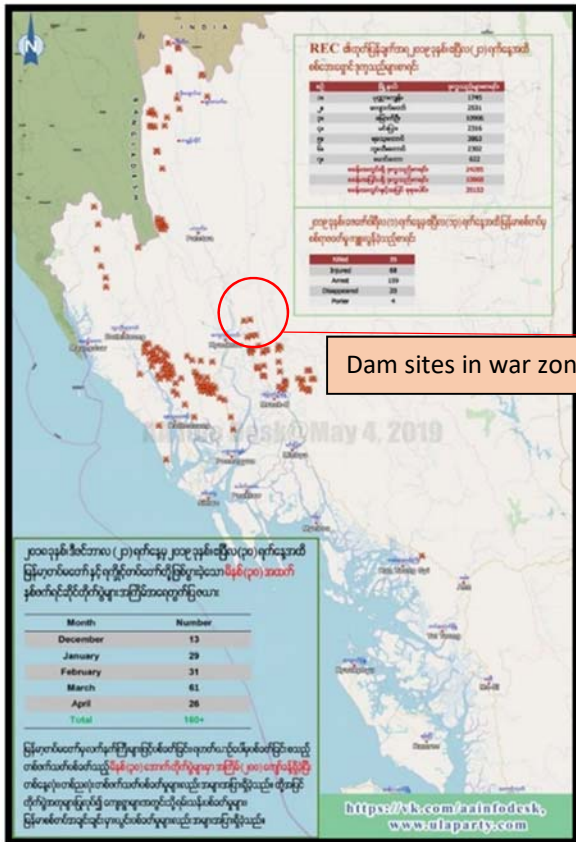
It is estimated that a total of 51 villages, with a population of about 25,000 people, will be submerged by the Lemro hydropower project. These include 21 villages above the upper dam in Chin State -- including 11 villages along the Lemro, and 10 villages along the Than Chaung tributary – and 30 villages between the upper and lower dams – including 22 villages in Chin State and 8 villages in Rakhine State. The authorities have said they will relocate some villages to higher ground, but there are still no tangible promises yet. And there has been no mention of compensation by the authorities.

Above the upper Lemro dam, the inhabitants are mainly from the ethnic Dai tribe, while below the upper Lemro dam, they are mainly from the Laitu and Khumi tribes. The population of the Dai tribe is dwindling, and the building of the dam may threaten them with extinction. However, the Chin State government has rejected this as a concern.



### Livelihoods of local inhabitants

Along the river valley of the Lemro, local people earn their living by cultivating crops on both sides of the river. After the rainy season, when the river level falls, the sediment-rich banks of the river are used by local people to grow cash crops of groundnuts, beans and other vegetables. They transport local agricultural products and bamboo down along the river to sell in Rakhine state. In this area, there is no other mode of transportation than along the river.



**Armed conflict**

The civil war between the Burma Army and Arakan Army has been intensifying since 2015. Many clashes have taken place along the southern Paletwa boundary between Kyaukdaw and Myauk U townships. IDPs who have fled clashes in the Mrauk U area are now seeking refuge in Sinke and Shawmay villages near the lower Lemro dam site.

Dam sites in war zone

Protest organized by local people against Lemro dam



**Ongoing opposition to the Lemro dams**

Since the beginning, the local people have opposed the Lemro hydropower project. They have been holding protests, and issuing statements and leaflets against the project. The initial Chinese surveyors withdrew due to the opposition of the local people, and the project was stopped under the previous government. However, when the NLD came into power, they decided to restart the project, despite the local opposition.

The authorities have threatened local people not to oppose the dam project. In 2017, when local people demonstrated against the Lemro dams during Vice President Henry Van Thio's visit to Paletwa, they were summoned to the Than Htaung police station, interrogated and warned against opposing the dams. The then Chin State Minister for Municipal Affairs, Electricity and Industry Isaac Khen told community leaders that since the project had been authorized by Naypidaw, local people would never be able to stop it.



Villagers' prayer ceremony that show their position against the Lemro damproject



## Recommendations

- Not to implement large economic investment projects until and unless the interests of local people are protected constitutionally under a devolved federal system.
- Not to implement economic investment projects without the free, prior and informed consent of local people.
- To draw up a clear policy on natural resource ownership, management and interest-sharing for the future federal system, with the participation of local people.



Farming along the river

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