

# **WARNING SIGNS**

**An update on plans to dam the Salween  
in Burma's Shan State**



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## **About Sapawa**

The Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization works to promote environmental protection and human rights in Shan State, Burma. Sapawa empowers Shan communities to preserve natural resources and to expose the destruction of the environment and human rights violations occurring in Shan State.

## **Acknowledgements**

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**cover photo** by SHAN

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Photo by ISSAN

*Tasang ferry before 1998*

### **About Tasang**

Tasang is a small ferry dock on the Salween River in southern Shan State. It has long served as one of the crossing points on the river, as it links major roads leading to Mong Pan in the west and Mong Ton in the east. According to local people, if one travels to Tasang and looks up at the mountainside, one will see the likeness of an elephant's head and trunk. Because of this, the mountain was called Loi Jang, or "Elephant Hill." The ferry crossing at Tasang is therefore called Ta Jang, or "Elephant Dock." The Burmese misspelled Ta Jang as Tasang, and so it is known by this name in English today. In 1998 a bridge was built over the river at this site. Tasang has been going through many changes over the past few years and will continue to change if the dam is built.



Photo by ISSAN

*Local people forced to attend the Tasang bridge opening ceremony in 1998*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This booklet provides the latest information about preparations to build the Tasang dam on the Salween River in southern Shan State, Burma. Tasang will be Southeast Asia's largest dam in terms of installed capacity and dam height. While recent agreements indicate that the first dam slated to be built on the Salween in Burma will be at Hatgyi in Karen State, we wish to alert readers that preparations to build the Tasang dam have been proceeding step-by-step for over eight years. Studies for Tasang are far more advanced than for any other site: feasibility studies have been approved and the project is well into the detailed design study phase. Preparatory infrastructure at the Tasang dam site is also more advanced than at other planned Salween dam sites.

The Salween dam plans remain shrouded in secrecy. The public is denied the right to access any existing dam surveys or impact assessments. Making matters worse, the dam site is located in an active war zone and access by outsiders is strictly limited. Under these difficult circumstances, Sapawa has collected as much information as possible from local sources and presents in this booklet an update of the situation near the site. We hope that this update will inform and strengthen the growing local and international movement to oppose the building of dams on the Salween River.

### **The Salween**

The Salween River is the longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia. It originates in the Himalayan Mountains of Tibet, flows through Yunnan Province of China then cuts through Shan State and Karenni (Kayah) State in Burma. In the southern section of Mae Hong Son province, it forms the border between Thailand and Burma before flowing back into Karen State and then through Mon State in Burma, where it empties into the Andaman Sea at Moulmein. The Salween is 2,400 kilometers long, the 26th longest river in the world.

# Proposed Dams on the Salween River



## THE DAM PLANS

In addition to the 13 dams planned by China upstream, the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) of Burma and the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to build four dams on the Salween River at Tasang in Shan State and Weigyí, Hatgyí, and Dagwin in Karen State. The Tasang dam is also included in the Asian Development Bank's "Regional Indicative Master Plan on Power Interconnection in the Greater Mekong Subregion."

### Official Agreements on Tasang

December 20, 2002 – MDX Group of companies of Thailand signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Burma's Ministry of Energy to construct the Tasang Dam

April 3, 2006 – MDX signs a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Burmese Department of Hydroelectric Power of the Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise for joint development of a 7,110 megawatt dam at Tasang. The signing is witnessed by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT).

#### Dam details

Location – 13 kilometers north of the Tasang bridge crossing that links Mong Ton and Mong Pan in southern Shan State

Size – 228 meters high (the tallest in Southeast Asia)

Electricity production – 7,110 MW, mostly for sale to Thailand

Estimated flood zone – 870 square kilometers

Construction costs – at least US\$6 billion

## THE UPDATE

### Moves by MDX

#### *Preliminary Infrastructure*

Between 2003 and 2004, MDX hired Thai Sawat Company (a Thai company which has been logging around Tasang since 1988) to build a 13-kilometer road from the Tasang bridge to the dam site. During 2005, MDX built a 150 KW hydropower turbine to run a generator on the Mae Mok stream, a tributary of the Salween, between the dam site and Tasang Bridge and one kilometer from Sala Village. This generator would provide power during dam construction. Three houses for employees, a clinic, and an office have also been built south of the dam site. According to local sources, MDX is also planning to repair the main road from the Thai-Burmese border crossing BP1 at Nong Ook to the dam site after the rainy season in 2007.

