

The Plight

OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN BURMA

Woman and Child Rights Project (Southern Burma)

Issue No.1, March 2010

Report: Women's Rights Study on Mon Women's Day



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Acronyms

IDPs	- Internally Displaced Persons
LIB	- Light Infantry Battalions
MWO	- Mon Women's Organization
NMSP	- New Mon State Party
RLU	- Rehmonnya Labor Union
RTA	- Royal Thai Authority
SPDC	- State Peace and Development Council
TBBC	- Thailand-Burma Border Consortium
WAV	- Women Against Violence Programme

Report:

Women's Rights Study on Mon Women's Day

Introduction

On February 24th, 2010, Mon nationals from various areas in Thailand and southern Burma celebrated the 6th anniversary of *Mon Women's Day*(MWD). Celebrations took place in Baleh-Donephai, an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) resettlement site in southern Burma. During the celebration WCRP conducted a cross-sectional qualitative study about: domestic violence, economic despair, livelihoods and the role of women in the family.

This report details the feelings of women from the Baleh-Donephai IDP community, and highlights activities and the perspective of participants at the MWD celebration. The report also discusses the effects of domestic violence and economic despair on the livelihoods of women in the Baleh-Donephai community.

Background

Under the rule of the Burmese military regime women are not assured their basic rights. Women are physically and psychologically abused daily and violence in ethnic states and the use of women as weapons of



Female community leader gives speech at MWD

A message from

Woman and Child Rights Project

The Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP), southern Burma, was founded in 2000 by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) in order to monitor and protect the rights of women and children and to focus international attention on Burma in order to pressure the Burmese military regime -- the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) - to uphold the rights of women and children.

WCRP's main aim is to promote and protect the rights of women and children according to the CEDAW and the CRC, which were both ratified by the regime. WCRP implements various alternative activities to expose how the SPDC and its Burmese Army continually violate women and children's rights and ignore the CEDAW and CRC.

WCRP's objectives are:

- § To monitor and protect women and children's rights by: collecting information, monitoring the situation inside and distributing information to the international community
- § To strengthen women and children in their communities by teaching them about their rights, according to the CEDAW and CRC and encouraging them to protect these rights..

war, inhibit the ongoing battle for equality. In order to avoid persecution, tens of thousands of women and children regularly flee to IDP areas and refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. Bleh-donephai IDP resettlement site in southern Burma near the Three Pagodas Pass (TPP) border crossing point, provides a semi-permanent haven for these fleeing Burmese citizen.

Baleh-donephai is under the administrative control of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and is within the ceasefire area of Mon State. Before the 1995 ceasefire agreement between Burma's ruling military Junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)¹, and the NMSP, there was a Mon refugee camp in the forest of Sangkhlaburi district, Thailand (around two hours from Baleh-donephai). The Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) and other relief organizations provided a regular supply of rice, cooking oil, beans and other goods from various donors to the refugee camp. However, after the ceasefire agreement was enacted, supplies were cut off and Mon occupants were forced to repatriate by The Royal Thai Authority (RTA).

The RTA cited the ceasefire agreement as a sign of peace and stability throughout Mon State and announced that it was safe for all camp occupants to return to their once abandoned homes. While the ceasefire gave the NMSP more autonomy within areas of Mon State, the entire region was not stable and fighting persisted in what are now called *black areas or conflict zones*.

Immediately following the ceasefire agreement, the SPDC stationed additional Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) and Artillery Regiments between Ye Town and Yebyu Township, which incubated the atmosphere of hostility and fear. Rape and abuse were rampant and women constantly felt threatened. Moreover, in a continued attempt to extinguish the Mon population and other ethnic minorities, the Burmanization policy was fully enacted and, among other things, Mon women were forced to wed SPDC soldiers. As a result, when camp occupants tried to return home they found the situation too volatile and once again fled to the border area. Other camp occupants could not return to their previous homes at all and instead became IDPs living in the Burmese forest near Thailand's border.

The border area the refugee camp occupants fled to, is now known as Baleh-donephai resettlement site. The site, once consisting of one household, now has a fluctuating population of over a 1000. In the surrounding area there are two other IDP resettlement sites, Halockhani (the first IDP resettlement site and closest to Thailand's border) and Htee Pa Doh (majority Karen IDP site), were established in a similar manner as Bleh-donephai.

