

## **Implications on Women’s Lives and Livelihoods: A Case Study of Villages to Be Affected by the Mongton Dam Project in Shan State**

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### **Abstract**

This study focuses on the potential impacts of the proposed Mongton Dam on women villagers living downstream using the gender perspectives. It aims to give an in-depth understanding on the socio-economic conditions of local ethnic rural people in the area of the proposed Mongton Dam project on the Salween River, the power distribution between men and women at household and community level and the existing and potential impacts of planning of the project on women and men. The research aims to inform relevant authorities of the importance of community consultation and taking into consideration the gender perspectives in making choices for development planning, adopting gender sensitive policies and processes to ensure gender equity and social justice. This study used the ‘gender impact assessment’ tool developed by Oxfam in collecting data from the field including surveys with individual households and holding focus group discussions with women and men (mixed groups) and women’s groups separately. Secondary information was also collected through desk review.

The study shows that women are more subject to potential impacts of the large dam project due to their vulnerable socio-economic conditions at their household and community level. Women are also rarely able to raise their voice and make decisions related to community affairs. In addition to traditional and cultural

limitations, their access to forest and rotational farming are restricted amidst concerns for security and safety.

## Introduction

*“Once this dam is built, the river will change its course. We are worried that we won’t have adequate amount of farming land which is seasonally flooded with alluvial sediment. We are also worried that we will not be able to get access to our upland fields.”* A female villager from Wan Hsala Village

Key concerns of rural communities especially in ethnic areas in Myanmar are related to their perceptions about the negative impacts of hydropower projects on their land, livelihoods, environment, community life, culture and tradition. People have seen the adverse impacts on other communities displaced by large dams such as the upper Paunglaung Dam in Southern Shan State and also the negative impacts from the construction of mega dams on the Shweli River, a tributary of the Irrawaddy River (Physicians for Human Rights 2015, Kngy 2011, TSYO 2007, 2011). Drawing from existing experiences, concerned civil society groups and local communities are protesting against the planned large dam projects like the Mongton Dam along the Salween River, one of the country’s major rivers.

Key arguments against the Mongton Dam project include its threat to the rich biodiversity of the Salween Basin, and the culture and traditions of various ethnic groups who will either be resettled or face limitations to their access to fields and forests. The lives, homes and property of countless communities in Shan, Karenni, Karen and Mon States are under direct threat.

This research looks at the Mongton Dam from a gender perspective. In spite of the fact that there have been some improvements in the economic and social

status of women in Myanmar over the past decade,<sup>1</sup>there continue to exist gender inequalities in all spheres of women's life according to global, regional and national data (ADB, UNFPA, UN Women 2016). Especially in ethnic rural areas, due to poverty, lack of inadequate public services, and lack of exposure to the outside world, women are subject to exclusion from participating in decisions that directly impact their lives.

As the above cases of hydropower projects indicates, local people including both men and women have experienced negative impacts due to lack of responsible business practices by the companies involved and also the responsible government authorities. These include forced relocation, lack of adequate compensations, loss of livelihoods; lack of proper consultations with the affected community has resulted in social injustice. In such cases, women tend to be more affected than men and studies have been rarely conducted in Myanmar on how women and men are differently impacted by these projects.

In Myanmar, there is no legislation specifically dedicated to gender or women's issues although a violence against women law has been drafted. Myanmar has adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and has articulated its policy position on discrimination against women in the 2008 Myanmar Constitution under article 348 that said "the Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth". Despite all these, the new government's overall reform agenda still lack specific gender dimension in its programs. However, a land policy enacted in 2016 included provisions that protect women's rights in terms of land tenure, and participating in decision making processes related to land rights issues.

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<sup>1</sup>Indicators for women in Myanmar over the past decade, in particular, the labor force participation rate of women, nonagricultural wage employment, access to credit, literacy rates, primary and secondary education, and maternal mortality ratio.

Likewise, Myanmar's Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure 2015 also includes a provision that mentions that projects are required to adhere to safeguard policies of Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) which include specific policies on indigenous people (IP) and gender as a cross-cutting issue, in particular cases that involve involuntary resettlement and have potential negative impacts. Those policies apply to the hydropower sector. Currently, ADB is supporting the government in drafting the Myanmar Energy Master Plan (EMP) while JICA is supporting the government in drafting the National Electricity Master Plan. Likewise, World Bank is supporting the National Electrification Plan. However, it is not clear if these draft policies include a gender dimension. Currently the government is embarking on a one-year activity for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the hydropower sector with the support of IFC in which gender is a cross-cutting issue. SEA aims to provide the government useful policy advice in making decisions on hydropower projects. IFC is also supporting the government in drafting the hydro power specific guideline on EIA process.

