



The 20th Anniversary

A Pathway to Social and Environmental Justice



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Salween Peace Park

Thank You!

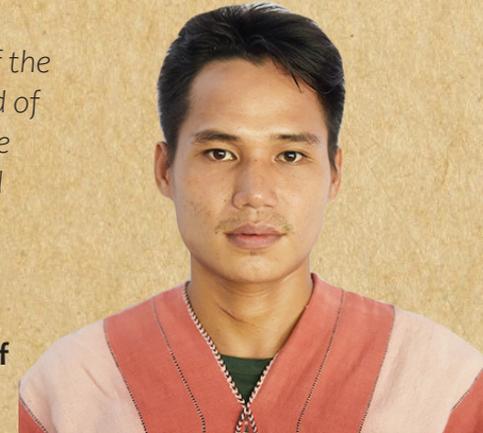


"I've worked with KESAN in our woman-led research projects on biodiversity that included orchids, mushrooms, wildlife and birds. From my personal experiences working with local indigenous communities, we have become more aware of sustainable resource management and conservation. On KESAN's 20th Anniversary, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and wishes that it will continue to succeed and overcome any adversity"

**Naw P' Lae,
Women-led Biodiversity
Research Program**

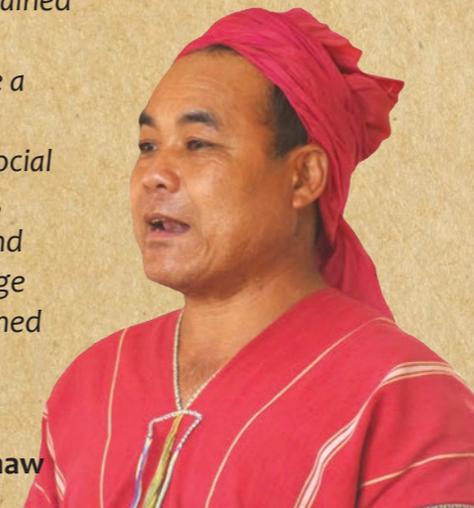
"I've collaborated in KESAN's program activities for many years and during those years I've observed a number of positive impacts and benefits from it: for instance, environmental conservation, cultural revitalization and protection of our ancestral lands. As a result of the activities, local communities are now aware of the socio-ecological movement and of their own important roles in the stewardship, management and sustainable governance of natural resources"

**Saw Htoo Eh,
General Assembly Member of
the Salween Peace Park**



"I started working with KESAN in 2007 and I've engaged in a number of activities relating to traditional livelihoods and local food security, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. I've gained so much from these work experiences and have made a greater contribution to my community. We see more social cohesion and collaboration, mutual respect and help, and cultural knowledge exchange are fostered and strengthened locally"

**Saw Nya Ki Htoo,
Community Leader in Luthaw**



"KESAN is an organization that encourages, facilitates and supports local Indigenous peoples' work in the protection of ancestral lands and recognizes our environmental stewardship as vitally important"

**Naw Paw Tha,
community leader and widow
of Saw O Moo**



Foreword

When KESAN was established in November 2001, the initiative was ground-breaking and new. The five key terms in its founding name embodied a purpose of intention that was very different in the contested minefield of national politics: a civil society organisation that would be indigenous, promoting community-based actions and networks, to focus on the grave social and environmental challenges facing the country. It was certainly a bold statement. The question, though, was whether KESAN could deliver on these goals.

On the surface, the prospects did not look good. At the time, the ethno-political landscape was deeply fractured after decades of military rule and civil war. Communities were divided between ceasefire and non-ceasefire territories in many parts of the country, and aid programmes were separated between two notions of delivery: “inside” (government-controlled) or “border” (ethnic opposition-controlled). In ceasefire territories, health and development programmes were tentatively allowed by the authorities, but civil society movements were generally suppressed. In the conflict-zones, meanwhile, the numbers of refugees and internally-displaced persons were still increasing. KESAN faced a daunting mountain of challenges.

Twenty years later, it is a measure of how far KESAN has succeeded that its pioneering approach has gained recognition by the Goldman Environmental Prize, the Equator Prize of the United Nations Development Programme and conservation initiatives around the world. In raising awareness, real advances have been made. But it is within Burma/Myanmar itself that impact has been most deeply felt. During the past two decades, KESAN has become a visionary model in demonstrating how communities, even in the most contested and difficult of circumstances, can work together to bring progress and understanding on vital issues of cultural, economic and ecological significance.

KESAN’s achievements today span diverse fields. Policies have been turned into actions. The Salween Peace Park has become a landmark of national aspiration. The language of community inclusion and sustainable livelihoods has spread its roots into different parts of the country. Priority areas include forest protection, wildlife and biodiversity conservation, water governance, food security, land rights and natural resource management. And KESAN has never lost sight of its foundational aims. Networking and advocacy ensure that the perspectives and rights of indigenous peoples are never forgotten. “Voice for the voiceless” has become a compelling refrain.

Looking to the future, the social and political landscape is presently very troubling. Conflict, instability and the spectre of militarised rule have all returned. Covid-19, humanitarian emergency and civilian displacement are only adding to the threats to delicate eco-systems and local communities in the failed state front-line. Political instabilities and national divisions are as serious as at any time since independence in 1948.