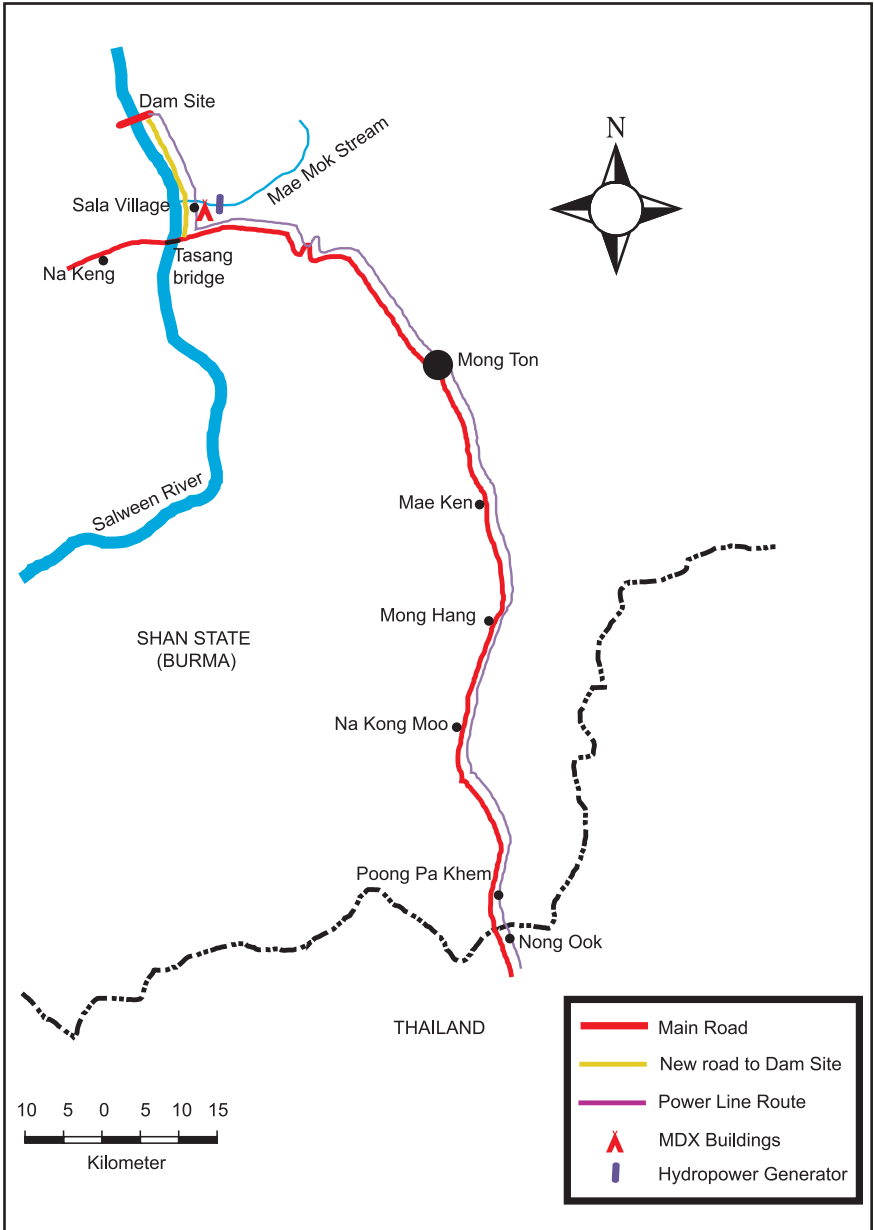
#### *Selective public relations*

Since the beginning of 2006, MDX has been carrying out public relations activities in the southern township of Mong Ton, through which the power transmission lines from Tasang to Thailand will be built. MDX has hired three doctors from central Shan State to test for malaria and provide dental services to villages along the power line route. The manager of MDX operations for the Tasang area has been promoting the dam to local residents. Communities upstream that will be flooded out by the dam, however, have received no such special attention or health services. Indeed, they have not been informed, let alone consulted, about the dam plans.

*“MDX is trying to make us believe that building Tasang dam will improve our lives so that we will support the dam and not try to destroy the transmission lines. They told us that the dam will bring lots of visitors and tourists who will come with money to spend in our town. But they never told us about any negative effects.”* - a local resident of Mong Ton



# Infrastructure development at the Tasang dam site



### **Who is MDX?**

MDX Public Company Limited has an agreement with the Burmese Department of Hydroelectric Power and is cited as the project developer for the Tasang dam. Through its subsidiary GMS Power, it has brokered consultancy deals with international dam engineering and design companies Lahmeyer (Germany) and EPDC (Japan) to carry out studies for the dam.

MDX is a Bangkok-based real estate and infrastructure development company that was established in 1988 and has operations throughout the Mekong region. MDX and its subsidiaries are involved in land speculation, financial and management services, development of large-scale residential and industrial estates, water supply facilities, and power generation and distribution facilities.

MDX board members, staff, and advisors include former politicians, ex-governors of EGAT, and former employees of the Asian Development Bank.

MDX has faced financial problems since 1997; its shares have been suspended and are in the Stock Exchange of Thailand's rehabilitation section. The Salween dam projects could ensure the financial survival of the company. Since it is unlikely that major financial institutions would directly support the Tasang project, the company says it will finance the projects through its own resources and loans raised in Thailand. It is still unclear how MDX and GMS paid for the design studies.

Investors in the Salween dams include more than MDX. In June 2006, the state-owned Sinohydro Corporation of China signed a Memorandum of Understanding with state-owned EGAT of Thailand to develop the Hatgyi hydroelectric project further downstream on the Salween. It is expected that Sinohydro could provide financing for the other dams on the Salween as well.