Given the fact that there are scant studies in Myanmar regarding gender and hydropower, this research addresses precisely this knowledge gap to study the potential impacts of the proposed Mongton Dam project from a gender perspective. It is expected that this study will contribute to the ongoing activities of the government and relevant stakeholders including SEA in taking into consideration gender perspectives in hydropower sector planning and policy so that these policy and plans do not exacerbate gender inequalities, but promote equity, avoid violations of women's human rights, and promote women's overall development.

The objectives of the study are to explore the following research questions:

- What are the current livelihoods in the two villages visited: Wan Hsala and Kone Kyine?
- How are control and access to land, resources, household property and income gendered?

- What are the implications of these practices women's welfare within the village?

The structure of the paper is divided into six parts. Introduction (Section 1) is followed by a brief discussion on the methodology (Section 2). The discussions on the findings of this study are found in Sections 3 and 4: lives and livelihoods in the study area, and the potential impacts of Mongton Dam to women's welfare. This study offers a conclusion which is found in Section 4.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in two villages in the downstream area of the proposed Mongton Dam project in Southern Shan State. Wan Hsala is 19 kilometers away from the proposed dam and Kone Kyine is 32 kilometers away. These two villages were selected mainly because of accessibility in terms of location, language and network. The researcher worked with a local group called Mongpan Shan Youth Group and two female research assistants assisted the researcher in identifying the villages and in collecting the data. Villagers in the two villages mainly speak Shan language except for a few with Burmese language skills. Wan Hsala is adjacent to a 150 kilowatt (KW) small dam that was built about ten years ago as part of the preparation for the Mongton Dam (previously known as Tasang Dam). Nowadays villagers in Wan Hsala have experienced the impacts of this preparatory project and it was assumed that this would be a good case to learn such experience and also their perceptions on the potential impacts of the large dam project. The second village was selected since it is near to Mongpan Town where two research assistants live and it is easily accessible in terms of location and network.

The study was conducted in Wan Hsala for two weeks in November 2015 and for another four days in June 2016. In Kone Kyine, field visits were conducted for one week in June 2016. The study used four data collection techniques such as

the observation; survey questionnaire, focus group discussion, and individual interviews. The survey was conducted to collect their daily activities, their control and access to public services. Focus group discussion was conducted to discuss on their life and their concerns on the tentative hydropower projects. Individual interviews were conducted to understand related specific issues such as migration or the village background.

## Lives and Livelihoods in the Study Area

### 1.1. Background to the area

Figure 1. Location of Wan Hsala Village and Kone Kyine Village in relation to the proposed Mongton Dam Project

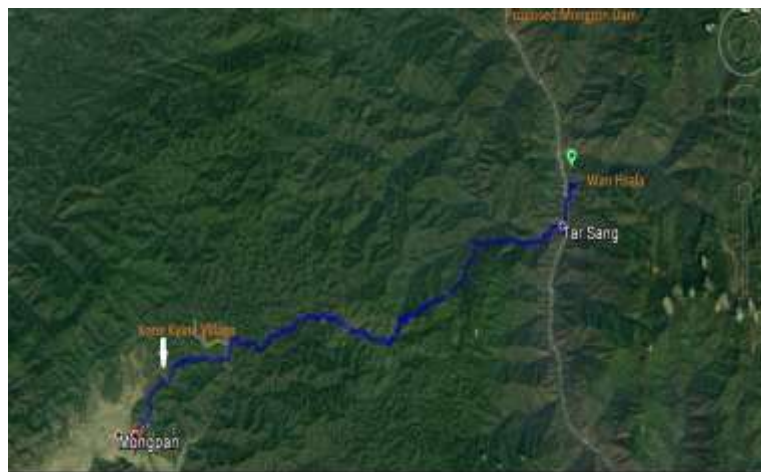


Figure 2. MDX company structure





Figure 3: Cultivation on alluvial land along the Salween River



Figure 4. Boat from China that has entered illegally into Myanmar for gold mining on the Salween River



Figure 5. Kone Kyine Village and the path to its monastery



Figure 6. A plantation on farmland in Kone Kyine Village



Both villages in the study are situated in the downstream area of the proposed dam site in the Southern Shan State (Figure 1). Both Wan Hsala and Kone Kyine villagers nowadays have become more and more aware of water scarcity problem as compared to ten years ago. One villager recalled:



*“Since a few years ago, we started to face water scarcity and problem of distribution evenly among farmers who grow garlic in December and January when they need lots of water. Nant Hu stream is our main water source. This year, we manage to solve this problem by forming a team of farmers’ committee and manage water distribution systematically in equal manner (Interview with a farmer from Kone Kyine Village).”*

Villagers from Kone Kyine think that reduction of water quantity in Nan Hu Stream are related to illegal and legal logging around the area when the road that connects Mong Pan and Mongton towns was built in 2009-2010. The villagers also put the blame on those who cut the wood for making charcoal and brick for their livelihoods.