This new publication on KESAN’s 20th anniversary is therefore an opportune moment for reminder that this should not be a time for despair. The present crisis is a reiteration of challenges that have always needed to be addressed. In its two-decade history, KESAN has paved a way forward through the values of capacity-building, inter-community resilience and enlightened thinking in the face of adversity, and today these efforts are needed more than ever. This is a message of universal significance. At a time when nations around the world are struggling with the challenges of climate change, KESAN’s birthday is an occasion to be celebrated as a beacon of progressive hope. KESAN and all those taking part in this brave endeavour are to be congratulated. May the next twenty years witness ever-greater advancement, achievement and justice for long-suffering peoples in the pursuit of environmental protections and community empowerment on the ground.

Martin Smith

Author, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity,
18 November 2021



Message from the Executive Director

Omusober Kogha! Warm greetings to everyone! It's a great privilege for me to write this for our pictorial book marking the occasion of KESAN's 20th anniversary.

Today, despite the many challenges we face - ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic, to the climate crisis, and to the military coup in Burma along with the escalation of armed conflicts in our Karen homeland - we have managed to celebrate KESAN's 20th birthday meaningfully.

Celebrating an anniversary means many things for us. It takes us way back to our origins - the point of departure of our long journey which has led us to where we are now. At that time, a group of young adults gathered and made a pledge to care for the wellbeing of Mother Nature and the Karen people. It was a selfless act that joined us together to work for the common and greater good. No matter what challenges lay ahead - in our words, "climbing mountains or walking through the dark valley"- we were strongly committed to seeking a path leading to social and environmental justice. On this occasion, let me pass onto our young colleagues two inspiring quotes which have been our guiding stars from the start. These words resonate with our 'community empowerment', people-centered and 'rights-based' approaches.

"Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say 'We have done this ourselves'." (Lao Tzu, BC. 700)

"Teach by showing, learn by doing. Not a showcase, but a pattern. Not a piecemeal, but integrated. Not odds and ends, but a system. Not to conform, but to transform. Not relief, but release." (Y. C. James Yen)

Our 20th anniversary gives us an opportunity to communicate our successes and lessons learned. We do this for the purpose of sharing and exchanging experiences to inspire or be inspired, by others. The golden rule for doing this is to compile a systematic documentation of our work- great reflections we all gained from publishing this book. I hope this book will tell you interesting stories of our 20 years-long journey. I would be grateful if you could share yours with us too.

We would not have been able to complete so much without the incredible amount of unique contributions that Karen women have made across all aspects of our work during the last 20 years. So, let's take this opportunity to commemorate all their great deeds that they have accomplished for us, whether as individuals or as an organization.

Furthermore, organizing our anniversary brings back many good memories of our fallen heroes. They have sacrificed their lives in defending our ancestral territories, as well as environmental, human and Indigenous Peoples' rights, while sharing our vision of a peaceful future.

To all my dear colleagues, friends and supporters, take this moment to acknowledge each other's great accomplishments and the generous contributions that have been given to us over the last two decades. I say to you, Congratulations! And thank you for being with KESAN through all these years – through the laughter and through the tears.

I hope that the 20th anniversary celebration will also remind us that we are human beings and that we sometimes need to refresh ourselves too. We need to turn a new page for KESAN's journey. For the next generation of leaders: the future of our people, planet and organization might as well begin in this moment. The time is right now as your elders once had 20 years ago. The journey to the next two-decades' goals starts from here and today!



KESAN at a Glance

The Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) was the first wholly Karen indigenous organization to address social and environmental problems that the people of Kawthoolei have faced over many decades. KESAN was founded on November 18, 2001 by Paul Sein Twa and members of the Karen Nature Conservation Group (KNCG) that had been collectively formed by a group of Karen refugee students and teachers in Mae Ra Moe/Mae Ra Ma Luang Camp.

KNCG was formed in early 1997 and its members were actively involved in environmental campaigns through awareness raising, waste collection and management, watershed conservation, community organic gardens, tree nurseries and publishing the *Kwee Mu Nya Roe* (“a healthy pond that attracts fish”) environmental magazine. KNCG worked collaboratively with camp-based schools and community members to conduct these environmental activities.

In its earlier years, KESAN focused on capacity building, environmental awareness training, research, advocacy and media publications. KESAN’s first research project was titled ***Destruction and Degradation of the Burmese Frontier Forests*** and was conducted in mid-2001 in four of the seven KNU districts. It was followed by further multilingual advocacy relating to deforestation, big hydropower dams, herbal medicines, biodiversity conservation and traditional agriculture among other issues, all aiming to advance environmental justice while addressing Indigenous Karen peoples’ livelihood security.





KESAN has a unique organizational logo that is deeply embedded in Karen culture and indigenous ontology. To our way of thinking our logo represents and substantiates our vision, mission, ideology and philosophy in a way that is intrinsically congruent with our Indigenous Karen peoples' way of life and worldview. The logo is based on what we call *Ta Kar Keh* (တံခဲးကဲ), small woven bamboo strips that connect people, culture and the environment.

- People - Indigenous Peoples are central to environmental conservation as they have been the guardians of the environment and territories since the times of our ancestors.
- Frog Drum - A core symbol of the Indigenous Karen peoples which indicates our uniqueness as a nation, way of life, traditional knowledge, and traditional livelihood practices that are intrinsically related to environmental integrity.
- Tree - Representing our work on environmental protection and conservation.

Ta Kar Keh's are traditional icons for Indigenous Karen peoples' social taboos which are commonly placed in *Ku* (rotational farms), paddy fields, and soemtimes at village entrances as an offering to spirits in order to prevent any evil forces arising. Just as with the *Ta Ka Keh*, it's important for KESAN to connect and integrate the aspects in our logo throughout all of our work.

Where Do We Work?