*A Burma Army truck between  
Tasang and Mong Pan*

## **Moves by the SPDC's military**

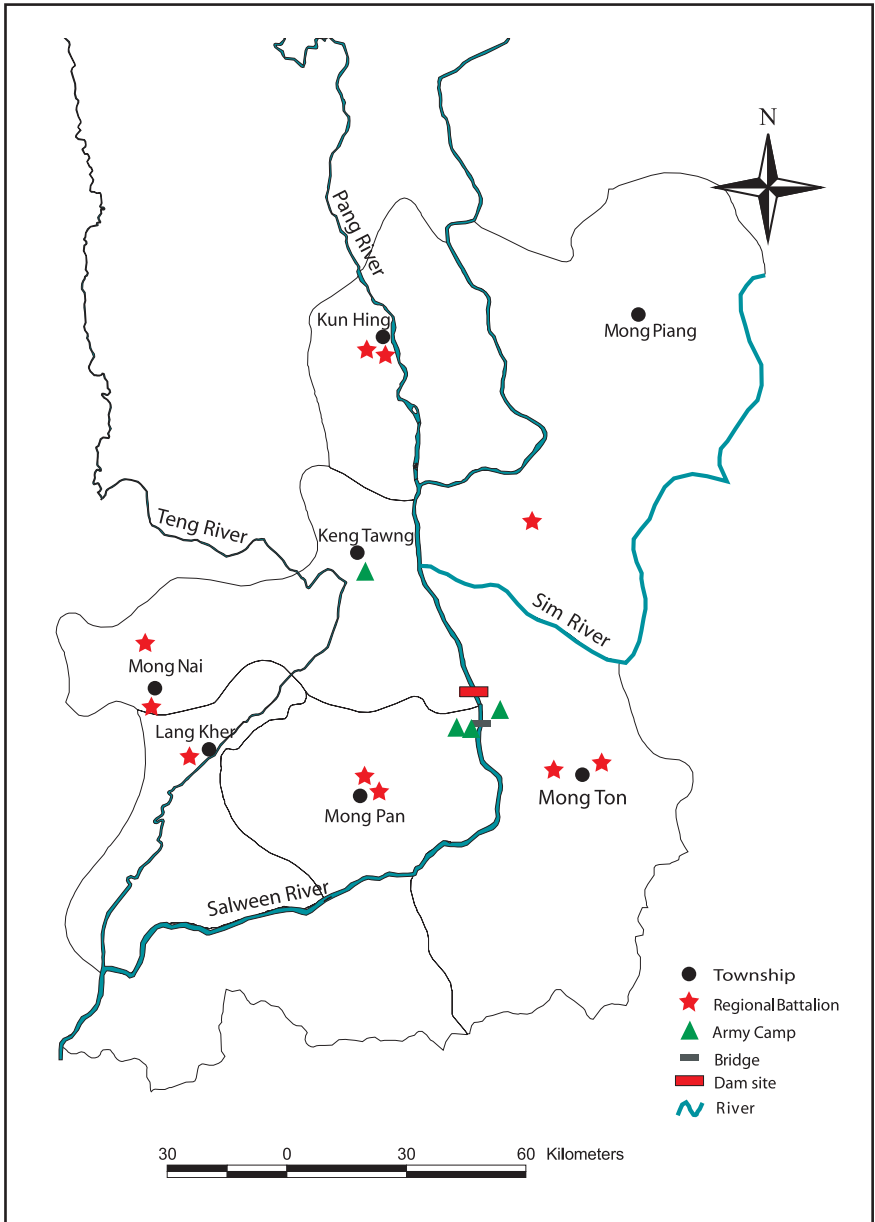
### *Damming in a war zone*

The planned Tasang dam is located in the middle of the main area of conflict in Shan State where resistance forces have been fighting the Burmese military regime for over four decades. The areas west and northwest of the dam site are of particular strategic importance as armed Shan groups are active there.