In Wan Hsala Village, villagers face reduction in water quality and quantity in the Wan Hsala stream which they rely on for livelihoods. The reduction is due to a small dam in the stream built about ten years ago as the preparatory project of the large scale Tasang Dam project, now known as Mongton Dam project. Impacts of this project were further expressed by the villagers as the cause of reduction in fish population and reduction in farm land due to erosion of the bank of the stream.

### ***1.2 Background to the Mongton Dam***

The proposed Mongton hydropower project is one of the six dam projects on the Salween River in Shan State, Kayah State (Karenni) and Karen State that was approved under the former government in 2013 (Salween Watch, 2013). Mongton Dam is located in the middle reaches of the main Salween River, between Mong Ton and Mong Pan Town in Southern Shan State (Mongton hydro, n.d.). With the height of 241 meters and a planned installed capacity of 7000 megawatt, it could be the largest dam in Southeast Asia (S.H.A.N., 2016). A consortium of developers and investors includes China Three Gorges

Corporation as the leading party, Sinohydro<sup>2</sup> and China Southern Power Grid, EGAT<sup>i</sup> (a wholly subsidiary of Energy Generating Authority of Thailand or EGAT) and a local company IGE.

MDX public company limited, a Bangkok-based real estate and infrastructure development company was cited as the developer of the Tasang Dam in the early days of the project in 2000. Between 2003 and 2004, MDX hired a Thai company to build a 13-kilometer road from the Tasang Bridge to the dam site. In 2005, MDX built a 150 KW capacity small dam on a sub-tributary of the Salween near Wan Hsala Village which is 19 kilometers from the dam site and a case study of this research. This small scale hydropower dam was aimed to provide power during large dam construction.

The planned dam is located in the middle of the conflict areas in Shan State for a number of decades, and Sapawa (2006 and 2009) documented the actual impacts incurred by the project planning. They include increased militarization threatening the security of local people including women for perceived or real incidents of sexual violence.

The logging concessions in the areas around the dam project has provided authorities involved and companies concerned a lucrative business, and has exacerbated deforestation and threatened the life security of local people who depend on the forests for generations for their food, traditional medicine and the shelter. Reportedly, the areas around the dam project have been depopulated by forced relocation in 1996 as part of an anti-insurgency campaign by the military regime and uprooted over 300,000 villagers in Central and Southern Shan State. Many villagers were reportedly forced to relocate to military-controlled relocation sites near main towns or roads and many fled to Thailand or others hid in the jungles near their old homes. At the time of survey by Sapawa in 2006, it was estimated that more than 2,000 of remaining villagers were living in the projected flood zone.

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<sup>2</sup>Sinohydro is a Chinese state-owned hydropower engineering and construction company

When the project resumed in 2013, the new consortium of companies from China, Thailand and local IGE Company got MOU with the Ministry of Electrical Power. Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation, SMEC was hired to conduct the environmental impact assessment (EIA) in 2014. SMEC conducted public meetings in Shan State, Kayah State, Mon State, Kayah State and the Bago Region. However, SMEC faced public opposition at key areas in Shan State such as Taungyi, Mongton and Kunhing and couldn't properly undertake the public consultations. Kunhing in the upstream area of the dam, will be flooded if dam is built. Kunhing is also known as thousand islands that is the pride of Shan State with immense potential for tourism development. SMEC could not also have access to conflict areas due to security reasons. Even though SMEC couldn't do a proper study in such key areas, the study continued and they finished the draft EIA and passed the report to their client. SMEC said they used ADB guidelines for conducting EIA before the Myanmar EIA procedure was issued in December 2015.

### **1.3 Lives and livelihoods in Wan Hsala Village**

#### *1.3.1 Resources in the village*

Villagers rely on the Wan Hsala stream, Salween River and nearby forests for their housing, livelihoods, and traditional and recreation activities. Given lack of government service, there is no health care centre, and other government departments related to villagers such as agriculture and fishery departments. Given that the majority of the villagers are Buddhists, there is a monastery which is a place for them to gather for discussion on community related affairs. There is only one primary school built six years ago and students have to go to other places such as nearby Tasang or Mongpan towns for further study. However, many of the parents couldn't afford to send their children to other places mainly due to poverty and lack of adequate facilities. Education level of the villagers is quite poor. Villagers have to rely on traditional herbal medicines for their health or access medical services in Tarsang or Mongpan. Although the village is adjacent to the small scale dam that is still running to maintain the structure built

by MDX, villagers are not provided the electricity. Instead, they have to generate electricity by themselves by constructing mini hydroelectric power stations at their household level.