Mutraw District/Hpapun

- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation
- Salween Peace Park
- Water Governance
- Community-Based Livelihood Initiative

Dooplaya District

- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation

Hpa-An District

- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation
- Water Governance
- Community-Based Livelihood Initiative

Doo Tha Htoo District/Thaton

- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation

Taw Oo District/Taungoo

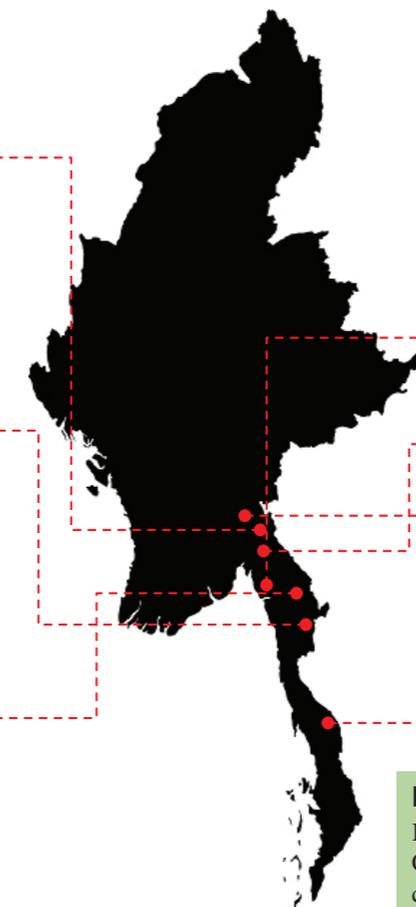
- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation
- Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park

Kler Lwee Htoo District/Nyaunglebin

- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation

Mergui-Tavoy District

- Land & Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation
- Paw Klo Landscape



Remark:
KESAN Programs such as Media, Networking & Advocacy Campaigns and Environmental Education are undertaken as cross-cutting activities across the geographical areas where it operates.



KESAN's Historical Milestones

“Empowering Communities to Protect the Environment, while Securing their Lands, Livelihoods and Peace”



1997
The student-led **Karen Nature Conservation Group** (KNCG) was formed in Mae Ra Moe refugee camp.

1999
Thulei Kawwei Magazine, the first environmental publication in Sgaw Karen was initiated as a project of the Images Asia-Environment Desk

2001
KESAN was officially formed after merging with KNCG on **November 18** by young Karen social and environmental activists from Kawthoolei as the first Karen indigenous organization led solely by Karen. In its earlier years, KESAN focused on **capacity building, environmental awareness raising, and research and advocacy media publications.**

2001
KESAN helped co-found the **Karen Rivers Watch** (KRW) to monitor destructive development projects affecting the health and wellbeing of rivers and local communities in Kawthoolei.

2004
KESAN's **Environmental Education Program** was established

2003
KESAN co-founded and actively participated as a member of the **Burma Environmental Working Group** (BEWG)- a civil society network primarily working in ethnic-controlled, conflict-affected areas of Burma.

2009
KESAN helped facilitate and support the development of the first **Kawthoolei Forest Policy** which came into effect in April.

KESAN contributed significantly to the development of the first revised **KNU Land Policy**, which came into effect on May 6.

2009
KESAN's **Land and Forest Resource Management Program** was established to empower and support local communities in securing their land rights and sustainably manage their natural resources.

KESAN supported lands and ancestral territories documentation through technical and financial supports to local and indigenous communities, and the KAD & KFD. This initiative was scaled up across Kawthoolei in following years.

2012
KESAN helped facilitate and support the development of KNU's **Community Forest and Rotational Cultivation Guidelines** which came into effect in 2012.

Following the opening of space for civil society in Burma in early 2012, KESAN joined and engaged with others to elevate national advocacy campaigns about land, natural resources and water rights of local/ Indigenous Peoples.

The **Community-Based Water Governance Program** was initiated to empower and strengthen local communities' voice and rights to manage water resources in the downstream areas of the Salween River Basin.

KESAN helped co-found the **Karen Wildlife Conservation Initiative** (KWCI) with the KFD & a few like-minded international conservation organizations and individuals to protect biodiversity in Kawthoolei.

KESAN co-founded the **Karen Peace Support Network** (KPSN) to voice Karen people's concerns and visions for genuine peace through research, media and advocacy, and humanitarian assistance.

2014
KESAN increased its work in the Tanawthari (Tenasserim) Region by participating in the formation of the **Conservation Alliance of Tanawthari** (CAT) together with five local CSOs in 2014.

2015
KESAN was actively involved in the facilitation and support for the development of the second revised **KNU Land Policy** which came into effect in December, 2015.

Working closely with the KAD, KESAN assisted to set up a centralized land data registry for KNU's seven districts.

KESAN's **Salween Peace Park Initiative Program** was established to support and strengthen Indigenous Karen ancestral territories and community-led natural resources governance in KNU's Mutraw District.

2015
KESAN joined the **ICCA Consortium** to be a part of the global movement for the recognition of the world's Indigenous Peoples' rights and responsibilities to their customary lands and territories. The ICCA is dedicated to promoting ICCAs – Territories of Life. KESAN's Executive Director became an ICCA Honorarium Member.

2018
KESAN facilitated 16 Indigenous Karen communities to form the **Paw Klo Landscape of Life** in Tanawthari Region. The initiative is still in the process of documenting customary lands & cultural and community histories through community consultations.

2018
KESAN helped facilitate the groundwork for the **Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park** in Taw Oo/ Taungoo District through documentation of customary lands & cultural and community histories.