MWD was founded to celebrate the strength and perseverance of Mon women and is particularly important to the well being of those in the IDP area. In previous years MWD was only celebrated in the US and Canada, but for the past two years the Mon Women's committee, (comprised of female leaders from the surrounding towns and the NGO border community) has organized celebrations in Thailand and Burma.

The Mon Woman's Committee hopes that the celebration will inspire action within the IDP community and encourage women to take leadership roles in social, economic, and political processes.

(Footnotes)

¹ When the agreement was signed the Junta was called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)

continued report on Pg. 5

Feature:

A home for the unwanted

March 12, 2010 by Chan Chan

WCRP: "I want to go back home. Can you take me?" a mentally challenged woman asked me while my friend and I were visiting the Safe House near Huay Malai in Kanchanaburi province, Thailand. But for this woman, and many of her fellow patients, the Safe House serves as the only "home" such individuals can find.

It had taken us about 45 minutes to travel to the Safe House by motorbike. When we arrived the manager, Naw Paw Lu Lu, was accompanying an HIV positive patient to the Kwai River Christian Hospital, a five minutes drive from the Safe House. As we waited to interview her, staff from the Safe House gave us a tour of the organization's grounds and projects. Small houses and buildings connected by gardening projects, fish banks and a pig farm scattered the Safe House property. When Naw Paw Lu Lu returned we sat down and she patiently answered my questions about the Safe House, while my friend photographed the weaving centre.

Naw Paw Lu Lu, a 61-year-old Karen woman, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), and the Christian Church of Thailand, founded the Safe House in 1993. The Safe House was a coordinated effort of the three organizations to aid the increasing number of displaced migrants struggling to survive on and around the Thailand-Burma border. Over the past 17 years, the Safe House has treated over 1500 patients suffering from varying illnesses. Patients of the Safe House are members of various nationalities, ethnicities and religions; presently there are Mon, Shan, Karen, Arakan, Akha, Thai, Malay, Khmer and Indian patients at the residence.

Naw Paw Lu Lu explained to me that the aim of the Safe House is to help mentally impaired, or terminally ill, individuals who have no other option. This includes individuals suffering from: HIV/AIDS, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Tuberculosis (TB), schizophrenia, mania, epilepsy, intellectual disabili-

ties, and various other ailments.

In the past, most of the HIV/AIDS patients that came to the clinic were men but now the clinic is admitting



Huay Malai Safe House weaving center improves women's livelihoods

more women. Naw Paw Lu Lu thinks the increase is due to the rise in women migrating to and working in Thailand.

Since she was 27, Naw Paw Lu Lu has been studying and providing healthcare on and around the Thailand-Burma border. Initially running the Safe House alone, she now has a round-the-clock staff of 14. Other than caring for patients, Safe House staff runs various recreational, rehabilitation and vocational programs to aid in the patients' recovery. Able patients can tend to the: vegetable gardens, fish banks or pig farm. Other activities include: soccer, crafts, brick making and chicken husbandry. Additionally, the Safe House's weaving centre and loom project teaches patients how to weave Karen bags, purses, scarves and various other goods.

Naw Htin Phyu, a 22-year-old Karen women, who runs the loom project explained to me how she came to the Safe House:

One day a troop of SPDC soldiers were fighting in my village so we ran to Nu Poe refugee camp. While I was living in the camp, my aunt contacted me and



Elderly Patients in Safe House

invited me to live with her in Huay Malai and she told me about the Safe House. So my husband and I came, and we now live with my aunt. When I arrived, I attended the loom training and now I work at the Safe House. I don't want to go back to my village because if I live in my village I will constantly worry about SPDC soldiers. I am very happy to work here. I also have two children who attend the Christian school in Huay Malai." Naw Htin Phyu is from Paw Nan village, Karen State, and has worked at the Safe House for several years.

Through the weaving centre and loom project, the Safe House provides jobs and opportunities for patients to earn an income if and when they are capable. At the front of the Safe House there is a small store where all the goods from the two projects are sold. When an item is purchased the profit goes back to the maker.