### ***1.3.2 Governance in the village***

Wan Hsala is led by an existing elected village head which is male and who has the responsibility for the villages' welfare. The village head had requested the Mongton Township authorities to provide more school facilities and health care facilities in the village. They have traditional way of sharing resources like alluvial land and upland cultivation and if there are disputes on land, they solve it with the facilitation of the village head.

The army and the Lahu Pyithusit (Lahu army) co-exist near Wan Hsala, but it is still relatively peaceful and not impacted by civil war. Reportedly, a lucrative business seems to have emerged on both sides, Lahu army and the military stationed at Tasang gate not far from Wan Hsala village. A bridge was built connecting the eastern side and the western side of the River about 20 years ago with the support of Chinese and Thai. On eastern side of the bridge, Wan Hsala is situated. Tarsang Village on the western side of the bridge is like a military town since most of the villagers are supposedly relatives of the military stationed at the Tasang gate. A number of Chinese and Thai businesses reportedly legally or illegally cross over and under the bridge and engage in gold mining activities in the Salween River.

### ***1.3.3 Livelihoods***

The main livelihoods of the village depend on upland cultivation, rice farming, alluvial land, home gardens, hunting and collecting valuable forest products. Clearing land for upland cultivation and ploughing on farm requires physical strength and it is mainly the domain of men. Mostly women work on farm, upland cultivation and land by sowing seeds or growing plants. Table 1 shows the means of livelihoods of the 15 households interviewed in the study.

Table 1: Means of livelihoods of 15 interviewed households

Season	July/Aug - Oct/Nov	June/ July- Oct/Nov	Through out the season	Oct/Nov	All seasons	All seasons	All seasons	seasonal	All seasons/s seasonal	All seasons	All seasons
Types of Key livelihoods	Farm	Upland Cultivation	Fishing	Alluvial Land	Home Gardening	Grocery, shops	Rice Mill	Ad-hoc, informal	Forest including hunting and other valuable products	Gold Panning	Livestocks
Interviewed Households (total 15)	3 (2 female headed household + 1 male headed household)	3	2	15	15	3	1	1	15	1	10

Most of the interviewed households said they work and own the land together. However, according to the survey results, properties including land are controlled mostly by male except for female-headed households. Males control property at 60% of households surveyed and females control property at 20% of households. Twenty per cent of the households said both female and male equally control land. However, they all said they have equal access to those properties. On the other hand, Over 80% of households said female control income except households of single men while the income is shared equally among household members. In case of two women-headed households who own land, their male counterparts like sons or relatives work and manage the land. It is the customary land ownership system where one clears the land for shifting cultivation or farming and everybody in the community recognizes and acknowledges each other's land. In case of disputes, normally the village elder or the village head facilitate the discussion and negotiation between two parties. One villager during the women's group discussion said:

*“In our village, men are a bit more influential in society. Women are not exposed to the outside world and dare not speak up in front of others. Mostly women have very little or no education and knowledge. We dare not make any decisions in community affairs since we are worried that we might not be able to take any responsibility for any*



*decision we make. We mostly rely on men in making decisions on community affairs because men tend to be more knowledgeable and physically more capable.”*

(Interview with a village woman, 19.06.2016)

### **1.3.2 Other livelihoods in the village**

According to survey, three households run small grocery shops at their house selling various goods for domestic consumption but they also work on their home gardening or shifting cultivation. One household head in the survey works as one of the remaining few Burmese staff that maintain the MDX structure in the small dam project in Tasang Dam. Some villagers also raise livestock such as chicken and pigs for domestic consumption and also for sale.

### **1.3.3 Traditions**

They maintain traditional cultural practices such as paying respect to the 'Nat Sin', a shrine for the village guardian spirit called the "ywasangunat" to get relief from their economic, social and health issues. The majority is Buddhists and collectively organizes traditional Buddhist activities seasonally at the village monastery. For instance, together with nearby villages they hold a candlelight floating festival along the Salween River that is similar to "Loi Krathong" in Thailand.