2019
KESAN's Executive Director was confirmed as an ICCA Consortium Council Member.

2019
KESAN was the lead organization organizing the first **Kaw "Customary Land" Seminar** in May- bringing together local communities, Karen and other ethnic nationalities CBOs/CSOs, INGOs, political parties and KNU.

2020
KESAN contributed significantly to the development of the **KECD's Environmental Curriculum** for grades 10-12, being taught in KECD administered schools.

The Salween Peace Park, which KESAN has actively supported since its inception, received the **UNDP's Equator Prize** in recognition of their outstanding example of community-led, nature-based solutions to climate change.

KESAN's Executive Director, who also serves as the Salween Peace Park Chairperson was awarded the **Goldman Environmental Prize** due to his leadership and efforts for environmental protection.

Essentiality of Building a Strong Institution

Capacity Building, Awareness Raising & Researching



Above from left to right: KESAN director Paul and Steve co-facilitating an environmental awareness training in Mae Ra Moe Camp in 2006. Kaw Mu Hsa addressing the community during the Earth Day events organized in the Mae Ra Moe Camp in 2000. Thera Plor Moo explaining the interconnections within food chains during a training in Mae Ra Moe Camp in the early years of KNCG.



Raising people's awareness both locally and abroad of the different environmental threats and realities faced by Karen specifically and all people everywhere has been fundamental for KESAN to make a greater and lasting impact. Strengthening local community's capacity and ecological knowledge was undertaken with 1-3 month field trips and workshops involving community representatives from the 6 districts of KNU administered territories. After these trainings, community representatives further organized and conducted training and activities in their respective areas.



Continuation of capacity building and environmental awareness raising remained key focal activities of KESAN after it was first established. "Green Steve"- who also provided the first environment trainings for KESAN staff - stands at the far right in this group photo with his students in Mae Ra Moe Camp after a training in March 2006.

KNCG's Community Organic Garden

Karen Nature Conservation Group (KNCG) members who set up and promoted community organic gardens in the camp so that people in the refugee community could have a more healthy, ecologically sound and sustainable food system. (The photo was taken in early 2001)



KNCG's Environmental Campaign

A group of KNCG members comprised of refugee teachers, students, and community members preparing environmental awareness signboards for their environmental campaign in Mae Ra Moe camp (2001)



On the 22nd April 2000, members of KNCG and the local community in Mae Ra Moe celebrated Earth Day, which the United Nations designated as 'International Mother Earth Day.' To celebrate this significant event a monument with the message "Peaceful World" was constructed on Mae Ra Moe River bank.



Members of KNCG, Karen elders from Thailand, and Green Steve celebrating Earth Day in Mae Ra Moe camp (2000)



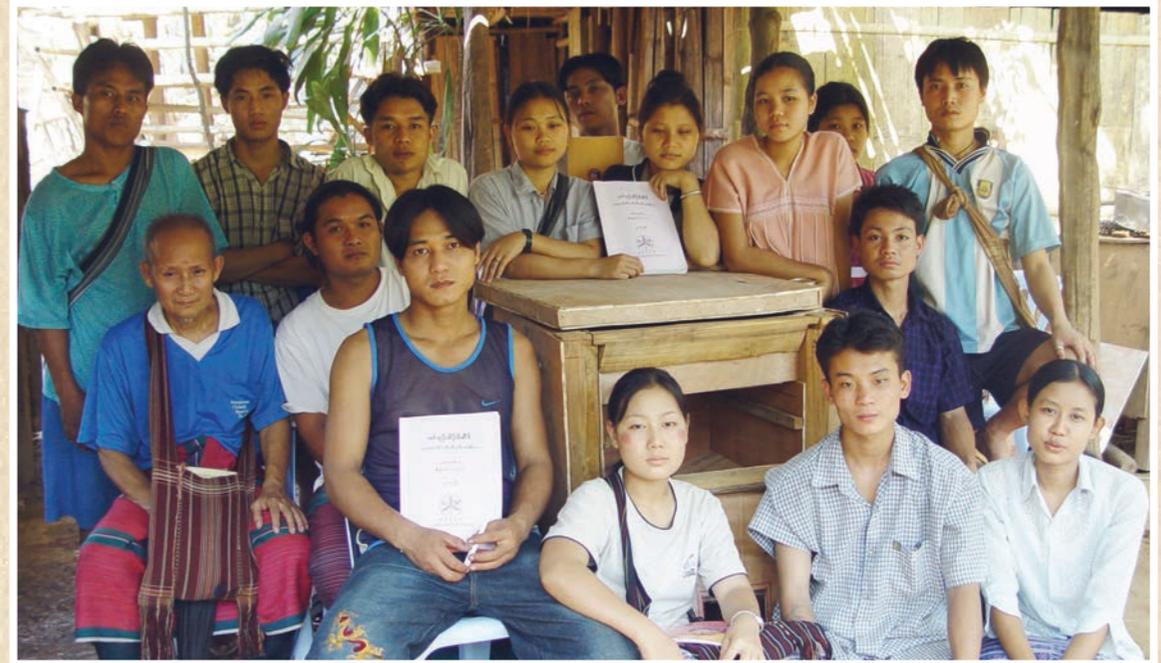
Photo memories of current and former KESAN staff members

Saw Plah Ghay, the former coordinator of KESAN's Community Livelihoods Program, conducting environmental awareness training/ 2008

Thera Victor, former KESAN livestock rearing and breeding trainer/2005



Thera Victor, seated on the left with blue shirt, providing a training on egg incubator construction in Mae Ra Moe/ 2005





Environmental and Cultural Exchange Program activity in the Por Lor Hpu, a sacred site that includes a large natural clearing in the Salween Peace Park territory/2015

Revitalizing Environmental and Cultural Knowledge

Our elders' traditional knowledge about environmental stewardship is highly relevant for both the current and future generations. To help bridge the cultural knowledge gap, Environmental and Cultural Exchange Programs are organized to create a space for an intergenerational dialogue and learning between the elders and young generation who will continue to share the common vision and commitment toward environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

Our ancestors regarded certain species of animals as their great allies, and took great care of their natural habitats through the protection and respectful management of the forests, cliffs and natural pools as part of their instinctual ecological responsibility. For example, hoolock gibbons are traditionally taboo animals for Karen because they are regarded as seers that help predict weather patterns and seasonal changes.

