



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

‘Development without us’: Village Agency and Land Confiscations in Southeast Myanmar

Yangon, August 29th, 2018

Today, at Orchid Hotel in Yangon, Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) launched its thematic report titled *‘Development without us’: Village Agency and Land Confiscations in Southeast Myanmar*. This report analyses the collective efforts of rural populations to defend their land rights in a time of growing investment and corporate development projects in Southeast Myanmar. The report aims to provide a comprehensive review of the experiences of villagers impacted by land confiscations and property damage caused by large-scale corporate development projects.

The report comes ten years since KHRG’s report on *‘Village Agency: Rural Rights and Resistance in Militarised Karen State’*, a report highlighting the village-level initiatives and resistance strategies of local communities in a highly militarised context. *‘Development without us’* draws attention to the rising tensions surrounding the land rights of indigenous people following the 2012 preliminary ceasefires and the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Rural populations in ethnic areas are particularly vulnerable to land confiscations because of overlapping land governance systems in Southeast Myanmar and increasing investment without sufficient transparency and accountability. When lands have been confiscated from rural communities, it impacts their livelihoods for the long-term.

During the report launch, KHRG’s Programme Director, Naw Htoo Htoo, said: *“Villagers, within their capacity, are working hard to protect their land and fight for their rights but companies are disregarding the rights of local populations in order to develop their business ventures. The Myanmar government and Karen National Union are not doing enough to protect the rights of local populations.”*

In addition to helping rural communities gain secure land titles, the Myanmar government and KNU authorities should develop the capacity of government bodies responsible for monitoring and resolving disputes relating to land confiscation and property damage. *‘Development without us’* urges authorities to promote the inclusive and non-discriminatory ownership rights of formal and customary landowners and to end land confiscations of rural communities.

Although the principle of the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) is a part of the NCA, the perspectives of local communities are not taken into account by companies and government authorities. As stated by one community member from Toungoo District:

“For me, I do not recognize that a project is conducted with dignity without consultation with villagers... The best way to conduct the development project by either companies or others is to have meaningful consultation with villagers.”

KHRG hopes that this report will assist relevant national and international gain an in-depth understanding on the continuous struggles of rural populations to secure their right to land. Today’s land confiscations are a threat to long-term peace in Southeast Myanmar, because they increase social and political instability. The human rights and land rights of ethnic communities should be respected throughout Myanmar.

KHRG is an independent, unaffiliated, locally-led organisation committed to promoting the perspective of villagers in southeast Myanmar, whose voices are often otherwise unheard. Founded in 1992, KHRG engages in field research, documentation, report-writing and local and international advocacy. KHRG also conducts workshops with villagers where they can openly discuss the abuses and the challenges they face, gain greater knowledge of protection strategies, and consider options for collective action in their local area.

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