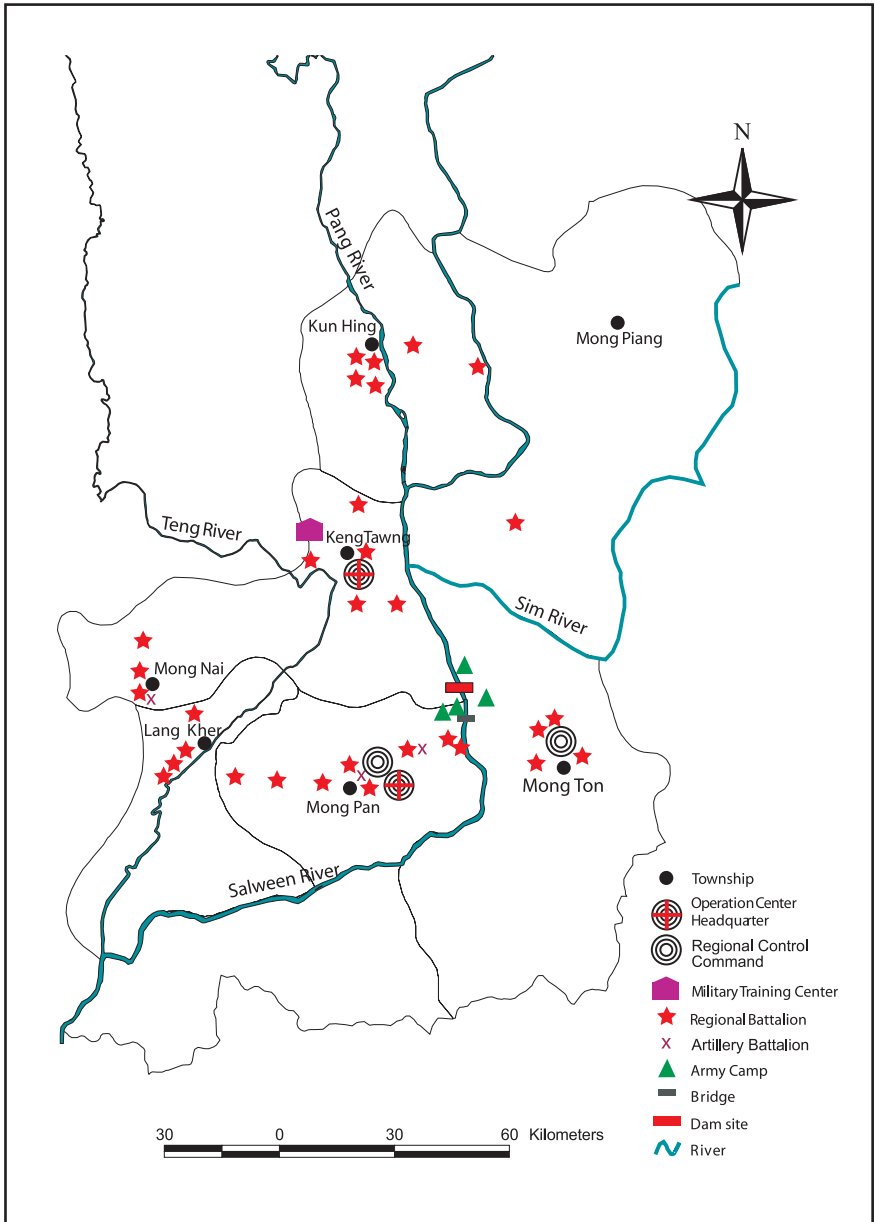
### *Rapid militarization*

The regime has been increasing the number of Burma Army troops and military bases in the Tasang area over the past decade, even after clearing out the area with a forced relocation program (see below). In 1996, there were only ten battalions in the townships adjoining the Tasang dam site. Today, there are a total of 30 battalions, not including engineering, medical, and other supply units. The battalions have an average of 50 soldiers each at any given time.

# Burma Army Deployment Before 1996



# Burma Army Deployment 2006





*Keng Tawng administrative center*

Keng Tawng is the closest town to the dam site (about 20 km to the northwest). It was elevated to township status in 2005 under the newly established province of Lang Kher and has since been developed as a military and administrative center.

In order to build new government offices, land was confiscated from local villagers and forced labor demanded.

### ***Security measures at the dam site***

A Military Operations Command was established at Mong Pan in 2000. The battalions based there, particularly LIB 332 and 520 are in charge of security around the dam site. LIBs 294 and 295, also based in Mong Pan, and LIBs 56, 225, and 519, based in Mong Ton, rotate patrol duties of around 10-20 soldiers at the dam site itself. They can call on any of the battalions for support at any time.

There is a Burma Army checkpoint just north of the dam site on the east bank of the Salween. Formerly, villagers would frequently travel in boats or rafts along this section of the river, but since February 2006 they are no longer allowed to travel past the dam site. Villagers traveling south by boat are now forced to disembark north of the site and then continue their journey overland. There is also a military checkpoint at Tasang Bridge.

MDX staff never travel without military escort. Dam site survey activities by other foreign consultants have taken place under heavy military guard. Villagers observe that when foreigners visit the site, there are 6 Burma Army soldiers for each foreigner.

The military's close collaboration with dam builders is clear not only on the ground but at the leadership level. Military leaders have frequently touted dam building as a means of developing the country in speeches and state run newspapers, especially in recent years. Lt. General Kyaw Win, who oversees the three regional military commands in Shan State, personally flew by helicopter to visit the Tasang dam site the day after the MoA signing to build the dam in April 2006.

### ***Divide and rule tactics***

Apart from directly deploying increased numbers of Burma Army troops in southern Shan State areas, the SPDC has been allowing armed ceasefire groups or militias to control certain areas in exchange for policing or fighting against the active Shan State Army – South (SSA-S). Areas south and southeast of the Tasang dam site are under the control of the ceasefire group, United Wa State Army (UWSA), that has been moving in its troops and populations from northern Shan State at the behest of the SPDC. In April 2005, the UWSA was backed by the SPDC to attack the SSA-S headquarters on the Thai-Shan border. Villagers around the Tasang area were forcibly recruited as porters for the SPDC at this time.

### ***More troops, more abuses***

The ongoing conflict, and the increasing numbers of Burma Army troops, has caused local populations to live in constant fear of abuse. Villagers through-out the area have been tortured or killed when suspected of supporting the Shan resistance. Villagers are forcibly recruited as guides or porters to carry ammunition and supplies for troops operating in the area or forced to do work for troops based in the area. Restrictions on movement prohibit villagers from tending their crops or collecting forest products; farmers must pay for permission to reach their fields.

LIBs 332 and 520 in charge of security around the dam site have been involved in several cases of violence, disappearances, and extortion against civilians. Below are just a few of the more recent cases that have been documented by the Shan Human Rights Foundation:

- In February 2005, four villagers gathering leaves in the forest were shot dead by SPDC troops from LIB 520. In the same month, 10 villagers of Pa Khaa village were accused of stealing guns and taken hostage by SPDC troops from LIB 332, and 1,000,000 kyat was extorted for their release.
- In September 2005, 3 villagers from Ho Phaai Long village in Mong Pan Township were conscripted as guides and later killed by SPDC troops from LIB 332.
- In January 2006, people in all Mong Pan village tracts and in the town of Mong Pan itself were forced to grow physic nut/castor-oil plants by SPDC troops of LIB 332 based in Mong Pan. A 76-year old man died while gathering plants.

In addition to these abuses, women are also vulnerable to sexual violence. Shan human rights groups documented the rape of about 300 women by Burma Army troops within a 50 km radius of the Tasang dam site between 1996 and 2001. Since then sexual violence has been continuing. On May 18, 2006, a group of SPDC soldiers from LIB 246 led by Sgt. Maj. Moe Tin gang-raped an 18-year-old girl from Pang Nim, Kun Hing while she was tending buffalo.