In a separate building, there are 30 live-in children; some sick, some orphaned, and some merely the children of patients. TBBC provides funds so the children are able to attend the local Christian school.

"I have been working here [the Safe House] for five years. My duty is to care for the children, I teach them on the weekends, prepare food, and make sure they are healthy... Also I teach them Burmese, English, Karen, and do Math with them. I am tired, but I am happy to take care of them. They are very cute," said Naw Joe Phyu, a 49-years-old Karen woman from Kyain Seikgyi Township, Karen State, who is responsible for the live in children. In total, three Safe House staff members tend to the children while they

are not attending school. In an attempt to accommodate all students, the Christian school, provides language classes in Karen, Burmese, English, Thai, and Mon.

Currently the Safe House is supporting 42 patients, 19 female and 23 male with the average age of 37. There are six adults and two children with HIV/AIDS, 22 patients are mentally ill, 14 patients are suffering from an assortment of chronic physical illnesses. Additionally there are 10 chronically sick elderly patients over the age of 70. TBBC provides the: staff, rent, food, clothes, furniture, appliances, cutlery, medicine, and

medical supplies for occupants of the Safe House. The Safe House is currently in the midst of a 5-year plan to become independent.

Potential patients have to meet strict criteria before the Safe House is able to accept them as in-patients. Admitted patients usually do not have a home, family or any kind of support network. Patients that cannot or do not recover, are able to rely on or live at the Safe House for extended periods of time.

Land limitations are currently creating difficulties for the Safe House and its occupants. The 22 mentally ill patients share two cramped dorm like spaces, which are divided by sex. Naw Paw Lu Lu explained that due to the confined quarters, fights are quite common.

"We do not have enough land and it causes problems. Also, the land that we use is rented and the landlord may want it back in the future. We also do not have enough toilets." Said Naw Paw Lu Lu. For the 42 occupants and 14 staff there are only four toilets, two of which are inside the mentally impaired patients' male quarters. When fights break out, between the patients, or if the quarters are locked, everyone is blocked from using the toilets.

"I want to help the people who have no place to stay and no one to care for them. I try to give them a place to sleep and treat their diseases. I also try to help migrant workers who have problems and make it so they can stay in our Safe House comfortably." Said Naw Paw Lu Lu.

Last year the event was celebrated in Sangkhlaburi and over 100 people attended. Celebrations are thrown annually in the hopes of empowering and raising awareness about women's rights. This years celebrations in Baleh-donephai included speeches and a group discussion about domestic violence in the community.

2010 Mon Women's Day (MWD) celebration

MWD was founded to celebrate the strength of Mon women, both past and present. The Mon Woman's Committee decided to celebrate MWD on the birthday of the Mon Queen Banyu Thou. "We chose this day ... in honor of the birthday of Queen Mi Jao Pu, who lead the Mon kingdom between 1453 and 1472," the pamphlet issued at the celebration explained.

The Queen was born on the 12th Waxing day of the 12th month, or the Mon lunar year of 757. Her majesty reigned Hongsarwa Toi, an area of lower Burma, for 29 years.² Queen Banyu Thou is also known as Mi Joa Bu (Shin Saw Bu in Burmese), and she was the only ruling queen in the history of Burma. She is very popular with Mon women because she worked closely with the community and donated the gold that now covers Shwedagon pagoda. Mon women use this day to remember Queen Banyu Thou and they are inspired by her courageousness.

On February 24th, Mon women from the Thai-Burma border area joined women from Mon State to attend the annual celebration of MWD. Over 100 people attended the Baleh-donephai celebration and smaller celebrations were held throughout Thailand.

Early in the morning women wearing traditional red Mon sarongs and purple (the international color for women) sarongs prepared for the celebration. Women from Baleh-donephai village and the Mon Women's celebration committee prepared chicken curry and rice for participants and children from the surrounding area. Young female participants distributed pamphlets, political journals and newspapers, provided by NGOs and CBOs from the border.

Supporting organizations included: Mon Women Organizations from America, Canada, Mon Youth Progressive Organization, Woman and Child Rights Project and another Independent Mon Women Organizations.