Sound natural resource management is also crucial for sustaining cultural practices and our way of life. Karen traditional harps are made from the specific woods, either *Thay Ka Ma*, *Doh Ka Hti* or *Ser*. These harps are used during local festival and ceremonies and are usually kept in the *Blaw* (formal meeting place), yet they can be also kept at home or in farmland huts.



Ehzana, one of KESAN's former staff conducting environmental awareness training in the Ei Htu Hta IDP camp in 2004



Saw Tun Naing conducting environmental awareness training in a remote area in Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District in 2007



An elder from the Salween Peace Park in Mutraw District teaching youth visiting from the Taw Oo District further to the north techniques of playing the traditional harp// Saw Mort



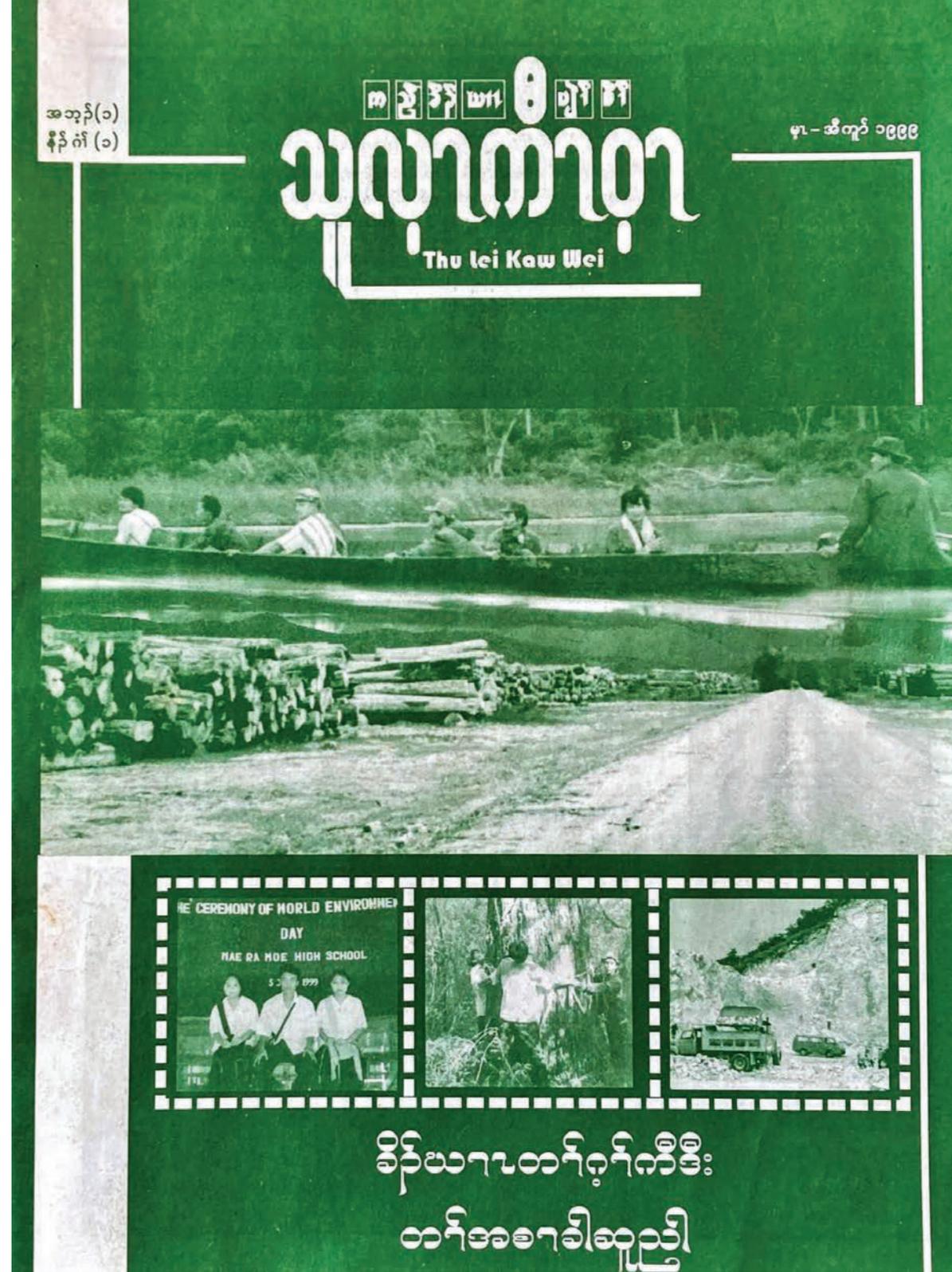
Students from The Nue Chet La Cultural School playing traditional musical instruments//Saw Mort

