

KESAN IN ACTION

“Empowering communities, securing the peace, protecting environment, lands and livelihoods”



KESAN

Karen Environmental and Social Action Network

KESAN is a community-based, non-governmental, non-profit organization that works to improve livelihood security and to gain respect for indigenous peoples' knowledge and rights in Karen State, Burma, one of the most impoverished regions in the world.



As illustrated in the diagram above, KESAN's programs are designed to mitigate the current threats to Karen livelihoods by assisting Karen communities to access their rights, strengthen their assets, and build their skills and capabilities to deal with challenges to livelihood security.

- Access to rights is attained through a **rights-based approach** and by advocating for **policy change and sustainable development** and effective **implementation of just laws** to secure land tenure and community land and natural resource conservation and management.
- Assets are strengthened through **participatory community-based livelihood projects** which lead to increased food security.
- Karen community members' ability to most effectively and sustainably utilize land and natural resource assets are **protected** through **capacity building**.

KESAN's approach is a holistic one- it addresses the underlying causes of Karen livelihood struggles and attempts to identify the most appropriate 'locally-based' approaches to empower communities to overcome their problems. However, one drawback to such an approach is the complexity and wide range of 'cross-cutting' activities that are required for this type of approach.

This document aims to provide readers with an overview of KESAN's programs - their strategies, target groups and challenges - as well as to share concrete examples demonstrating the innovative approaches and tangible results of recent interventions.

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Community Based Livelihood Initiatives and IDP Livelihood Restoration Program

The people of Karen State have traditionally lived in areas rich in biodiversity, with fertile soil, lush forests, valuable mineral resources, and rivers that have been the lifeblood of Karen communities. However, more than 60 years of civil war have left Karen State one of the most impoverished regions in the nation, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced into refugee camps in Thailand or makeshift camps in Burma for internally displaced people (IDPs). A decades-long campaign by the military government to sell off the state's abundant natural resources to the highest bidder has further degraded and destroyed local communities and the environment. Most recently, due to the preliminary ceasefire, there have been an increasing number of families wanting to return and re-establish their farms and gardens in areas that they had to abandon.

The Community Based Livelihoods Initiative (CBLI) and IDP Livelihood Restoration program represents the main pillar of KESAN's community development work, allowing KESAN to build up a relationship of trust with villagers and to keep a close eye on the situation on the ground in Karen State. All livelihood initiatives link with the social-economic development of Karen communities and aim to contribute to the reduction of poverty in Karen State. This program aims to support small-scale local interventions to:

- Strengthen local livelihood security
- Preserve and promote indigenous knowledge
- Conserve local biodiversity
- Empower women
- Enhance local mitigation and adaption mechanisms against natural and human-caused disasters

Activities supported and implemented under this program include:

- Restoration of irrigation canals & abandoned rice terraces
- Establishing and operating rice banks
- Traditional medicine production & clinics
- Strengthening community leadership and evaluation capacity
- Fuel-efficient stove making for women
- Traditional weaving and sewing
- Tea production
- Seed sharing



CBLI and IDP Livelihood Restoration Program Recent Highlights:

Improved water and food security for 3,500 vulnerable villagers:

In 2014, KESAN directly supported 26 community development projects in villages facing water and food shortages due to the fact that the continued presence of the Burmese Army prevents them from utilizing the most fertile lands. 7 water supply projects, 12 rice farm rehabilitation projects, and 7 animal husbandry projects allowed community members to access more food and water than they would have been able to without these interventions. The food security projects directly benefited nearly 1,800 villagers, while providing further indirect benefit to an estimated 3,500 people.

Promoted indigenous Karen knowledge for health and sustainability:

KESAN provided support for a traditional Karen herbalist to treat over 100 patients, while training 11 others to keep the knowledge and practice alive. We also provided training in agricultural techniques to overcome pest and soil fertility problems, integrating indigenous Karen knowledge and practices. We established two community-based fish and river conservation projects that are integrated with traditional customs, building communities' capacity to protect their rivers from industrial encroachment and sustainably manage their own fish resources.

Supported women's empowerment and livelihood improvement:

KESAN supported 2 women's weaving projects and 2 fuel-efficient stove-making workshops which had a total of 75 participants and directly benefitted another 285 villagers. These projects were implemented in areas where few alternative livelihood opportunities exist; they empower women to develop more livelihood opportunities, help them provide for their families and facilitate leadership and management skills development among the women.



