

Karen Peace Support Network

Critique of Japan International Cooperation Agency's Blueprint for Development in **Southeastern** **Burma/Myanmar**



Brief Summary and Recommendations
September 2014

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has recently issued a blueprint that proposes industrial development in Southeast Burma/Myanmar, purportedly to aid in the return and settlement of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Karen and Mon States. However, the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN), a network of nearly 30 ethnic Karen organizations, cautions JICA that its blueprint for infrastructure development such as roads and industrial estates in the war-torn southeast is premature and flawed, potentially exacerbating conflict in the region.

The KPSN (formerly KCBPSN) is the largest network of Karen civil society organizations in Burma/Myanmar.¹ These organizations have been providing support for vulnerable people in this conflict-torn region for decades, striving to empower local communities, build transparent and accountable institutions, and help create a sustainable peace in Burma/Myanmar. KPSN and its member organizations are important stakeholders which must be included in any development planning process in the Karen areas of the southeast.

The JICA blueprint is officially called the *Preparatory Survey for the Integrated Regional Development for Ethnic Minorities in the South-East Myanmar: Final Report* (October 2013).² It is intended to guide Japanese investment in the southeast and focuses on upgrading and expanding road networks and establishing industrial estates, urban infrastructure, and industrial agriculture such as rubber plantations.

By working primarily with the central government and its appointed state governments in planning major development projects, JICA's approach legitimizes and reinforces existing centralized government structures. The blueprint assumes that refugees and IDPs will voluntarily return when industrial development occurs, and it assumes that such development can be implemented in parallel with the peace process. However, KPSN's own conflict analysis argues that these assumptions are wrong.

¹ For a list of member organizations, see <http://kesan.asia/index.php/links/karen-peace-support-network>

² JICA's website does not contain any direct links or documents related to this nearly 500-page report. This link does mention development in southeast Burma/Myanmar: http://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/president/speech/130809_01.html; an abbreviated document was released in February 2014 entitled, "Project for the Integrated Regional Development Plan to Support Ethnic Minorities in the South-East Myanmar in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Inception Report".