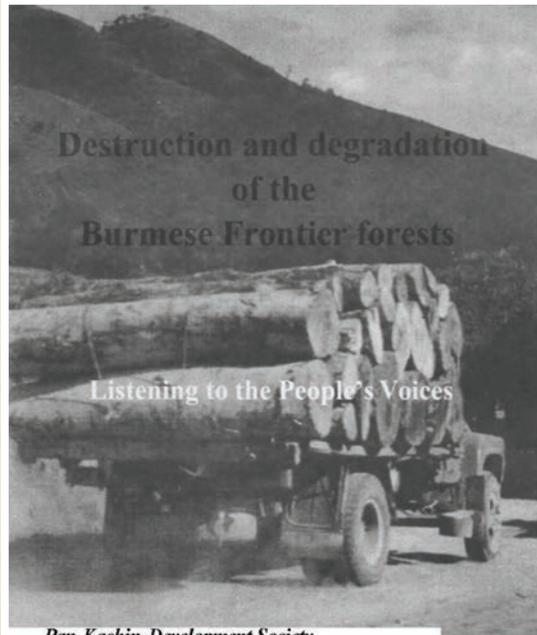
Media, Networking & Advocacy Campaigns

Voice for the Voiceless!

KESAN's media program has played an key role in our work since our organisation's founding, using print, video, radio, internet, music and the stage to reach countless numbers people. These media tools act as a vehicle of expression for the otherwise voiceless local indigenous communities who for many decades have been marginalized and persecuted under the successive military regimes of Burma/ Myanmar. KESAN's media program also increases political, social and ecological awareness amongst local communities and civil society actors so that they are better equipped with knowledge about the causes of conflict and the developmental realities they must deal with.

Right: One of the earlier research reports produced by KESAN on cultural and biological diversity in Kawthoolei





Destruction and degradation of the Burmese Frontier forests

Listening to the People's Voices

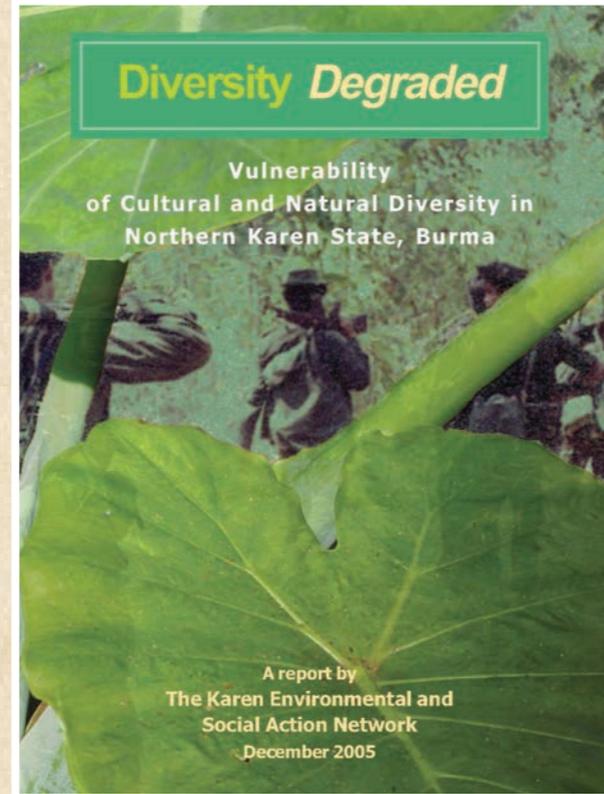
Pan Kachin Development Society
Karen environmental and Social Action Network

Edited and introduced by Searchweb

Destruction and Degradation of the Burmese Frontier Forests was our first major environmental report. It was jointly researched with the Pan Kachin Development Society (PKDS) and published in partnership with Searchweb Foundation in the Netherlands in 2004. KESAN has collaborated with Global Witness, the Environmental Investigation Agency, International Rivers and other well-known organisations.



Paul, providing situational updates to NC-IUCN's staff following the first publication of KESAN's report *All Is Not Lost: the Fate of Karen's Forests*.



Diversity Degraded

Vulnerability of Cultural and Natural Diversity in Northern Karen State, Burma

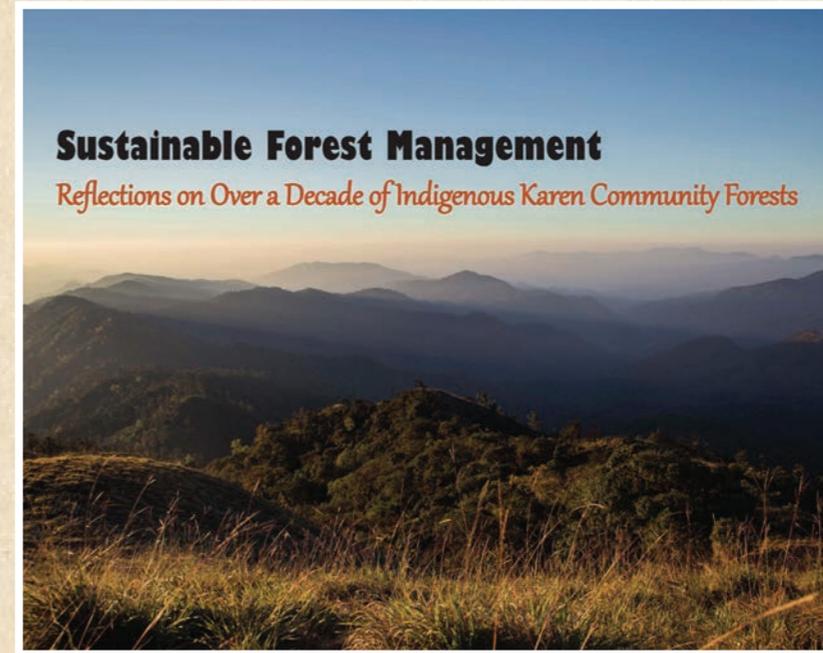
A report by The Karen Environmental and Social Action Network December 2005

One of the earlier research reports produced by KESAN on cultural and biological diversity in Kawthoolei.