CBLI and IDP Livelihood Restoration Program Case Studies:

Kho Lor Traw women's weaving project, Eh Htu Hta

Recently, food rations have been reduced in Eh Htu Hta camp for IDP's (internally displaced people), leading to a greater need for income opportunities for residents. KESAN provided thread for weaving projects to 26 women in the camp, who sell their products in Thailand through the Karen Women's Organization (KWO). The Kho Lor Traw women's weaving group meets once a month to share experiences and skills to improve product quality. This year, the women sold 74 Karen women's shirts, 51 men's shirts, and 176 Karen handbags. Their total revenue was 52,715 baht, of which 27,740 baht was direct income to the 26 women in the group. The remainder was used to cover the group's meeting costs, and reinvested to continue buying materials for the project. This year, the project will become self-sustaining, and the income from sales will result in these women no longer depending on KESAN for financial support. The women will be able to continue to provide for their families even in the face of reduced rations to refugees and IDPs.



Doo Doh Hta Rice Bank Project

The rice bank project in Doo Doh Hta demonstrates the importance of women's inclusion in local management of the project. The rice bank was established in 2012, and was initially managed by men in the community. However the project suffered from poor management, and repayment of rice back into the rice bank was inconsistent, leading to a declining supply. However, in 2014, management of the project was turned over to the women of the community. Repayment of rice loans has since been much more consistent, and the rice supply is increasing. This case demonstrates how important it is for KESAN to continue emphasizing gender inclusion and women's leadership in all of our projects.

Land and Forest Management Program

KESAN works on land and natural resource management in collaboration with the Karen National Union's (KNU) Karen Agriculture Department (KAD) and Karen Forestry Department (KFD). This work informs, encourages and empowers local community members and officials in securing rights to their lands, in managing and developing their land and natural resources, and in developing and implementing the KNU's land, agriculture and forest policies.

Under this program, KESAN provides trainings on land & forest policies, community forestry, sustainable natural resource management principles, land demarcation with GPS and GIS mapping, and data management. These trainings and capacity building are crucial for the demarcation and titling of land and forest in Karen State. Due to the success of the project Kachin and Karenni ethnic group leaders have requested KESAN to share our experiences issues so that they can better develop their own land and forest policies.

Threats to land tenure security have intensified since the 2012 ceasefire, along with a mushrooming of investment in land-based industries such as logging, mining, and plantation agriculture. The need to document and register the lands of Karen communities to assist them in defending their lands against confiscation and destruction is felt more than ever.

Land and Natural Resource Management Program Recent Highlights:

Demarcated and registered Karen land and forest:

From 2007 to the end of 2014, KESAN has assisted with the demarcation and registration of household, community, and forest land in areas under KNU administration including:

- 34,544 household land titles issued
- Demarcation of 18 customary “Kaw” community land areas
- 105 community forests established, with 51 certified
- 14 wildlife sanctuary areas formalized
- 63 reserved forest tracts mapped
- 8 herbal medicine forest zones protected

Revised KNU Land Policy with input from local communities:

KESAN facilitated expert legal review and community input during the drafting of the revised KNU Land Policy, which is grounded in international human rights principles and prioritizes protecting the lands of



marginalized communities. By holding a series of public consultations with Karen community based organizations on the land policy, KESAN ensured that local priorities – for example the right of refugees to return to their land – were incorporated into the draft policy. The KNU policy serves as an exemplary model in KESAN’s work with the Karenni and Kachin ethnic groups to develop their own land policies.

Raised awareness about land and forest policies for more than 3,000 villagers:

In 2014, KESAN facilitated 34 workshops in Karen State to provide information to local community leaders about the KNU land and forest policies. These workshops, held in areas facing the most severe and complex land conflicts, reached more than 3,000 participants from 168 different villages. As a result, local communities better understand how policies affect their lives on the ground, and are more confident to approach the KNU Agriculture and Forest Departments to obtain assistance in protecting their own lands and resources.