## **1.4 Lives and livelihoods in Kone Kyine Village**

### **1.4.1 Resources in the village**

Villagers mainly rely on "Nanthu" creek for their agricultural activities. One village woman said "Nanthu stream is our lifeblood! (Interview, 28.06.2016)"Nanthustream enters into "NantTain" stream that enter into Salween River. One villager recalled:

*"Nanthu stream has never dried up since I was born and it is a good place for farming livelihoods. However this year, we noticed that due to logging and deforestation*

*around the area, the stream starts to dry up in summer.”* (Interview with a 90-year old village elder man)

Compared with Wan Hsala, Kone Kyine has better transportation system given that it is close to Mongpan Town. It also receives government services including a primary school and a health center although medicine and health staff is not adequate. They also get electricity and the agricultural department provides loans and seeds to farmers. There are also health campaigns about preventing malaria.

On education, Kone Kyine Village has a primary school and there are three teachers and 40 students in 2015-16 academic year. This year, the school has been extended and after children finish primary school, they study in Mongpan Town. In summer, they can also learn Shan dialect and literature. Many of the parents couldn't send their children for middle and high school education due to poverty. There are also children who cannot go to school at all. Children normally start to work by the age of 12. There has been a significant change in terms of access to education as one interviewee shared that:

*“Nowadays I think both girls and boys have equal opportunity to attend schools. When I was young, girls normally cannot go to school due to poverty and also having to take care of younger siblings. When we were young, we need to pass the military gate to get to the high school in Mongpan town. It was a barrier to get to school since we are scared that we will be sexually harassed by soldiers from the gate. Nowadays, when the road that connects Mongpan and Mongton towns was built in 2009-10, students no longer need to pass the gate.”* (Interview with a 40-year old village woman)

In recent years, young women from the village have got more opportunities to join trainings held by local organizations in places such as in Mongpan Town and Taungyi City. Three women interviewed have attended trainings on topics such as human rights and public health care practices.

### *1.4.2 Governance in the village*

The village head is selected by the villagers who are highly respected in the village. If there are disputes or any problems in the village, parties involved follow the village head's decision. Due to water scarcity problem since 2014, there were disputes regarding water allocation especially during the garlic growing season when lots of water is needed for the plantation. To solve the problem, a group of ten farmers organized themselves and established a system of sharing water systematically among them. Water is distributed in turn to each farm hourly per day. The farmer's group consists of male only since men have the control over, and manage the land. Like in Wan Hsala, men are in charge of farm work that needs more physical strength such as ploughing and clearing land while women sow the seeds or grow the plant in the field. This way, men earn more authority in farm land management.

They also use ancestral and customary methods for allocation of farm land and rotational cultivation among their community. Villagers noticed that early this year, the land record and settlement department did measure their farmland so their land would be registered soon.

For community affairs including celebrations, ceremonies and funeral, villagers including both men and women work together. However, regarding matters needed to make decisions, women mainly participate in such cases as observers rather than participating in decision making. However, women take a leading role in preparation of village ceremonies mainly for shopping and cooking, among others.

### *1.4.3 Livelihoods*

Villagers work on farmland in the beginning of the rainy season in June, July and reap crops in October or November based on weather. They grow paddy, garlic and peanut on farm. Nowadays, they practice their ancestral ways of labour distribution by contributing to each other farm work by taking turns. It is partly due to scarcity of daily labourers and also to make it more efficient and cost

effective by working together. The villagers also do rotational cultivation by growing corn, peanut, sesame, peas and vegetables in May and reap the crops by end of October. Women mostly grow vegetables for domestic consumption and for sale in their home garden. There is no market in the village and villagers especially women sell their crops and vegetables at markets in Mongpan in the early morning. Like in Wan Hsala, survey results show that women have control over income from selling vegetables and both men and women have access to the money.

#### ***1.4.3.1 Other livelihoods in the village***

A few people have shops and others who don't have land, work as daily labor in the farm during the paddy season, growing garlic and farming. A few work in the charcoal business by cutting trees or baking bricks. Some villagers also raise livestock such as chicken and pigs.

#### ***1.4.4 Traditions***

There are two monasteries, a sacred site and religious and traditional occasions are held seasonally. During the Sabbath time, at monasteries, there are donation ceremonies every full moon day and new moon day. Monthly and seasonal ceremonies include Shan New Year, Shan National Day, making of seasonal and traditional delicacy of sticky rice, the honoring ceremony for Shan ancient literary authors, holding ceremonies at Nan Yi Saing Kaw's lake that is mentioned in Shan legends, donations at pagodas known as Nanlate and worshipping the Buddha's foot image situated near a village at the entrance of Mongpan and rice donation ceremonies at monasteries. These important traditions are being used to 'help' have better livelihoods. As one villager said:

*"Recently, we hold praying ceremony for getting back water in accordance with our tradition at the spiritual shrine situated at the spring of the Nanthu stream. Thirty years ago, the spring was very beautiful with trees and nowadays, it looks very different."*

(Interview with a village woman, 28.06.2016)

## **2. Potential impacts of Mongton Dam to women's welfare**

### **2.1 Impacts on resources and livelihoods**

While it is obvious that affected community from upstream area of the dam project will be subjected to involuntary displacement, communities in the downstream area are often forgotten, women's welfare and well-being takes a toll in the construction of large scale dams such as in Mongton.