Disappearances, extortion, beatings and torture, forced labor, killings, and rapes have been reported throughout Kun Hing Township. During January–November 1997 alone, the regime’s troops killed 319 villagers in Kun Hing Township. This included a massacre on June 13, 1997 of 29 villagers at Sai Khao village and 27 villagers in Tard Pha Ho, both villages in southern Kun Hing north of the dam site. Recently, on July 9, 2006, SPDC soldiers from LIB 524 interrupted a Buddhist ceremony in the temple of the village of Na Khao, south of Kun Hing, and arrested and tortured village elders, accusing them of supporting the Shan resistance. On the same day, they seized 5 women from the village and forced them to serve as porters.





Photo by Hseng

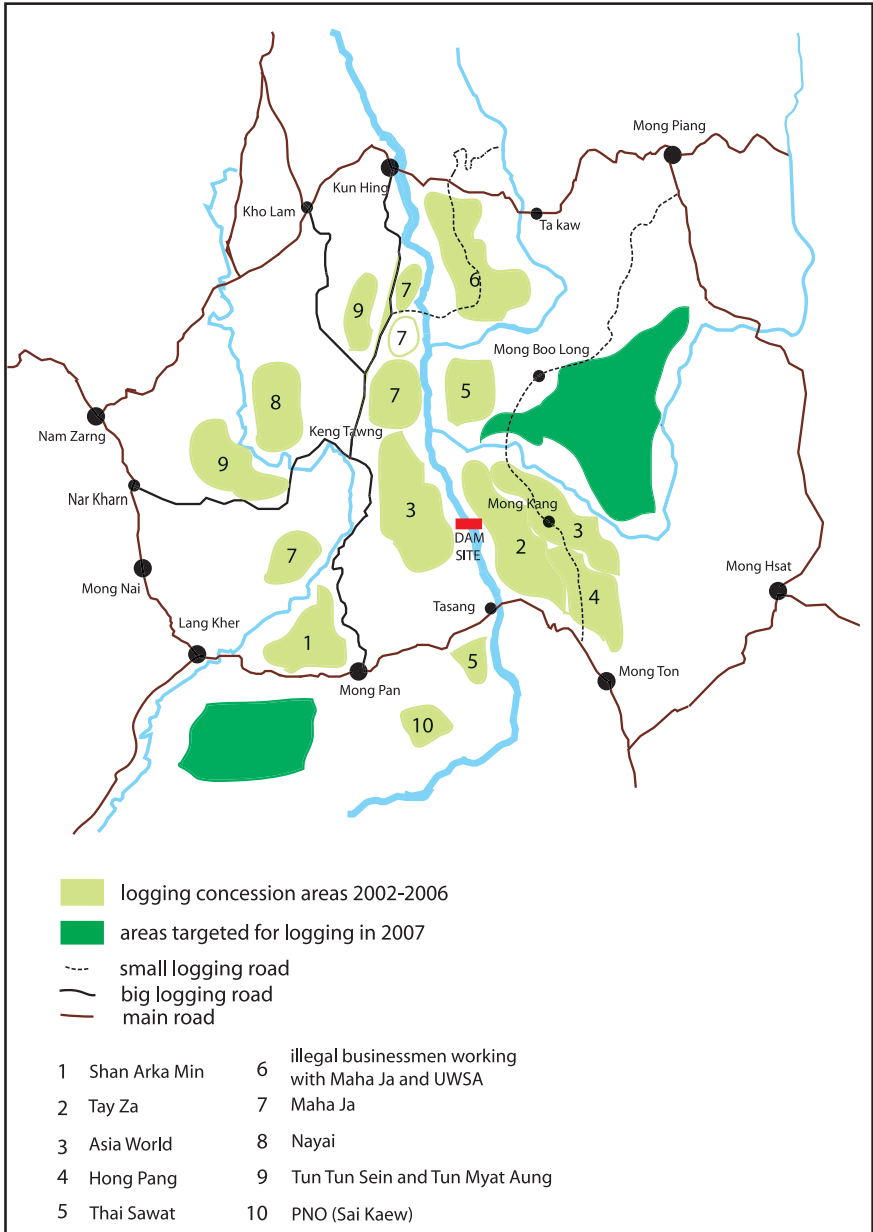
Villagers forced to repair the road between Mong Pan and Tasang



Photo by SRDC

IDPs gather to discuss how to avoid the Burma Army

# Logging Concession Areas 2002-Present



## **Logging around the dam site**

As increased numbers of Burma Army troops have moved into the areas around the dam site and roads have been built, the rate of deforestation has risen accordingly. Logging is being done by ceasefire groups, companies with family connections to the regime, and individuals. All of these must apply through brokers to the SPDC regional commander for logging permits; they must also pay off SPDC local commanders, making the process extremely expensive for loggers and lucrative for the SPDC.

Local people have depended on the forests for generations for their food, traditional medicine, and shelter. Cutting down the forest destroys the food chain of local people.

### *Logging west of the Salween*

The main company contracted to build roads in this area has been Asia World Company, founded by drug lord Lo Hsing Han. Roads built between 2001 and 2004, linking the formerly isolated community of Keng Tawng to Mong Nai in the west, Kho Lam in the north, Mong Pan to the south, and Keng Kham to the northeast (see map), have enabled various logging operations to move in and clear cut the area's thick teak forests. Local villagers now report that less than 10% of the original teak forest around Keng Tawng remains, only in remote valleys where transportation is difficult.