Land and Forest Management Case Study:

Burma Army returns land to Mae Sami villagers:

20 years ago during a period of intense conflict the Burma army confiscated 273 acres of farmland in Mae Sami Village, in Hpa-an District. The army used this land to construct a large outpost for three battalions, confiscated land surrounding the outpost for security patrols, and in effect used the villagers as a shield against attacks from Karen resistance forces.

After learning about the recent adoption and implementation of the KNU Land Policy, villagers appealed to the KNU authorities for assistance in recovering their land from the Burma Army. During a public meeting held last year, the KNU successfully negotiated for the Burma Army to return land surrounding the camp, while the camp itself would remain. The local abbot and villagers, very satisfied with the result of the meeting, are planning for a public ceremony for the distribution of their titles to the returned land, which will be attended by senior KNU officials, Burma army commanders, and journalists.

This case study demonstrates how KESAN’s work on helping develop the KNU land policy and raising awareness about it has set new precedents for the return of confiscated lands, making a genuine contribution to the peace building process between the KNU and Burma Army. However, this is only one of thousands of land disputes between Karen villagers and the Burma Army, and in many cases the military is suing farmers for “trespassing” on their own land. More work on resolving land disputes is urgently needed for the success of the peace process.



Water Governance Program

KESAN's water governance work empowers vulnerable communities to advocate for the good governance of water resources – with a particular focus on protecting the Salween River. The longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia, the Salween supports incredible biodiversity as well as the livelihoods of the Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Shan peoples of Burma. However, the river's health is threatened by secretive plans to build a cascade of five large hydroelectric dams in order to generate electricity for China and Thailand. Local people in the Salween Basin are overwhelmingly opposed to the damming of the river which would devastate their cultures, livelihoods and on many levels, their security. Not only are these dams moving forward without local community consent, proper scientific study or information transparency – they are also major drivers of violent conflict and human rights violations in ethnic areas. With our wide network of partner organisations, KESAN works to support the calls from local communities for “No Salween Dams” by:

- **Raising awareness and building capacity** among affected communities through information sharing workshops, skill development training and distributing educational materials such as documentary films and local language booklets.
- **Facilitating grassroots research** on the biodiversity of the Salween basin and the impacts of dam construction.
- **Advocating** for a dam-free Salween by producing campaign materials, gathering signatures for petitions, strategically engaging with the media, and through lobbying elected and company officials.
- **Networking** between civil society organizations by coordinating meetings and conferences, arranging public events and exposure trips, joint production of reports and statements, and other collaborative actions.
- **Mobilizing** the local, regional, and international community through public demonstrations.

KESAN's water governance work over the past year has greatly built up the relationship between ethnic activists and the more mainstream civil society groups working in central Burma. We have been able to build trust at a personal and organizational level that has resulted in KESAN becoming allies with experts in renewable energy who have the ear of government and international institutions. This has increased KESAN's ability to make stopping the Salween Dams an issue of national importance throughout Burma. Our collective Salween activism over the past decades has been a major success – the Salween remains dam-free – though investors are now trying aggressively to move forward with their plans.

Water Governance Program Recent Highlights:

Raised awareness about the link between dam building and conflict:

Heavy clashes broke out in Karen State near the planned site of Hatgyi Dam in October 2014 but the fighting and its impacts on villagers were not being reported in the media. Based on field interviews conducted by KESAN and Karen Rivers Watch researchers, we published the report “Afraid to Go Home” along with producing a short video documentary about the fighting. The report documented human rights violations perpetrated by Burma government forces, including the displacement of over 2,000 civilians, forced labor, looting, destruction of property, and the blocking of access to humanitarian aid. Media coverage of the report has led to a heightened awareness about the link between conflict and dam building, making it impossible for dam builders to get permission from local armed groups to operate in the area.

Increased and sustained media coverage of the Salween issue:

Over the past year, KESAN’s public activities with our partners have garnered sustained, critical, and impactful media coverage of the Salween Dam issue. Now the Salween is covered not just by exile media sources, but by newly emerging newspapers in Yangon, and by international media as well. From January to June 2015, there were at least 15 English language news stories covering the Salween River, most quoting our staff. Together with our network, KESAN is continuing to build a relationship with journalists and build local capacity for reporting on environmental issues.