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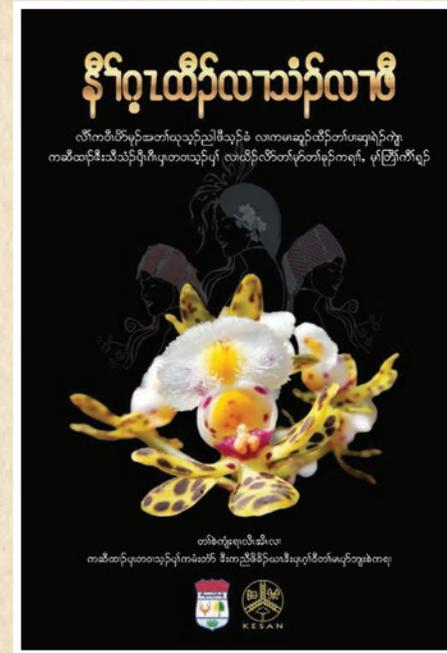
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Sustainable Forest Management

Reflections on Over a Decade of Indigenous Karen Community Forests

"KESAN is an indigenous Karen organization that strives to fulfill Karen peoples' aspiration for self-determination rights"
Naw Hsa Moo, coordinator of KESAN's media program



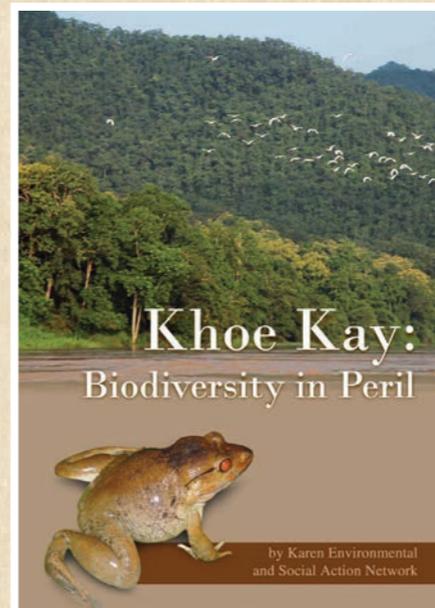
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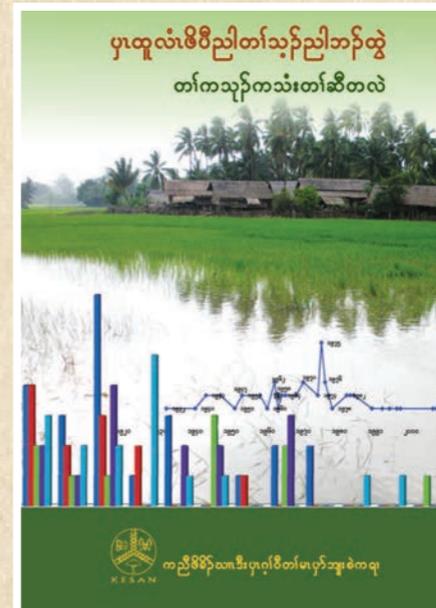


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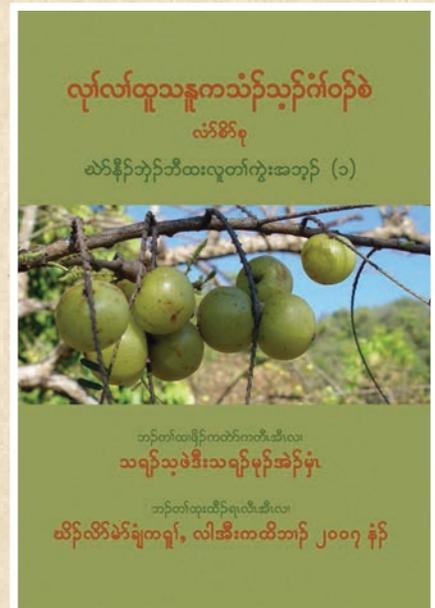
Khoe Kay: Biodiversity in Peril