Loggers include Maha Ja's Shan State South Company; Asia World Company, Tun Tun Sein, Tun Myat Aung, and Nayai. Most of the logs are transported to Rangoon for export. However, some have been transported illegally across the Salween, and then by truck up to the China border via Pang Sang (the headquarters of the UWSA). Some logs are also floated down the Salween and then transported to Tachilek for sale to Thailand.

Despite having permits, loggers in the area must provide wood for free to the SPDC military in Keng Tawng for construction of military and other government buildings. The demands from the military for wood have been so high that it has put some individual loggers out of business.



As the forests around Keng Tawng have been depleted, larger logging companies such as the Shan State South Company have moved northeast to log the forests in Keng Kham and Sai Kao areas along the Pang River in Kun Hing Township that would be flooded by the Tasang dam. Locals report

that at the present pace, forests in these areas will be gone in one year.

Both north and south of Mong Pan, two groups have been logging since 2004. A Pa-O businessman, Sai Kaew, used his connections with the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) to get permission to log south of Mong Pan and is targeting further areas for future logging. A company called Shan Arka Min used a contact with a businessman based in Mong Pan to get permission to log 1,500 tons northwest of the town. The company is also expected to extend its operations in the coming years.

### *Logging east of the Salween*

Extensive logging has taken place since 1988 in forests along the eastern banks of the Salween in Mong Boo Long and Mong Ton by the Thai Sawat company. Logs were floated down the river and then transported from Ta Sala by truck via Mong Ton to the Thai border.

However, a new road built in early 2005 by Asia World Co. from Mong Kang village to the north has enabled loggers to enter formerly inaccessible teak forests in Mong Boo Long (and Mong Ton); logging has since become even more rapacious.

The three main groups carrying out logging east of the Salween dam site are: U Thin Myint from the UWSA's Hong Pang Company, Asia World, and



Photo by SRDC

Trucks take logs out from the forests of Keng Tawng



Photo by SHAN

Piles of logs wait for transport in China

Sai Naw Kham from Mong Hsat, who is closely linked to Burmese tycoon U Tay Za. These groups are all logging between Mong Karn and the Hsim River. All of the logs are transported to Tachilek for export to Thailand. In January 2006, the military regime and Thai local authorities agreed to import about 600 logs from Burma, presumably from areas along the Salween River.

According to local sources, each of the three groups has already transported about 5,000 tons of logs to Tachilek and each is still waiting to take out a further 10,000 tons, which have already been cut, from the forest. Only the mountainous terrain and transportation difficulties have delayed the process.

## **THE HUMAN IMPACT**

### **Forced relocation**

Prior to 1996, there were approximately 60,000 people living in 280 communities in the rural village tracts adjoining the Tasang dam site and its projected flood zone (see Appendix 1). These were traditionally prosperous agricultural areas. Most people were farmers, planting seasonal crops in fertile valleys between mountains thickly forested with teak. In two tracts of Kun Hing Township, villagers lived along the Pang River, a tributary of the Salween, farming on the many islands in the river (Kun Hing or *Kun Heng* means “Thousand Islands” in Shan).

However, in 1996, as part of an anti-insurgency campaign by the regime that uprooted over 300,000 villagers in central and southern Shan State, these villagers were forced to abandon their farms and homes and move to military-controlled relocation sites near main towns or roads. No longer able to cultivate their fields and feed their families, many villagers fled to Thailand. Others hid in the jungles near their old homes, cultivating crops in secret while avoiding Burma Army patrols.



Photo by SRDC

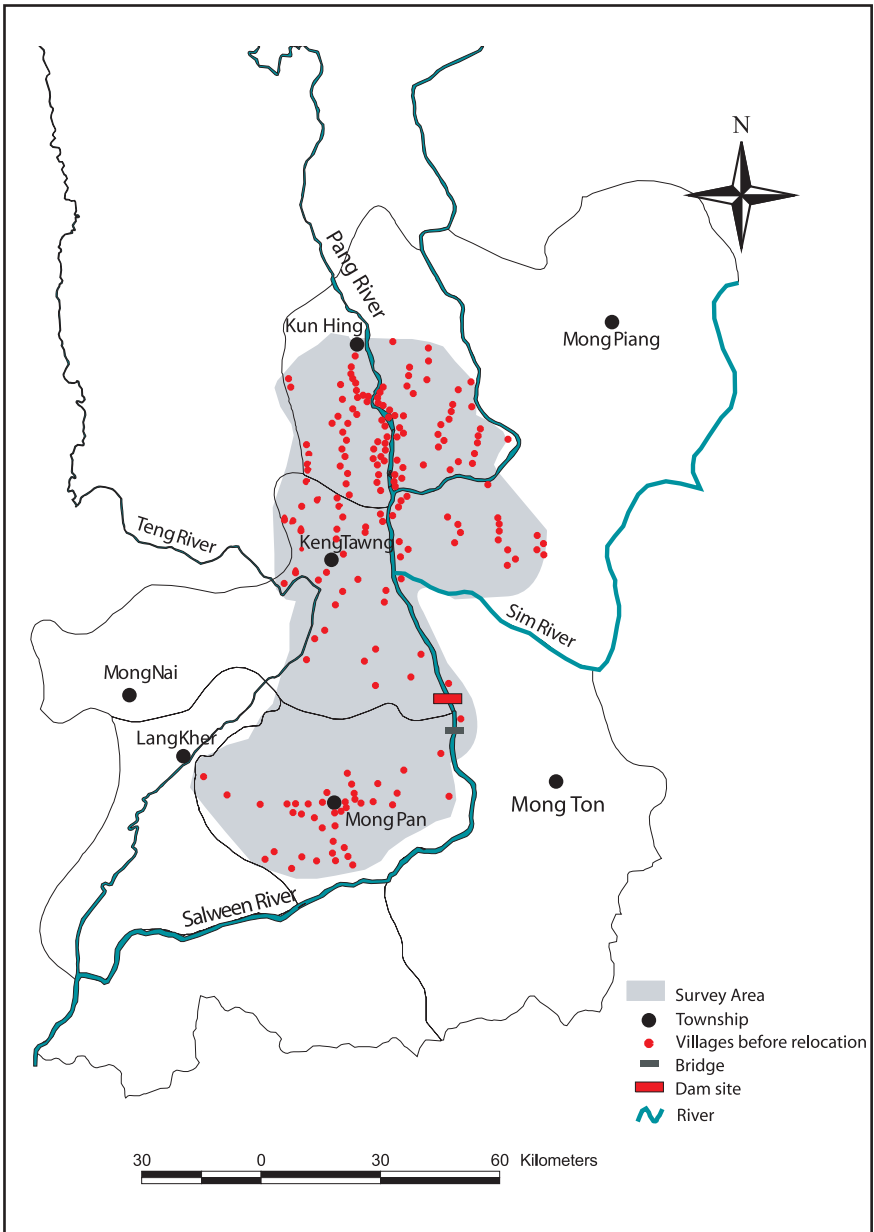
IDPs moving from one place to another with all their belongings