90 species of Salween fish identified through community-led research:

KESAN’s community based research with villagers from along the Salween River downstream of the dam sites, is crucial for producing baseline knowledge about the local environment and the livelihoods that would be impacted by dam building. So far, researchers have identified 90 species of fish - over 50 more than the 2008 EIA for the Hatgyi dam - and they have presented their findings at regional conferences in Chiang Mai, Thailand and Siam Riep, Cambodia.



Water Governance Program Case Studies:

Increasing space for civil society

Burma's limited reforms allow greater freedom in movement and expression in some parts of the country, so KESAN has adapted accordingly. By opening a Yangon office we have had an important presence at government panels and consultations. In this past year KESAN campaigners spoke at a conference on hydropower organized in Burma by the World Bank and also publicly protested at a corporate dam promotion meet-



"Karen River Watch" from Karen State expresses concerns and opposes the Upper Thanlwin (Mongton) Hydropower Project.

ing masquerading as a public consultation – both activities that would have been impossible in the past. Also over the past year, KESAN has built up meaningful relationships with emergent civil society organizations in central Burma, along with well-respected academics, artists, and former government officials, thus increasing the voice of ethnic people in public deliberation.

Empowerment of Mikayin Villagers Through Grassroots Fish Research

By training residents in Mikayin village to conduct fish research, we have accomplished much more than just documenting fish diversity in the Salween. The villagers now have a greater understanding of the importance the natural environment, and are increasingly motivated



to protect it. When a Chinese company proposed to build a cement factory at Mikayin village, the grassroots fish researchers organized their community to oppose the project, which would likely have negative social and environmental impacts. They were able to mobilized 1,000 villagers to join a meeting with the company, where they voiced their opposition to the project. They have also persuaded their local member of parliament to raise the issue in the national parliament. The KNU, which was originally in support of the project, has now agreed to respect the villagers' decision. In order to protect their environment from other development projects, the villagers are now establishing a community forest with KESAN's support. In this way, the increased environmental awareness from the fish research project has empowered Mikayin villagers to take action to defend their community rights and to protect their environment and the natural resources they rely on.

Environmental Education Program

KESAN's environmental education program aims to develop and provide environmental education services and materials to raise awareness among youth, IDPs, villagers, and community leaders both inside Burma's Karen State and along the Thai-Burma border. The program encourages informed participation in locally-owned environmental protection and adaptation measures, promotes and preserves indigenous knowledge, and is focused on the real environmental threats commonly faced by Karen communities. KESAN delivers trainings on a variety of environmental topics upon request, disseminates educational materials, and has also worked within the Karen education system to integrate environmental issues into school curriculum.

Though it is difficult to measure the ultimate effects environmental education over the short term, since KESAN's founding this program has been successfully cultivating an environmental vision and building capacity for tomorrow's Karen leaders. These educational activities have been crucial to restoring hope and empowering Karen people in an area where civil war and state discrimination has left many without opportunities for formal education. Now, as limited reforms and the fragile peace allow the Karen education system to expand and thrive, there are new opportunities to make environmental awareness a cornerstone of the Karen youth experience.

Environmental Educational Program Recent Highlights:

Trained over 1,200 people on environmental issues and advocacy:

Over the past year, KESAN has conducted environmental trainings for over 1,200 participants, including students, teachers, refugees, IDPs, community leaders, civil society representatives, and even Burmese government officials. Close to half of the training participants were women, and we were able to reach audiences in new locations such as Mergui-Tavoy district where we were unable to travel before. At these trainings, KESAN also distributed more than 400 educational DVDs.

Built up network with other student/youth organizations:

Also in the past year KESAN has increased its collaboration with other student and educational organizations including the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG), the Karen University Student Group (KUSG), the Karen Education Department (KED), and the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE). These new partnerships have allowed us to effectively integrate environmental education into their existing programs and to build relationships with local communities in new locations.

Environmental Educational Program Case Study:

Workshop participant inspired to conduct his own training

KESAN, together with the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG), facilitated an environmental awareness workshop in Dooplaya District during June 2014. One of the training participants was a high school science teacher at Mae La refugee camp. After the workshop, he was inspired to use his newfound knowledge to conduct his own environmental awareness training in his home village in Mutraw District. Using KESAN study resource materials, he was able to motivate 600 participants to enthusiastically conserve their environment in the crowded camp. The villagers especially enjoyed viewing a documentary film about the impacts on wildlife and workers of the logging and the palm oil industries in Indonesia that was supplied to participants in the earlier KESAN - KSNG workshop called *The Disappearing Tomorrow*.