Photo by WCRP

Community leaders salute the Mon flag on Mon Women's Day

women should learn about politics and we should try hard to be leaders like the men. I would like all Mon women to be able to join the celebration. Hopefully next year I will see more women at Mon Women's Day."

There were 5 speakers at the event: Mi Nyin (an adviser from the Mon Women Organization, MWO), Nai Ka Bar Kyaw (committee member from Three Pagodas Pass, TPP), Mi Chan Chan from the Mon hospital in Halockhani, a leader from a CBO in Bleh-donephai and a monk from Baleh-donephai.

Mi Nyin opened the celebration with a message to the people, "I am very happy to see so many women here today. Women now have a lot of knowledge and confidence. Before women always had to take care of the children and cook because men didn't think it was their duty ... It is like that in a lot of households in our community. Now we have to change, women have to try to be leaders,

² <http://gmsuk.org/?about-mon-people> cited from 1/4/10

NEWS:

SPDC ambushes Mon group, girl and soldier killed

Kaowao/February 10, 2010

Yebyu -- Fighting broke between the Burmese government's militia force and a Mon splinter group near the Yadana gas pipeline which resulted in the death of two people.

The two groups exchanged a short round of gunfire in the second week of January near a Mon village in Tenasserim Division which killed a young girl aged 6 and a SPDC soldier, said a Mon village administrator to Kaowao who requested anonymity for fear of reprisal.

The SPDC Light Infantry Battalion No. 282, a special battalion that guards the Yadana Gas Pipeline, and its militia force, surrounded and ambushed the Mon splinter group led by Major Jalon Taw who broke away from the NMSP last year.

The area of the fighting occurred in the east of Moulmein-Tavoy motor road near Kaloin Ong (Kalein Aung in Burmese) of Yebyu Township. There are over five Mon villages situated along the Yadana pipeline that runs along a portion of the road. The villagers are often caught in the crossfire between the

government forces who force the villagers to guard the pipeline and the Mon resistance groups who demand their support.

The militia force members which are composed of ordinary villagers were recruited by the SPDC local battalion in 2001 and face an uphill battle in following the orders of both the SPDC and the ethnic armed groups who make numerous demands on them.

The village recruits are told to fight their own people who make up the splinter group; one of the recruited villagers, Yabu (Daik Tao in Mon), said they face continual harassment in the column alongside the SPDC soldiers and often fear of running into their own people while out patrolling the area.

Most of the village militia force speak only Mon and have problems communicating in Burmese to the SPDC's soldiers. Meanwhile, the strapped for cash SPDC extorts money from the villagers leaving them with little even to feed themselves. Many villagers will decide instead to flee to one of the Mon Internally Displaced Camps situated along the Thai- Burma border, while others will move to a more urban area where no fighting occurs.



Photo by WCRP

Nai Ka Bar Kyaw briefly greeted the crowd and Mi Chan Chan followed with the history of the Mon Queen. Next, Mi Yin Non, from the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), read the official statement of the event, which was issued by the Mon Women's Day committee:

"We must prevent the military government from carrying out its plan to have its men marry Mon women [the Burmanization policy]. We must close the restaurants where Mon women work as prostitutes. We must stop traffickers who traffic women. We must prevent the military government from sending its troops into Mon State, where they abuse Mon women."

The ceremony finished with the crowd rising to sing the Mon National anthem. As festivities concluded, WCRP's

"Women leaders can bring peace" One of many messages hung at the MWD celebration,

A male community member said, "I would like to request that the Mon Women's Day committee hold the celebration somewhere in Mon State. Many women do not know about Mon Women's Day and most people have never seen a celebration like this. I would like to request the committee to make a celebration in a place where more people can see it,"

WCRP feels it is important to celebrate MWD because it can empower local populations and educate outside communities about the oppressive situation of Mon women. The day is an example to Mon women and demonstrates that they can speak out against persecution.