#### **2.1.1 Water resources**

Irregular hydrological regime along the Salween River due to the proposed large scale dam can cause major downstream environmental and social economic impacts. Those impacts will be serious for many ethnic peoples living along the Salween River. Fishing will be impacted due to dam obstructing the route of the long and mid-distance migratory fish. Reservoir flooding will cause deterioration of water quality by producing corrosive and foul-smelling gas, depriving many riverside communities of drinking water and fish. Increased turbidity in the river will increase alluvial deposition in the lower parts of the basin and reduce the ability of the riverbed to hold water thereby increasing the risk of rainy season flooding. Changes in the water course can also lead to flooding or reduction in water quantity during dry season.

Due to reduction in fish population, family members lost income from fishing and also had to reduce their protein consumption. This has more impacts on women, especially for pregnant women, girls and young children who need more iron and protein (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2013). Given that women are the ones who are taking care of the households including making food and child care, they take the burden of collecting clean and adequate amount of water. Reduction in water quality and quantity leads to a stressful situation for women and potential impact on their health and well-being, especially for pregnant women's health. Nowadays, they even have to face problem of water scarcity and bear the extra burden of time and labour on collecting water. This has been affirmed by a villager in Kon Kyine:



*“We women work harder than men. We work on farmland, home gardening and we also work at home.”* (Interview with a woman villager, 01.07.2016)

### 2.1.2 Land

Dam blocks the flow of sediment downstream, and increases sediment load in reservoir and leads to the erosion of farmland. It will also reduce the amount of silt alluvial land. The large dam upstream will incur irregular fluctuations in the Salween River and it will have serious impact on downstream riverine vegetation, birds and various aquatic life forms whose lifecycles are dependent on the natural flow of the River. As a result, it will reduce agricultural production of the villagers with adverse impacts on their food security and livelihoods.

Due to the rainy season and dry season flooding, their agricultural plantation will be flooded and will incur loss. Particularly in Wan Hsala Village, they grow vegetables on alluvial land after the rainy season when the floodwaters recede in late October or early November. Alluvial land is both income and food sources for women who mostly find edible insect there and sell them.

*“We are worried that nowadays we have abundant slit alluvial land and we share among us in peaceful manner. Due to the large dam, if they disappear or there are limited numbers, we will have to compete for them.”* (Interview with a village woman from Wan Hsala, 13.11.2015)

In both villages, home gardening is especially done by women for domestic consumption and for sale. If those plantations are flooded or couldn't be supplied adequate amount of water, women will lose their income, experience food insecurity and diminish their useful role at home.

*“We are worried that the big dam will flood us, our land and our lives will be destroyed.”* (Interview with a village woman from Kone Kyine)

It is also likely that there will be less accessibility to their rotational cultivations due to being restricted for security reason or potential flooding of the forest areas

they have been utilizing for the cultivation. Even nowadays, villagers in Wan Hsala find that they dare not go to their cultivation alone; instead they have to go by groups or by the whole family due to security concerns with the presence of both armed groups, military and some outsiders perceived to be Chinese as part of the preparation of the large scale dam.

It is often the case that people in the downstream area affected by the large scale dam are forgotten and are not compensated for the loss incurred (The Fisheries Office, Ratanakiri Province in cooperation with the Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) Project, Ratanakiri Province, 2000). Affected community in the downstream area need to be protected from such hazards and need to be compensated properly. Given the fact that women still lack official land title in the form of joint ownership of a farmland<sup>3</sup>, women are subjected to disadvantaged position in claiming for social justice.

Women villagers expressed that, women's participation is important in making decisions on land related matters including adopting prevention and mitigation measures. One villager articulated that:

*“It is important that our names will be included when we do land registration. It will ensure that land matters cannot be decided by my husband alone, but I have to be consulted.”* (Interview with a village woman from Kone Kyine)

### 2.1.3 Forest

Access to forest by villagers will be adversely impacted if there is flooding or restriction by security forces due to security reason. The latter impact in fact has been already faced by the Wan Hsala villagers as part of the preparatory project of the large dam. Logging required for clearing the dam site and illegal logging related to the site will potentially incur deterioration of environment and water scarcity. Since most of the villagers rely on herbal medicine from forest for their health, it will leave them without any protection of their health and well-being.