Providing insights on dam impacts to Burmese journalists

On invitation from the organizers of a Rangoon based journalism training program two KESAN trainers made an interactive presentation on the impacts of dams to a class of 18 senior journalists during an exposure trip for them to Thailand. From their exclamations and questions the mostly Burmese journalists were clearly unaware of many of the multiple issues relating to dams. Revelations on the global history of dam failures, the effects on floodplain farmers and fisherfolk both along the rivers and oou to sea, and on national debt levels evoked strong reactions. One of the reporters whose own family lived in a village below a large, obviously damaged irrigation dam announced her determination to investigate and report on the condition of the dam and others allegedly like it. Participants were keen to get access to the powerpoint presentations and archive data provided to substantiate what they plan to write.

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Networking, Media and Advocacy Campaigns Program

KESAN supports and participates in numerous networks both inside and outside Burma, advocating to defend human rights and protect the environment through lobbying, public events and demonstrations, and media engagement. Our advocacy work is focused on policymaking that relates to environment, peacebuilding, natural resource governance, and responsible investment. We have been active in various new initiatives in Burma, including being elected to high profile roles in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Multi-Stakeholder Group, the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA), and the Land in our Hands Network (LIOH).

Alongside our advocacy work, we strive to keep the public – including remote villagers, displaced populations and urban residents – informed about the status and impacts of mega- development projects and the benefits of alternative, sustainable development. KESAN achieves this by talking with grassroots communities, producing print and audio materials, collaborating with academics, and working with the media. The recent explosion of new media outlets operating inside Burma has brought an incredible opportunity to inform a knowledge-hungry public about the destructive aspects of development projects that are usually kept hidden from public scrutiny.

Networking, Media and Advocacy Campaigns Program Recent Highlights:

Opened up the draft National Land Use Policy for historic public input:

In October 2014, the Burma government released a draft National Land Use Policy (NLUP), which would determine the distribution, use and management of the country’s land. However the policy drafting process has been extremely flawed, undemocratic, and lacking meaningful involvement from Burma’s ethnic peoples. In response the Land in Our Hands Network (LIOH), with KESAN staff playing an active role, organized its own consultation meetings with expert support from the Transnational Institute (TNI). By publicly condemning the inadequate policy, LIOH successfully pressured the government to extend the consultation period, and incorporated some of KESAN’s recommendations on customary land into the draft.

Reached over 90,000 people with media productions:

In 2014, KESAN published two issues of our Karen language magazine “Thu Lei Kaw Wei,” which discusses issues of environment, human rights, peace, and development. 7,000 copies of each issue were distributed, reaching an estimated 38,800 people in the refugee camps, rural villages, towns and community based organizations. We also recorded 34 environmental stories that aired on Pweloh radio station and KSNG radio – reaching an estimated 35,000 people in the refugee camp and in Karen State. Online, more than 15,000 people have “liked” the KESAN Facebook page, and our short video documentaries have been viewed more than 5,000 times on YouTube.