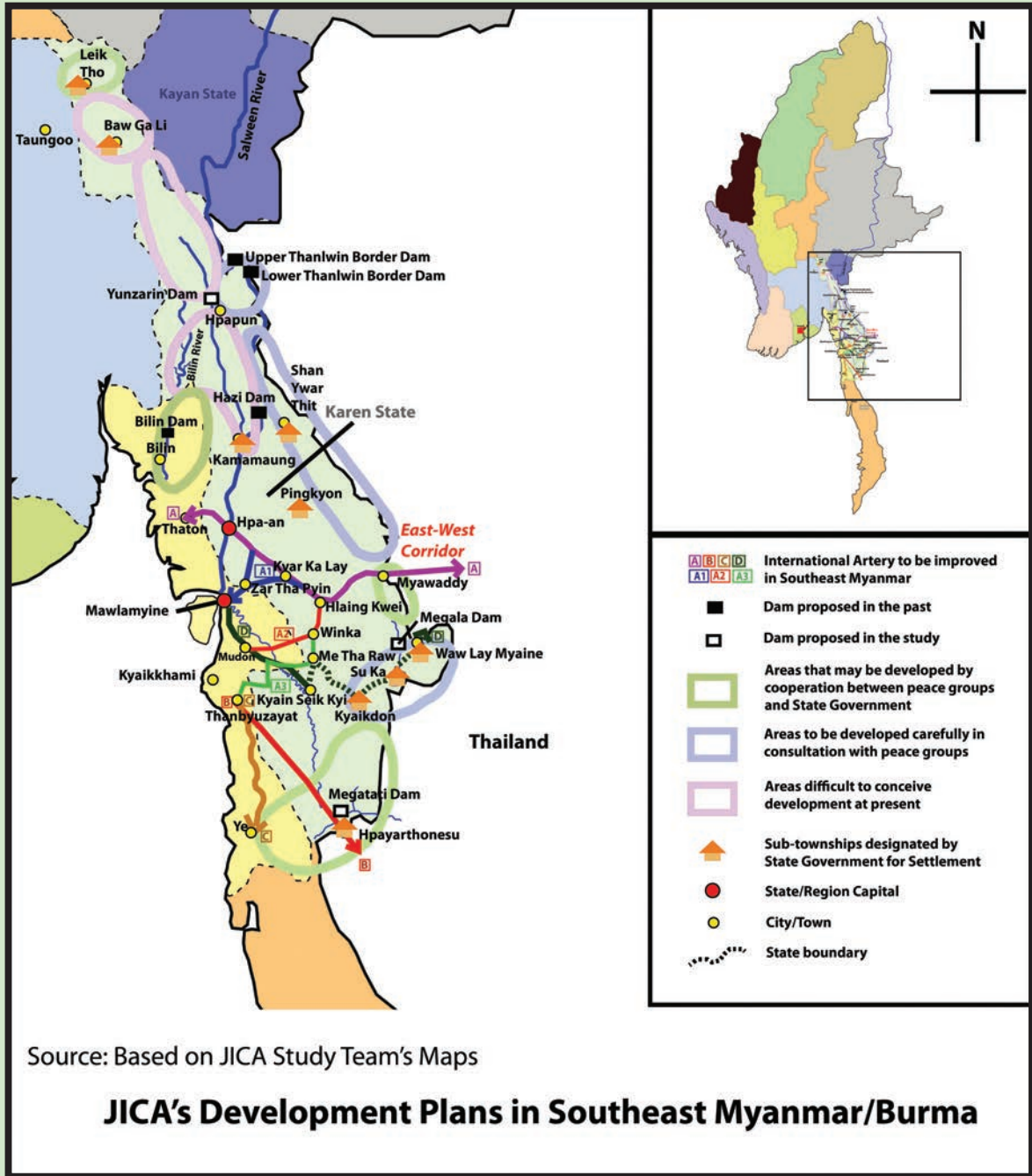
KPSN's analysis shows that the exploitation of local natural resources and disrespect for land rights by central military authorities are two key causes of more than 60 years of conflict in ethnic areas of Burma/Myanmar. This should be understood within the larger context of the state's denial of ethnic peoples' demands for self-determination. The current peace process has not yet led to a meaningful decentralization of constitutional powers, whereby local ethnic peoples have a voice in government development policies. We are concerned that JICA's blueprint neither sufficiently recognizes this risky context nor proposes people-centered development alternatives.³

It is indeed dangerous to ignore the underlying causes of conflict in the region and to invest money or technical support without consulting communities or paying heed to their concerns. A development strategy lacking a strong foundation of sound information from diverse sources – including critical analysis – cannot possibly lead to sustainable development. A more likely outcome is increased conflict: if this JICA blueprint becomes a means to strengthen current centralized government structures while ignoring local ethnic participation, it will fuel the ongoing conflict rather than help support a sustainable peace.

A blueprint of this scope, concerning socio-economic development in the southeast, is the first of its kind. We welcome the efforts of the Japanese people and other international organizations to contribute to our communities, which have been struggling with oppression and dispossession for generations. But we have serious reservations concerning JICA's blueprint, its processes, recommendations, and future consequences. Civil society organizations among the Karen and other ethnic communities have been providing support for vulnerable people in this conflict-torn region for decades, yet JICA has held no meaningful consultations with our organizations.

Despite this fact and despite our strong reservations about the process to date, KPSN is willing to engage JICA under the assumption that Japan is approaching Southeast Burma/Myanmar with good intentions. However, after decades of failed and destructive development in the region, it is illegitimate for Japan to proceed with the same outdated and discredited processes.

