



Report from the Field

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Central Papun District: Village-level decision making and strategic displacement

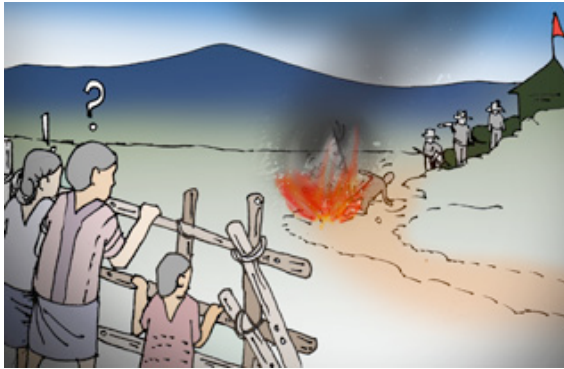
The following illustrated narrative details the way villagers from Pi--- village, Papun District, responded to abuses by a nearby State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Army unit. The illustrations challenge traditional narratives of villagers as passive victims, and presents an alternative view: villagers as agents, with the capacity and courage to respond to abuse. In this case, in spite of the risks, villagers actively engaged power-holders in an attempt to reduce violent and exploitative demands. When these attempts were not successful, the community made a joint decision to evade further abuse by collectively fleeing the village, ensuring that no remaining families could be singled out for further reprisals. Once removed to safe locations, groups of villagers again discussed their options and households made different choices based upon their individual priorities and available options.



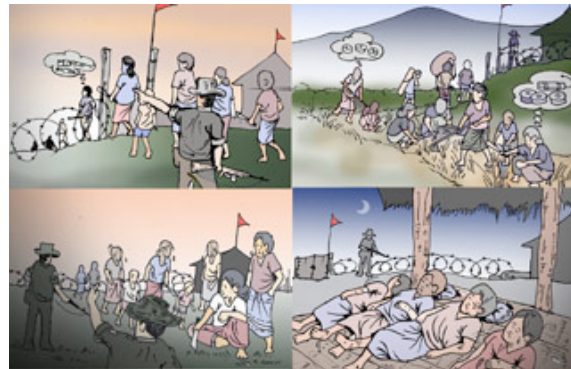
Residents of Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township, are mostly farmers. In spite of frequent orders to work as unpaid forced labourers for SPDC Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #219, the villagers were able to successfully manage livelihoods activities. [Image: STNH]



At the end of the 2009 rainy season, Pi--- villagers needed to complete their harvest. Instead, they were forced to clear grass overgrown along the Ka Ma Maung to Papun vehicle road and porter supplies for soldiers from LIB #219. Villagers explained to the soldiers that this risked causing them to lose their crops, as well as put them at risk from landmines placed by both KNLA and SPDC forces, but the orders were not withdrawn. [Images: STNH]



On November 21st 2009, an LIB #219 soldier stepped on a KNLA landmine outside Pi--- village, injuring himself and two other soldiers. The villagers had not been consulted or warned by KNLA forces active in the area that landmines had been placed near their community, but the local LIB #219 commander blamed them for the explosion. [Images: STNH]



The residents of Pi--- village were subjected to harsh treatment for three days by LIB #219 as punishment for the landmine. Everyday after the explosion, adults were ordered to porter heavy loads and clear grass along the Ka Ma Maung to Papun vehicle road, while children were forced to sit unattended under the hot sun. All of the villagers, including children, were denied food and water, in spite of the heat. While they were away working, soldiers entered villagers' homes and looted food and other materials. When the villagers finished working, they returned home to find all their food was gone. Each day after that, the villagers were allowed just one hour to try and collect food and prepare dinner – then they were ordered to return and sleep in the SPDC Army camp. [Images: STNH]



The villagers complained about the sustained harsh treatment to LIB #219 troops, but the soldiers did not address their complaints. After multiple days of abuse that jeopardised their livelihoods as well as the well-being of their children, the residents of Pi--- gathered in the evening to discuss steps they could take to protect the community from further harm. [Images: STNH]



After meeting to discuss the options available to them, the entire village decided to flee Pi--- that night, removing themselves to several hiding places in Dweh Loh and Bu Tho townships. After fleeing, the villagers actively monitored the security situation and considered their next steps. Their options included negotiating SPDC requests to return to their village, establishing permanent homes and farms in their host communities, or relocating to hiding sites further from SPDC control. But each family had its own priorities and options available, and the community divided and chose different solutions. [Images: STNH]

Further background on the situation in Papun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of Military Control (August 2010)*
- *Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River (August 2010)*
- *Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District (October 2009)*
- *Ongoing accounts of village-level resistance (July 2009)*
- *DKBA attack on villagers and the forced dismantling of a mosque in Papun District (July 2009)*
- *IDPs, land confiscation and forced recruitment in Papun District (July 2009)*
- *SPDC and DKBA road construction, forced labour and looting in Papun District (March 2009)*

Photos documenting the human rights situation in Papun District are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* (updated June 2010), *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* (updated June 2009) and other previous KHRG photo galleries and photo sets. These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at www.khrg.org.