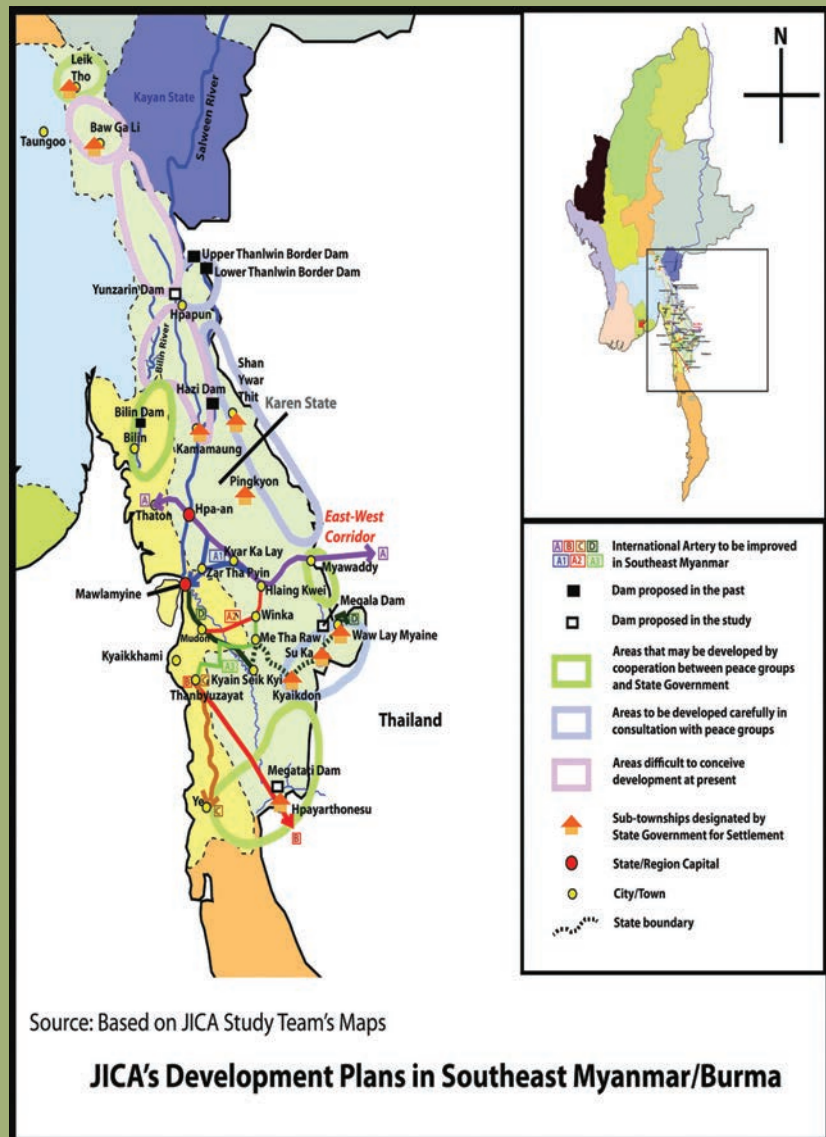
Networking, Media and Advocacy Campaigns Program Case Studies:

Raising the alarm about Japanese blueprint for harmful development

In October 2013, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) published a blueprint for development in Burma's Karen and Mon States that is considered by many to be inappropriate. Intended to guide Japanese investment in the region, it focuses on upgrading and expanding road networks, establishing huge industrial estates, urban infrastructure, and plantation agriculture. In preparing its plans JICA failed to consult with any Karen civil society organizations, relying on Japanese consultants and Burmese government plans, with the resulting blueprint failing to align with local priorities for peace and development. Indeed, the JICA plan would strengthen abusive centralized structures, is likely to increase land grabs, exacerbate conflict, undermining the peace process. In response, the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN), a network of 28 Karen organizations that is

coordinated by KESAN, published a critique of JICA's blueprint in September 2014.

Released in a packed-out press conference in Yangon and widely covered in the media, KPSN's critique calls for a moratorium on large-scale development projects in Southeast Burma until a full peace agreement can be reached, democratic rights guaranteed, and a decentralized federal union achieved. KPSN provides concrete recommendations for how JICA can improve its activities – for example by commissioning an independent conflict analysis, conducting a strategic environmental assessment, and ensuring informed local participation. JICA has not responded to our concerns but it appears they have put their plans on hold, and are well aware that any activities will be subject to intense public scrutiny.



Bringing communities' concerns to the Asian Development Bank

After hearing that villagers were worried about losing their land to the upgraded of the Asian Highway in Karen State supported by the Asian Development Bank's (ADB), KESAN worked to organize a meeting between ADB country directors and the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN). Working together with Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) we were able to bring them to meet potentially impacted villagers, who we also assisted to submit a letter articulating their concerns regarding the project to the ADB. Because of the close scrutiny of KESAN and other groups the ADB appears to be now proceeding with much greater caution than before over the likely impacts of their projects in Karen State. Indeed, the highway upgrade project has been reclassified from a "B" resettlement impact rating to an "A" classification, meaning stricter safeguards must be adhered to. The ADB has responded to the villagers' concerns by promising a transparent resettlement process, and working with KPSN to develop guidelines for conflict-sensitive investment.



Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Program

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified Burma as a global biodiversity hotspot, and the forests of Karen State hold local, national, regional, and global significance for conservation. Some Karen areas still support critically endangered pangolin, along with wild elephant, tiger, tapir, gibbons, clouded leopard, banteng, gaur, sun bears and many other rare and endangered species. In addition, the forests of Karen State have long been a refuge for Karen villagers throughout the civil war, providing a place to hide, and a source of food and medicine for survival. However the forests are under increasing threat from commercial interests as agri-business developments, mining and logging companies extend their reach into previously undisturbed Karen areas.

KESAN works with Karen forestry officials, local Karen communities, and conservation biologists from five conservation organizations – People Resources and Conservation Foundation, Wildlife One, Wildlife Asia, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Gibbon Conservation Alliance – to identify, enumerate, study, manage and conserve the extraordinary biodiversity of Karen State and the forests that shelter it. We identify high value areas and species, demarcate wildlife sanctuaries, train local forest stewards, and conduct research on the effective protection of forest biodiversity in combination with supporting local community livelihoods.

KESAN practices community-based conservation that combines scientific expertise with the local indigenous knowledge that remains strong in rural Karen communities who for generations have lived with and depended on the forest. Since KESAN is a grassroots organization representing Karen communities, we stress local community empowerment and involvement in all our conservation initiatives. KESAN believes that the promotion and preservation of indigenous knowledge is a vital part of maintaining traditional Karen culture and identity, in addition to conserving the biodiversity of Karen territories.



Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Program Recent Highlights:

Conserved 173,000 acres in a newly designated wildlife sanctuary and reduced poaching:

In partnership with local communities and leaders, KESAN worked with the KNU to establish the Thooplei Wildlife Sanctuary, which conserves biodiversity rich evergreen, semi-evergreen, and monsoon forests. KESAN and Karen Wildlife Conservation Initiative (KWCI) personnel trained and supplied a new wildlife protection unit and since then illegal poaching of endangered wildlife in the area has been greatly reduced. KESAN implements livelihood projects in the area around the Thooplei sanctuary so that community livelihoods are not harmed by conservation related land expropriation. An example of this is that KESAN has worked to help secure and rehabilitate rice paddy fields in the area so that villagers do not have to cut down forest in the protected area to make way for swidden agriculture to ensure their food security.

Identified 48 threatened or endangered species in conflict area:

In December 2014, using camera traps and scientific techniques, KESAN conducted a biodiversity survey in the forests of Mae Nyaw Kee (Twe Pah Wee Kyo), an area that was previously the site of fierce civil war conflict. KESAN staff spent two weeks in the rugged terrain, documenting 48 threatened or endangered species and the health of the ecosystem. With our help, the site will soon be established as a KNU wildlife sanctuary.

Identified 93 wild orchid species through women's research team:

KESAN's team of women researchers in Khe Shor Ter community forest has identified 93 species of wild orchid. They produced a poster showing the Karen and scientific name of each species, and distributed this in the nearby villages. The awareness raised by this poster has been successful in reducing the illegal harvesting of the orchids, valued for medicinal properties, for sale to China. The team has also drafted a report on their findings, is working to document the orchid names in other ethnic languages and has now started documenting the areas great diversity of amphibian and fungi species.



Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Program Case Study:

Local communities work to strengthen community forest buffer zone

After a community forest is established to help protect an area of exceptional biodiversity, creating a buffer zone is crucial for effective conservation. The presence of caring and empowered villagers' in a buffer zone stops others from encroaching on the forest. It also provides opportunity for villagers to legitimately grow agro-forest crops for their own needs. As a result of KESAN's approach with communities around Khe Shor Ter community forest villagers feel ownership of the project and have been inspired to design their own cooperative conservation strategies. One example is that each villager takes responsibility for the buffer zone area close to their home. The villagers plant trees and manage agro-forest gardens in these buffer zones to their own design. Each agro-forest has a family name on a signboard, but it is understood that the area belongs to the whole community and that anyone can harvest the fruit. This creates competition from one family to another on how they could best conserve their own nature, and has proven very effective in inspiring the community to excel at the buffer zone project.





Karen Environmental and Social Action Network



KESAN is a community-based, non-governmental, non-profit organization that works to improve livelihood security and gain respect for indigenous peoples' knowledge and rights in Karen State, Burma.

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Burma Relief Center