Informal celebrations of Mon Women's Day (MWD) in Thailand

Informal celebrations of MWD were held in Bangkok, Mahachai, Phuket and Ranong, Thailand. The celebrations took place at Universities, temples, learning centers and Mon migrant communities. Sponsoring organizers were from Rehmonnya Labor Union (RLU), Layie Jay Ta Na (Phuket), and Karat Hong Sa in Mahachai. Participants from various communities included monks, university students, migrant workers, and teachers.

At an informal celebration of Mon Women's Day at a monastery in Bangkok, a senior monk and prominent leader within the Mon community gave a series of speeches about women's rights and leadership. He felt, "All Mon women should know about their rights and Mon Women's Day. It is a very special day."

A female Mon student from Rangsit International University, Bangkok said, "We found out about the day late, so it was hard to arrange a formal celebration ... For sure next year we will celebrate much better." This year she organized a small informal gathering with other Mon Rangsit students. For next year's celebration she plans to contact Mon students at other universities and organize a larger celebration. She hopes future celebrations will bring unity within the Mon community in Bangkok and empower future female leaders.

15 days after Mon Women's Day is International Women's day. Clara Zetkin founded International Women's Day on March 19, 1910. She proposed that every year, in every country, there should be a celebration on the same day, a women's day, to press for female demands. Mon Women's Day is separate then International Women's Day but they serve similar purposes.

Women from all over the world celebrate International women's day to show their struggle for equality. On International Women's Day in 2010, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) focused on the hardship displaced women endure. The ICRC stated, "the displacement of populations is one of the gravest consequences of today's armed conflicts. It affects women in a host of ways".³

Domestic Violence in Baleh-Donephai

After this year's MWD celebration in Baleh-Donephai, WCRP invited participants to an informal discussion about domestic violence and influencing factors in their communities. A report by TBBC, that surveyed IDP and refugee areas along the Thai-Burma border, stated, "Villagers surveyed in 2007 and again in 2009 perceived domestic violence as the most common form of violence committed against women in eastern Burma."⁴ The women from the group discussion stressed that domestic violence within their community was an ongoing problem between husbands and wives or husbands and children, but awareness was spreading.

The women felt that in Baleh-donephai there had been a slight decline of domestic violence due to ongoing workshops and trainings on prevention and women's rights from various NGOs and CBOs. The women also expressed that learning about their rights from organizations was very effective and helped them recognize injustices within their community. The Mon Women's Organization (MWO), Women Against Violence Programme (WAV), the Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) are a few of the groups that consistently work within the community. These groups IDP promote that the key to preventing domestic violence is through educating women about their rights and raising awareness within the community.

³ International Committee of the Red Cross,

<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/women-displacement-interview-020310>

⁴ Internal Displacement In Eastern Burma, 2009 survey, TBBC

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Although villagers feel the level of awareness is increasing, the information is limited to women who participate in workshops and trainings. Those who are isolated from the community, and those who endure domestic violence but do not speak out, are not being helped. A teacher from Baleh-Donephai said, "It is very hard to invite all the women, especially housewives, to participate in group or community activities. Even though we focus on awareness or sharing knowledge about their children's education, the woman are busying with their work and family all the time."

The group discussion maintained that almost all of the incidences of domestic violence in Bleh-donepahi were a product of the husband's excessive alcohol consumption, among other factors. Additionally, they felt that excessive alcohol consumption instigated aggressive and violent behavior towards women and children in the IDP community.

Mi Son, a 20-year-old female from Baleh-Donephai elaborated, "There is an abusive family in my neighborhood. The husband is an alcoholic and does not give money to his wife. The couple has verbal arguments regularly, but sometimes I think the husband beats his wife because I have seen bruises on her face, near her eyes and on her body. I have seen the husband hit his children as well. No one dares to stop him."

Mi Kyait Swe, another participant in the group discussion added, "There are two families like that in my neighborhood as well."

Within families in the IDP areas, violence as a means to resolve conflict has never been taken seriously; instead it is perceived as a proper form of mediation. As a result, domestic abuse is traditionally acceptable and husbands feel entitled or a sense of ownership over women. Moreover, family is seen as a private sphere and is therefore only under the husband's control. Male control of the family and finances inevitably places all decision-making in the husband's hand, perpetuating male dominance and proprietary rights over women.

