



Statement by Burma Rivers Network

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New video exposes impacts of large dam projects on communities across Burma, on Shweli, Paung Laung, Chindwin, Irrawaddy and Salween rivers

The Burma Rivers Network (BRN) is launching a new video today, "Voices of the Dammed," documenting the devastating impacts of dam projects along the Salween, Irrawaddy, Chindwin, Shweli and Paung Laung rivers, which have destroyed the homes, livelihoods, historic cultural sites and ecosystems of local communities, and threatened their security.

Troops of Burma Army Infantry Division 144, providing security for the Shweli 1 dam on the Shweli river in northern Shan State, have been carrying out daily artillery attacks against the ethnic armed groups operating in Kachin and northern Shan states. Even though local community members have suffered from various abuses, including electric shocks, due to the Shweli 1 dam, the dam company has taken no responsibility for this. "If the French-funded Shweli 3 dam goes ahead, this will cause more conflict, human rights abuses and displacement, and will threaten the peace process," said Mai Amm Ngeal of the Ta'ang Youth and Students' Union.

On October 19, 2016, a joint statement after the official visit of Burma's State Counsellor to India revealed that bilateral agreements had been signed related to power infrastructure and production. In 2007, two villages were forced to move to make way for the planned Tamarthi dam, on the Chindwin river. If that project is revived, numerous villages housing over 45,000 people will be flooded by the reservoir, and will have to move. "Under U Thein Sein's government, the Tamarthi dam on the Chindwin river in northern Sagaing Region was cancelled, due to the huge potential social and environmental impacts. Now we have a popularly elected civilian-led government, why are they trying to restart the project?" said Daw Boinu of the Kuki Women's Human Rights Organisation.

On June 23, 2016, when President Htin Kyaw visited the Upper Paung Laung dam site, the New Light of Myanmar reported: "31.534 billion kyat has been spent on the systematic resettlement of villages from the reservoir flood zone." However, the resettled villagers are suffering serious livelihood problems due to the infertility of land in the new hillside farming areas allocated to them.

Communities living along the Irrawaddy and Salween rivers, Burma's two main arteries, have also suffered from displacement due to planned dam projects. "When there was strong wind in the rainy season, we didn't dare stay in the poorly-built houses in the new resettlement village, and we couldn't earn enough money to buy sufficient food. So I went back to rebuild my house and earn a living in my old village," said Daw Lu Ya, a local Myitsone villager.

"The current government is trying to push ahead with building large dams, claiming it is for development during the peace process. However, the dams are mostly planned in areas where ethnic armed groups are based, such as on the Salween and Shweli rivers, where conflict is continuing," said BRN coordinator Mi Ah Chai.

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