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<sup>3</sup> Although 2016 land use policy recognizes gender equality in land ownership, application of the policy is still nascent.

Although both men and women will be severely impacted, women are more impacted since they are less mobile than men due to security reason and physical strength. They will lose their income from selling forest products or they will not be able to enjoy valuable forest products for their own domestic usage. In cases of losing livelihoods or income, men can leave their home to look for another area for accessible forest or for earning an income from any available low skilled jobs. However, it can lead to family separation and women will be more subject to such impacts. Mehta (2012) highlighted how men being depressed in losing livelihoods and power due to displacement, tend to abuse alcohol and tend to vent their frustration on women and children and how domestic violence has increased.

In those days, kinship structures were also ruptured and women lose “their bargaining power with the loss of a social set up to monitor domestic disputes and they also lost their land rights” (Mehta, 2012). Although this study area would not be displaced like areas in flooded zone, the potential threats on their livelihoods and traditional ways of supporting each other and working together either in the field or in the seasonal traditional ceremonies implies another form of ‘forced displacement or disruption’ to their normal sustenance and peaceful rural life style.

## ***2.2 Impacts on tradition***

In both villages, their traditional and cultural practices can be threatened. For instance, if the Salween River is dammed, it would be very difficult for them to hold ceremonies like “Loi Krathong”. If their subsistence way of life is destroyed, it will have negative impact on seasonal ceremonies and celebrations at their village monasteries. Monks rely on food donation from their laypeople on a daily basis and reduction of wellbeing of their laypeople means reduction in their food security. The tradition of offering meals in respectful manner to monks can be disrupted. The only place that women’s leadership role can be found is in preparing traditional ceremonies especially at monasteries and the reduction or disappearance of such tradition can disempower women.

Villagers in both villages are worried that they will not be able to live together in a peaceful manner any longer if the dam is built. They feel that both men and women take respective role and responsibilities in such ceremonies and unity and equity can be found in such community activities and they feel that this community life will be endangered. In addition, a villager in Wan Hsala said:

*“We are worried that if the dam is built, there will be more Chinese workers. We feel threatened that our village girls might be taken by those Chinese workers and our tradition is disrupted. Women might also be used for entertaining those workers and their life and physical integrity would be ruined.”* (Interview with a woman villager 19.06.2016)

## **2.3 Involvement in decision making**

### **2.3.1 Access to information and public participation**

As mentioned in the Mongton Dam project website, SMEC held consultation workshops in potentially affected areas as part of their EIA process and explained about the project in 2015.<sup>4</sup> However, on its website, details are not mentioned about the pros and cons of the project and both positive and negative potential impacts. Information is lacking related to which places will be in the flood zone and which places power distribution line will be passed through.

Out of 15 households in Wan Hsala Village, only three said they know about the project. But in Kone Kyine Village, villagers know about the project and potential impacts because of awareness raising sessions organized by local civil society organizations with the support of NGOs and international NGOs. One villager from Wan Hsala Village said that only three male representatives from the village including the village head joined the consultation meeting in Mongton Town in early 2015. One of them said

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.mongtonhydro.com/eportal/ui?pageId=133208>

*“We couldn’t contribute to anything. Time is limited and we also didn’t understand well about how we would get benefit or how we would lose out (Interview with a villager, 19.06.2016).”*

Due to inaccessibility of data from SMEC regarding the number of participants including women especially at the consultation held at Mongton Town, the assumption is made on inclusiveness of the consultation held by SMEC based on villagers’ account. However, it is obvious that SMEC could not get access to key areas such as Kunhing due to conflict sensitivity and the local oppositions. Kunhing is to be flooded by the Mongton Dam and it is renowned for its natural beauty and potential eco-tourism.

The above case indicates that the EIA consultant companies need to provide adequate information and time frame in advance so that participants can meaningfully participate in those consultations. Community engagement strategies and plans are needed for a meaningful and inclusive participation of all relevant stakeholders throughout the process.

In addition, given the historic lack of active women’s participation in such events mainly due to traditional and practical barriers as discussed earlier, women tend to be the ones who lack access to information on what would be happening in their neighborhoods and how they will be impacted.

Currently at regional level, Regional Guidelines for Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment is being drafted and consulted. These draft guidelines are developed by the Regional Technical Working Group (RTWG) on EIA comprised of members from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.<sup>5</sup>It provides detailed guideline on public participation process in EIA including women and vulnerable groups.