According to UNICEF, "Violence in the domestic sphere is usually perpetrated by males who are, or who have been, in positions of trust and intimacy and power such as husbands, fathers, stepfathers, brothers, or other relatives. Domestic violence is in most cases violence perpetrated by men against women."⁵

The women from the group discussion felt that enduring violence from a caretaker or spouse can be the most psychologically damaging. In such cases, women and children are powerless and cannot make their own decisions, express opinions or protect themselves. Therefore, their basic rights are deprived and their opportunities for development and safety are stolen from them.

There is also a lapse in accountability. If someone is seriously injured during a domestic dispute the perpetrator may or may not be punished. Mi Yin, a member of the Baleh-Donephai administrative committee explained, "Some women are beaten by their drunk husbands in the community, but they do not complain to any women's groups or authority figures in the New Mon State Party." Instead, incidences are temporarily resolved within the family.

Mi Yin continued, "In some cases, violence has occurred with one of our women's group members, in these situations we have intervened and taken responsibility for stopping it, even though it occurs inside the family. Although, if the victim is not one of our members, it is hard for us to interfere. There are many women who cannot join us or give us some of their time because they have to focus on day to day survival."

Because of cultural restraints, traditional values and the fear of their husbands, women, who are victims of domestic violence, do not feel they have the right to protect themselves. Women's rights trainings and workshops provided by various NGOs and CBOs in Baleh-donephai attempt to address these issues head on, but because of economic hardship in the IDP community, allocating free time to social or support groups is not often an option.

⁵ Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls, Innocenti Digest No.6 –June 2000, United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Center Florence, Italy

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Photo by WCRP

Woman busily weaves thatch roof to earn daily wage

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⁵ Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls, Innocenti Digest No.6 –June 2000,

members, it is hard for us to interfere. There are many women who cannot join us or give us some of their time because they have to focus on day to day survival.”

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Economic Despair

While the NMSP provides Baleh-donephai residences with protection, jobs are scarce, land is difficult to cultivate, schools are inadequate, and living conditions are disparaging. According to TBBC, “the resettlement site area cannot provide sustainable living conditions for the internally displaced due to population density and limited access to suitable agricultural land, SPDC restrictions on travel outside of the ceasefire areas, and the inability of ethnic nationality authorities to support resettlement or compensate for livelihood assets lost.”⁶ Furthermore, since Baleh-donephai is classified as a resettlement site and not a refugee camp, TBBC and other relief organizations, can only provide a limited supply of rice.

The majority of the available work in Baleh-donephai is manually intensive and is traditionally done by men. However, due to economic despair and poor living conditions roles are shifting and women are working as much as, or more than, their male counterparts. Women from the group discussion stated that verbal arguments regularly occurred because of the poor economic conditions and a lack of support from their partner. Additionally, participants felt that domestic violence was accompanied by psychological abuse and the mental stress of financial instability.

Conventional sources of income (farming, mountain products, upland cultivation) are not consistently available in Baleh-donephai and IDPs are obliged to give up all other activities in order to focus on finding new sources of revenue. Some internally displaced families grow rice through upland cultivation, but most of the areas are too rocky to be cultivated. In addition, for environmental preservation, the local authorities of the NMSP have limited slash-and-burn farming. Consequently, because of the farming restrictions and a lack of alternative job opportunities, Bleh-donephai residents cannot maintain a stable salary.

Due to the unstable nature of the economic and political situation, it is increasingly difficult for IDPs to establish prolonged residencies



Photo by WCRP

Women return after collecting long-grass from the mountain

and many leave shortly after their arrival. New arrivals also struggle with the unfamiliar surroundings and find it extremely challenging to adjust to the new situation. In response, younger residents often migrate to Thailand for better paying jobs.