³ See JICA president's speech: http://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/president/speech/130924_01.html



Before outlining KPSN's recommendations, we must strongly emphasize that as a basic principle we argue for a **temporary moratorium on large-scale development projects**⁴ in Southeast Burma/Myanmar until a full peace agreement can be reached, democratic rights guaranteed, and a decentralized federal union achieved. Only then can local people benefit equally from development projects. We also argue for a **temporary moratorium on the emerging donor-driven pilot project process** until meaningful engagement and consultation has been conducted, including the engagement of women, refugees and internally displaced persons (see recommendation #8).⁵

Recommendations

The following are eight recommendations for JICA as it proceeds in leading the Japanese people's engagement in this complex and volatile security environment. (The full recommendations and supporting information can be found in the document: "Critique of Japan International Cooperation Agency's Blueprint for Development in Southeastern Burma/Myanmar: Full Report."⁶) Our common goal is to determine how international development agencies like JICA can make a meaningful and sustainable impact on peace and development in Southeast Burma/Myanmar. We have the common imperative to avoid doing harm and exacerbating conflict, something that is a real and imminent risk in the region.

⁴ KPSN uses the term **Large-scale development projects** to refer to top-down, multi-sectoral projects involving extensive social and environmental impacts and often costing millions of dollars or more; examples include the integrated plan proposed by JICA, as well as the proposed Dawei mega-port project.

⁵ When referring to consultation we refer JICA to the Shift Project's "Conducting Meaningful Stakeholder Consultation in Myanmar".

⁶ Please contact info@kesan.asia to obtain this report.

- 1. CONFLICT ANALYSIS: JICA must commission an independent, deep and comprehensive analysis of the causes of conflict in the southeast.** KPSN insists that this analysis be facilitated by an independent third party, using a participatory approach developed in collaboration with community-based organizations, NGOs, and ethnic armed groups representing the Karen and Mon peoples.
- 2. HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND DUE DILIGENCE: JICA must explicitly guarantee that development will honor international humanitarian development principles,** including the Do No Harm principle.⁷ For instance, due diligence on the part of businesses engaged in the projects should be required as defined in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.⁸ Project partners should also be required to sign an enforceable contract to honor specific international principles and standards.
- 3. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT: JICA must ensure that a meaningful Strategic Environmental Assessment⁹ (SEA) be conducted, integrating environmental considerations into its overall blueprint.** In addition to the profound environmental impacts of its own proposed projects, JICA must recognize that its blueprint will help enable the Burma/Myanmar government's plans for big dams and other major infrastructure projects in the southeast. This means a comprehensive Strategic Environmental Assessment is imperative.
- 4. CONSULTATIONS: JICA must reform its consultation process to be robust and meaningful.** Consultation processes must include formal recognition and inclusion of civil society organizations' inputs. KPSN would like to work closely with JICA to develop methodologies and identify important stakeholders and partners. This process would also serve to educate and empower local communities, thereby strengthening civil society in Burma/Myanmar.

⁷ "Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace or War", Mary Anderson, 1999 published by Lynn Rienner Publishers.

⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

⁹ See World Bank website on SEAs.

- 5. REPRESENTATIVE TEAM: JICA should work with KPSN on the creation of a representative team to lead the consultation, planning and implementation processes, at all levels of the Project.** This team would include JICA, Myanmar Government officials, leaders of ethnic armed groups and ethnic political parties, and civil society representatives, including KPSN. This team must ensure accountability to the people of Burma/Myanmar.
- 6. FULL INFORMATION DISCLOSURE: JICA must disclose full information** concerning JICA studies, agreements and recommendations which could impact Southeastern Myanmar/Burma. This disclosure should include project budget information, and it should be disseminated in accessible language and formats for the Karen and Mon communities.
- 7. LOCAL PARTICIPATION: JICA must explicitly ensure that any development projects connected with its blueprint establish meaningful partnerships with local civil society organizations.** There must be a mechanism to ensure knowledge transfer and skills development for local people within an agreed upon time frame. This requirement is not only to build local community capacity and employment opportunities; it will also facilitate local ownership, local decision-making, and local knowledge.
- 8. CONDITIONS FOR PURSUING PILOT PROJECTS: JICA should engage with Karen civil society organizations, including KPSN, women, refugees and internally displaced persons to explore practical options for pilot projects.** This is required in order to abide by JICA's own project implementation principles. Full consent of the local community is required in order for any pilot project to proceed.