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<sup>5</sup> See more on [eia.mekongcitizen.org](http://eia.mekongcitizen.org)



## **2.4 Conflict, Security and Peace**

Although villages in study are not currently impacted by conflict, they have experienced conflict in their lifetime directly or indirectly. In Wan Hsala, one family in survey has moved to the village after fleeing from civil war in Shan State. Similarly in Kone Kyine, village elders gave an account of how they have experienced conflict in the past. Those villagers are quite innocent and they could not mention which parties are involved in the conflict. However, the narratives of the villagers can be related to the incidents as argued in Sapawa (2006) on how villagers are displaced by the military about 20 years ago as part of the preparation for the large dam. In addition, these areas were in conflict zone or near the conflict zone until recent years where armed groups such as RCSS/SSA and TNLA are active in the north of Shan State. RCSS/SSA is one of the ethnic armed groups that have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, NCA in October, 2015. However, very recently in Northern Shan State, fighting was reignited between the ethnic armed groups and the military and tension is still going on.<sup>6</sup>

Given that backdrop, activist groups such as Save the Salween Network have raised concerns over the plan of the large dam on the River and potential fuel to increase the tension. There are implications for women and men in the villages in study regarding such conflict sensitive situation around their area and their past experiences of the conflict. As mentioned earlier, such impact implications include restriction of access to forest, rotational cultivation and security concerns. Elsewhere in the world, women and men are differently impacted by the conflict and women suffer more due to their vulnerable position in society. Although this study does not find out cases of sexual abuse in two villages in study, it obviously does not cover the whole area and does not represent all women suffered by the conflict.

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/fighting-breaks-out-between-tatmadaw-and-kiamonepaw-northern-shan-state>

However, even this study implies that women are facing real or perceived security threat in their villages due to presence of ethnic armed forces and the military around their area. For instance, In Wan Hsala, women relies on the Wan Hsala stream for having a bath and nowadays, they use to go for a bath in group and dare not have a bath alone in the stream since they do not feel comfortable and safe with their upper body uncovered during the bath with the presence of outsiders in their neighborhood. Water level has receded nowadays especially in summer partly due to the small dam upstream and partly due to illegal logging around the area.

In addition, due to legacy of conflict, women in the villages in study especially elders and the middle age had very little or no access to education, and even nowadays women lack adequate health care facilities especially in Wan Hsala. It shows the clear link between peace, security and women's development, access to education and quality health care and participation in matters that have impact on their life. If this linkage is not taken into consideration in the forthcoming development planning and projects, women will be left behind from any development process, and instead, will be more impacted by potential negative impact of large scale extractive projects. To fulfill the objectives of National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, needs and aspirations of ethnic women needs to be paid special attention.

## **Conclusion**

This study finds out that livelihoods of both villages that would be affected by the Mongton dam rely on the Salween River, forests and farmlands both near and away from the river. In both villages, men have control over land although both women and men have access to farming and fishing. They practice their customary tradition in sharing and recognition of land ownership. Both villages are relatively peaceful at present although they have experienced civil war in the past especially in Kone Kyine village near Mong Pan town. Wan Hsala village has

never experienced civil war although Lahu ethnic armed group and Myanmar military co-exist with each other because at the present moment, both sides are involved in sharing the benefit of legal or illegal access by Chinese and Thais in illegal gold mining activities along the Salween River.

The culture of the majority of Shan seems that women used to be the one who have control over income although both men and women are accessible to resources. It is also the tradition of both villages to hold seasonal ceremonies at monasteries and both men and women take respective responsibility in preparing and holding those ceremonies. Men normally lead activities that involve physical strength and women normally lead their traditional realm of cooking and decoration etc. Villagers agree that both men and women live in harmony and unity.

However, in Kone Kyine, women feel that they have to work harder than men. Women in both villages said that they dare not speak up like the men and are not involved in decision making at the village level because they lack confidence in themselves, with limited knowledge and exposure to the outside world. They refer to traditional barriers of women's access to education compared with their male counterpart. Women were regarded as those who take care of the home and their younger siblings rather than going to school. However, nowadays, people are already very aware of the value of education for women and such an issue is no longer a barrier for women's access to education. Main barriers to quality education and higher education in both villages are poverty and the lack of adequate educational facilities. Public service facilities such as health care are still limited. In both villages, there is external migration mainly to Thailand to seek better job and income opportunities.

The large scale proposed Mongton Dam project can potentially have negative impacts on their livelihoods and their environment and their culture because it incurs irregular hydrological regime along the Salween River. As the result, their land, forest and river will be subjected to flooding or dryness and water quality and quantity will be reduced. Women will be more impacted than men because



they are the ones who take the burden of taking care of their households including children and elders and their vulnerable position at home and within the community.

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