IDPs without a regular source of income work seasonally to supplement their earnings by searching the forest for non-timber products like long grass for making brooms, grass for thatch and food (leaves, vegetables or fruits) that they can sell. In the rainy season, residents seek earnings by collecting bamboo shoots in the mountains and selling them to merchants coming from the Thai side of the border. During the cold and the start of the dry seasons, villagers collect long grass from

the mountains to make thatch and brooms. One of the only consistent jobs for IDPs is collecting long grass to make brooms; for one

⁶ Internal Displacement In Eastern Burma, 2006 survey, TBBC

Invitation for Feedback to Our Publication "The Plight" of Women and Children in Southern Burma

Dear Readers,

In 2000, with objectives to monitor the situation of women and children in Southern Burma and to empower them with the rights described in CEDAW and CRC, which are both ratified by the current military regime, our "Woman and Child Rights Project (Southern Burma)" came into existence.

Under this project, "The Plight" Newsletter is produced quarterly and focuses on the general situation of women and children in Burma and how their human rights are violated by the ruling regime and its army.

In a plan to evaluate our publication, we wish to get FEEDBACK from our readers. Hence, can you kindly send us your feedback. If you know anyone who would like to receive the newsletter or if you wish to send your feedback, please feel free to contact the following mailing and e-mail address.

Woman and Child Rights Project
P. O. Box 2237, General Post Office
Bangkok, Thailand 10501
E-mail: wcrpcontact@yahoo.com
Website: www.rehmonnya.org

With regards,
Project Coordinator
Woman and Child Rights Project - Southern Burma

days work they usually earn between 30 and 50baht. However, the selling of forest products, non-timber products and food cultivation, is not sufficient to support a family.

For example:

Mi Son is 20-years-old and illiterate. She has two-sibling, a younger brother and an older sister who died 5 years ago. After her sister died, she started collecting long grass, and bamboo shoots to help her mother provide for the household. Her stepfather only financially provides a little for the family, her and her mother are responsible for sustaining the family's survival. Early every morning she climbs with her mother up the mountain or into the forest to collect non-timber products that they can sell or eat.

Apart from seasonal jobs, female residents also sell fruit, vegetables, basic household equipment, and noodle soup to generate additional income. Goods from the IDP areas are sold locally, in Sangklaburi and in TPP. Unfortunately, this kind of work is inconsistent and earnings only cover a small portion of household expenses. Traditionally Mon women's responsibilities were limited to the domestic sphere but now because of economic disparity women have become the breadwinners.

For example:

Mi Dot is a 53-year-old women and the sole provider for her family. Her husband is an alcoholic who beats her and does not work. To compensate, Mi Dot regularly travels long distances into the forest or up the mountain to find long grass, thatch grass, bamboo shoots, vegetables and food. Although, she takes on all the domestic responsibilities her husband and her argue regularly and he beats her when she does not provide him with money. He used to beat her every week, but lately she has been able to run from him. He now asks the community to give him with alcohol for money.

In several situations like Mi Son and Mi Dot's, women financially support the family and shoulder all the daily responsibilities of their families.

Photo by WCRP



Woman in displaced community beats long-grass to make brooms

According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (*UNIFEM*), "Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography."⁷

In the Bleh-donephai group discussion the women concluded that the main contributors to domestic violence are economic despair, hardship, stress, and alcohol abuse. These pervasive circumstances in Baleh-Donephia and other IDP areas increase vulnerability and prompt more abusive behavior.

Conclusion

The most fundamental consequence of domestic violence is the denial of basic human

rights. By using MWD to draw attention to displaced women, WCRP is trying to give a voice to women who have been victims of domestic violence or oppression. MWD is meant to show support for those that are struggling to survive and those that stand up against oppression and violence in their communities. Their strength and resilience to overcome appalling suffering and ultimately emerge stronger is celebrated on MWD.

A way to reduce domestic violence is through participation in village social groups that provide protection or counseling. In such groups, members' can intervene in domestic problems and help find solutions. WCRP has found that when victims of domestic violence have less domestic responsibilities and are not the sole providers for their families, they have more opportunities to participate in local organizations than prevent domestic violence. Unfortunately, Economic despair often inhibits opportunities for participation in these groups.

**Editors note: All names in this report have been changed for security purposes*

⁷ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/

Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP)

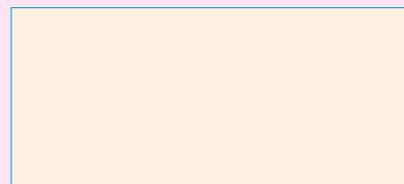
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