Photo by SRDC

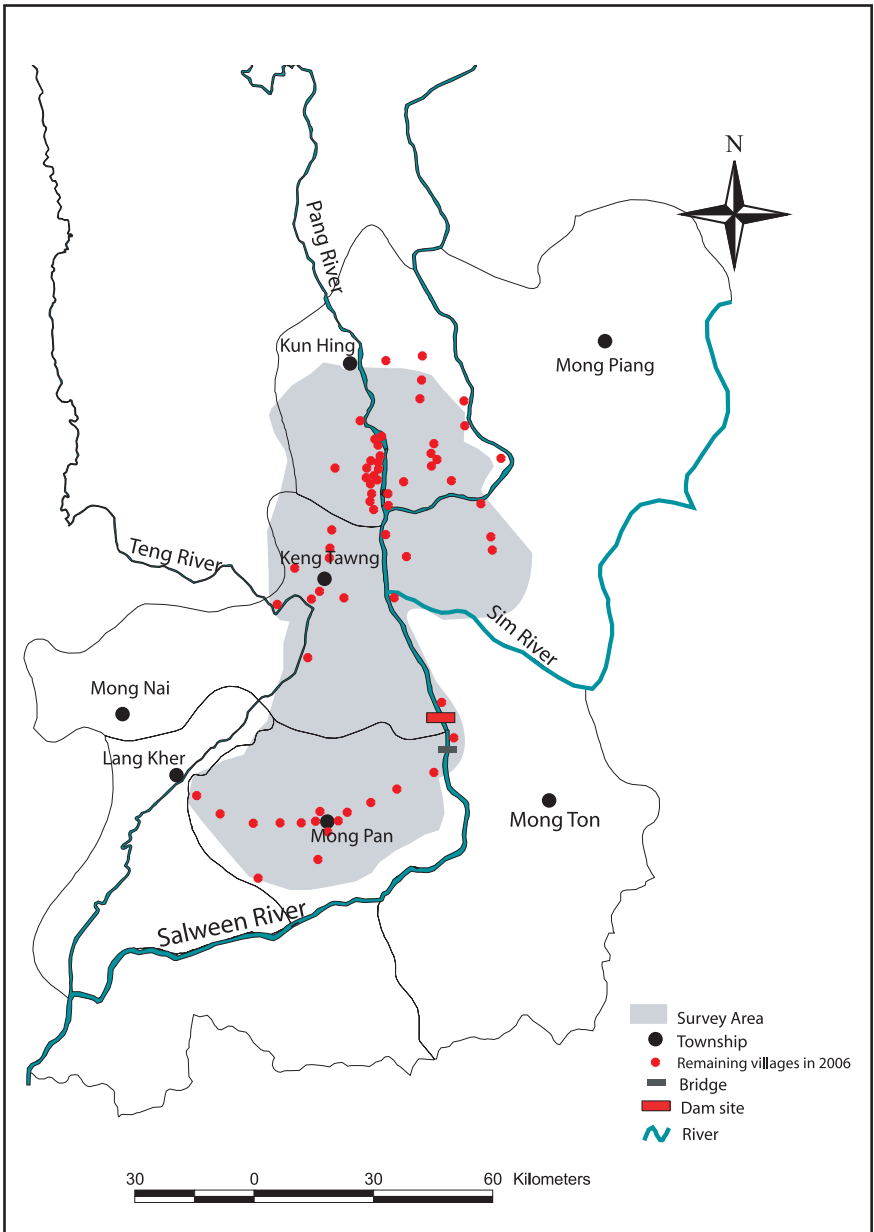
Relocated villagers build a new village from scratch

# Villages in Survey Area Before Forced Relocation in 1996





# Villages Remaining in Survey Area in 2006



## **Continued displacement**

Today, it is estimated that about 35,000 of the original 60,000 inhabitants have fled to Thailand. Out of the estimated 25,000 that remain, some are living in relocation sites, some have returned to their villages, and others are hiding in the jungle.

More than 2,000 of the remaining villagers are living in the projected flood zone (see Appendix 2 for detailed list). However, this number varies according to seasons and other factors. Villagers from this area who are living in relocation sites often return to work in the fields or catch fish whenever they feel it is safe enough. The population is always moving back and forth; exact population figures are therefore difficult to determine. Population estimates north of Kun Hing, where Sapawa has not been able to conduct any research activities, have not been included.

The scale of the relocations and the treatment of those remaining is a clear indication that dam-induced displacement will be of no concern to the military. Nevertheless, the reservoir created by the dam will have significant impact. With a proposed height of 228 meters and a maximum height of water level of 420 meters, the reservoir will cover an estimated 870 square kilometers of surface area, or 1.3 times the size of Singapore. All areas below 420 meters elevation will be inundated, as depicted in the map at right.

## **Life in hiding**

Even though some of the relocated villagers have been gradually moving back to stay in their old villages, after ten years there has still been no official announcement from the regime that they are allowed to do so. Thus, the villagers live in uncertainty of being forced out again. Those tending their farms outside villages are in constant fear of being shot on sight by Burma Army patrols.

The Pang River will swell and flood nearby villages after the dam is built. People living along the Pang are now hiding in the jungle, secretly planting rice, sesame and peanuts, and producing coconut oil. They subsist on these

## Expected Impact from the Tasang Dam



*“Hiding in the jungle, my security depends on my Shan bag. Every morning, I wake up early and cook for the whole day. I pack sticky rice, soy bean, salt, matches, and a water container into my Shan bag and make sure to keep it nearby at all times. When we hear that soldiers are coming, I grab my bag and run into the jungle. I can’t survive without my bag.”* - a Shan refugee from the Pang River

crops, and sometimes risk traveling to market towns to sell produce. They must constantly be on the alert for Burma Army patrols. They have to wake up early in the morning at 2 or 3 a.m. to cook so that troops will not see the smoke of their fires and come searching for them. After cooking, they have to prepare food for the day, and pack it in a bag ready for any emergency.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are efforts underway to assess the potential impacts of dams on the Salween River upstream in China where it is better known as the Nu Jiang. News reports and shocking documentary footage of the displacement happening downstream in Karen State are highlighting the urgency of stopping the Hatgyi dam there. The Tasang dam will be Burma’s and Southeast Asia’s largest. Nevertheless there is little known about what is happening to the communities and the environment near the dam site.

MDX of Thailand signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Burma’s military regime in April 2006 to build the dam. Infrastructure development has been accompanied by further military expansion, heightened security measures, and increased logging activities in the areas surrounding the dam site. Those that will be flooded out have not been informed, and thousands that have already fled military violence and forced relocation will not be able to return.

It is clear that the Tasang project is exacerbating the appalling human rights abuses and environmental destruction already evident in the dam site area, further threatening human security. Given that Burma's military regime has already implemented large-scale forced relocation in Shan State, any participation from local people in impact assessments or decision-making processes surrounding the Tasang dam is impossible. Worst of all, the project will further entrench Burma's military regime by enabling it to get more financial as well as political support from China and Thailand.

On this basis, Sapawa continues to urge an immediate end to the Tasang dam project.

**APPENDIX 1: Communities adjoining the dam site in areas surveyed by Sapawa that were forced to relocate**

West of the Tasang dam site

<b>Tract</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>Families</b>
Ton Hoong	18	483
Koon Long	12	403
Nong Hee	13	797
Koon Mong	9	168
Mong Pan*	61	2,031

Northwest of the site on the northern side of Pang River

<b>Tract</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>Families</b>
Keng Lom	36	1,388
Sai Mong	8	240
Loi Chio	9	591
Weng Phui	7	190
Nar Mong	8	895

Northwest of the on the southern side of Pang River

<b>Tract</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>Families</b>
Warn Lao	28	2,138
Ho Yarn	26	1,567
Koon Bu	12	520
Loi Keng	15	834
Nar Teng	9	397
Nar Boi	11	313
Sai Khao	17	501
Nar Mong	8	895

East of the Tasang dam site

<b>Tract</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>Families</b>
Mong Boo Long	24	285

\* Mong Pan is a township

**Total: 280 communities and 11,847 families (each family has an average of 5 people for a total of approximately 60,000)**

**APPENDIX 2: Communities in Kun Hing and Mong Piang townships surveyed by Sapawa that are currently living in areas which will be flooded if the Tasang dam is built**

<b>Communities</b>	<b>Households</b>	<b>People</b>
Nar Boi	60	195
Koon Bu	24	95
Nar Teng	59	204
Keng Kham	28	144
Warn Lao	150	350
Keng Lom	80	200
Nar Keng	38	60
Warn Tong	16	34
Sar Harng	11	25
Nar Tee	20	45
Wan Pai	60	200
Weng Phui	17	32
Sai Mong	29	61
Loi Khio	31	67
Ba Par	6	18
Nar Kark	18	32
Nar Kea	9	13
Kun Kue	5	13
Sai Leng	40	90
Nong Leng	17	34
Ho Pang	8	15
Kun Song	4	13
See Pao	8	25
Ta Long	4	15
Pa Kao	11	30
Kun Kok	60	300
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>2,306</b>

**For more information** about dam plans and the latest developments on the Salween River, please see [www.salweenwatch.org](http://www.salweenwatch.org)