by Karen Environmental and Social Action Network



ပုာ်ထူလံးဖိဝါညါတၢ်သုဉ်ညါဘဉ်ထွဲ တၢ်ကသုဉ်ကသံးတၢ်ဆီတလဲ

ကညီဖိအသုဉ်ပုာ်အဘူဉ်အတီ နီးပုာ်ဂီတီတံးမုာ်အသုဉ်ပုာ်အဘူဉ်အတီ လီလုာ်လဲ ၂၀၀၄



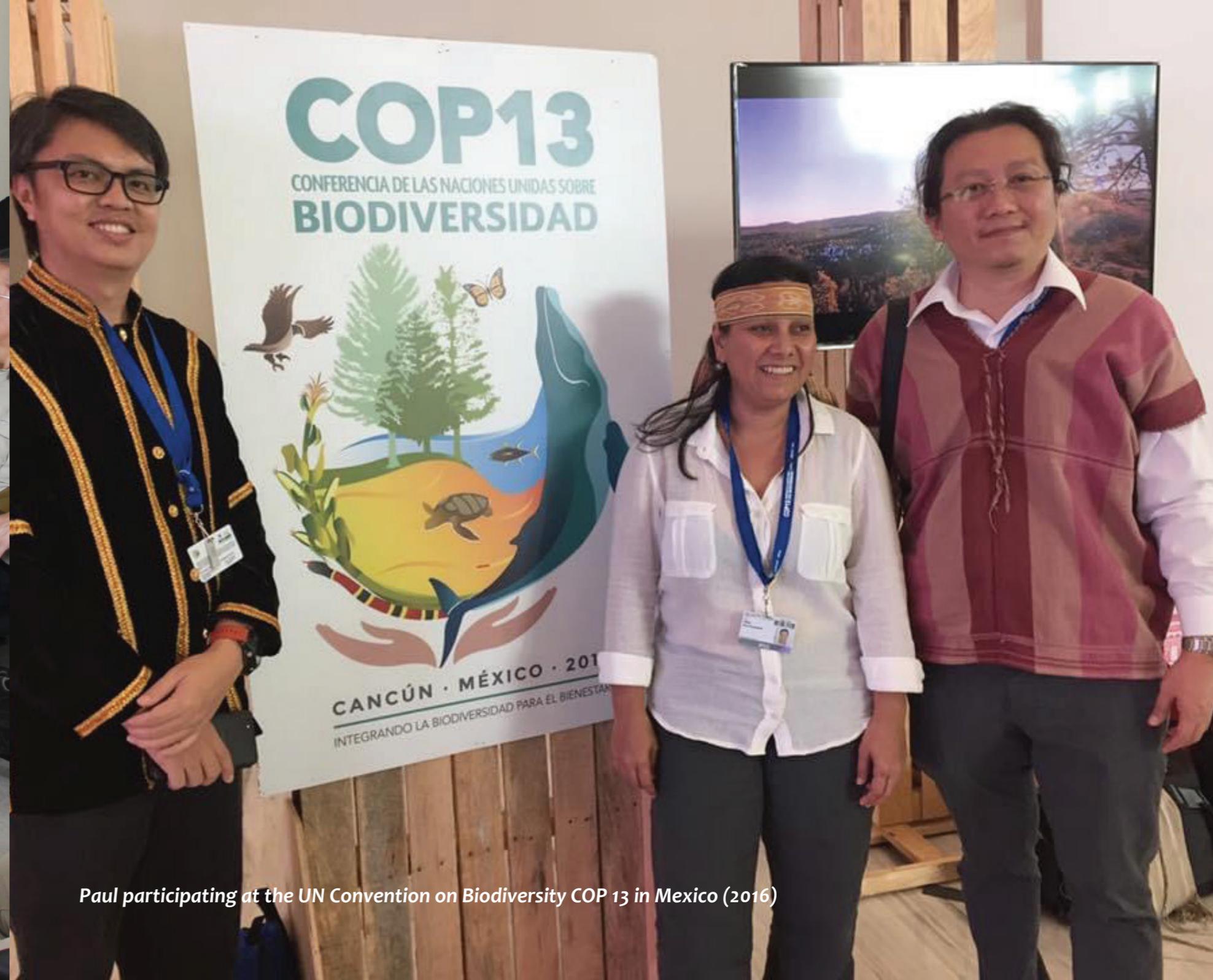
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မံာ်နီဉ်ဘဉ်တီထံးလုာ်လၢထူသန့ကသံဉ်သုဉ်ဂံာ်ဝဲဉ်စဲ (၁)

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Paul sharing at the ICCA Consortium 2018 Extraordinary General Assembly in Canada



Paul participating at the UN Convention on Biodiversity COP 13 in Mexico (2016)

KESAN was a co-founding organization of Land in Our Hands, a multi-ethnic network advocating for land reform in Burma. Since then, KESAN Deputy Director Saw Alex has provided land rights trainings for EAO leaders, Members of Parliament, and ethnic CBOs. This photo was taken at the Customary Land Rights Seminar in Loikaw, Karenni State (2014)



Saw Alex presenting the Burmese government's investment plans and their impacts in Karen State during the Kaw Seminar in 2017

Sustaining Traditional Livelihoods



KESAN's Community Based Livelihoods Initiative Program aims to increase food security for people in the war-torn areas as well as to sustain and build on traditional livelihood practices and systems of Indigenous Karen peoples. A livelihood based on traditional knowledge is rooted in Karen cultural identity; it is usually also based on an agroecological system that maintains ecosystem services and a high level of biological diversity. By maintaining ecosystem services and functions, we assert that traditional swidden food systems and practices are carbon neutral and play an important role in climate change mitigation whereas industrial agriculture systems are one of the major contributors of GHGs in the Earth's atmosphere.



An organic rice paddy field surrounded by the forest in Maw Lay Kho/Saw Mort



Indigenous Karen youths documenting the different varieties of rice crops during the cultural and environmental exchange program organized in 2018 in the Salween Peace Park

“Rice is Life”

Rice is a staple food for Indigenous Karen people in Mutraw District of Kawthoolei. Living in a mountainous region, the majority of people practice Ku (upland rotational farming). The impacts of climate change on regional weather have caused rice production to decline in recent years. To overcome these challenges and increase food sovereignty, KESAN has worked with communities to establish rice bank since 2014.

Ceremonial flowers in a “Ku” rotational farm. Some of the flowers also serve to repel insects and foster beneficial soil micro-organisms.



"The focus of our Community Based Livelihood Initiative (CBLI) program is for local indigenous communities to have sufficient rice for their food security. In order to achieve this, a number of activities, including irrigation channel construction, community rice bank establishment, indigenous seed saving, establishment of fish conservation zones, agroforestry, and domestic livestock rearing have been conducted with local communities since KESAN was first established."
Saw Nay Kaw, CBLI Program Coordinator

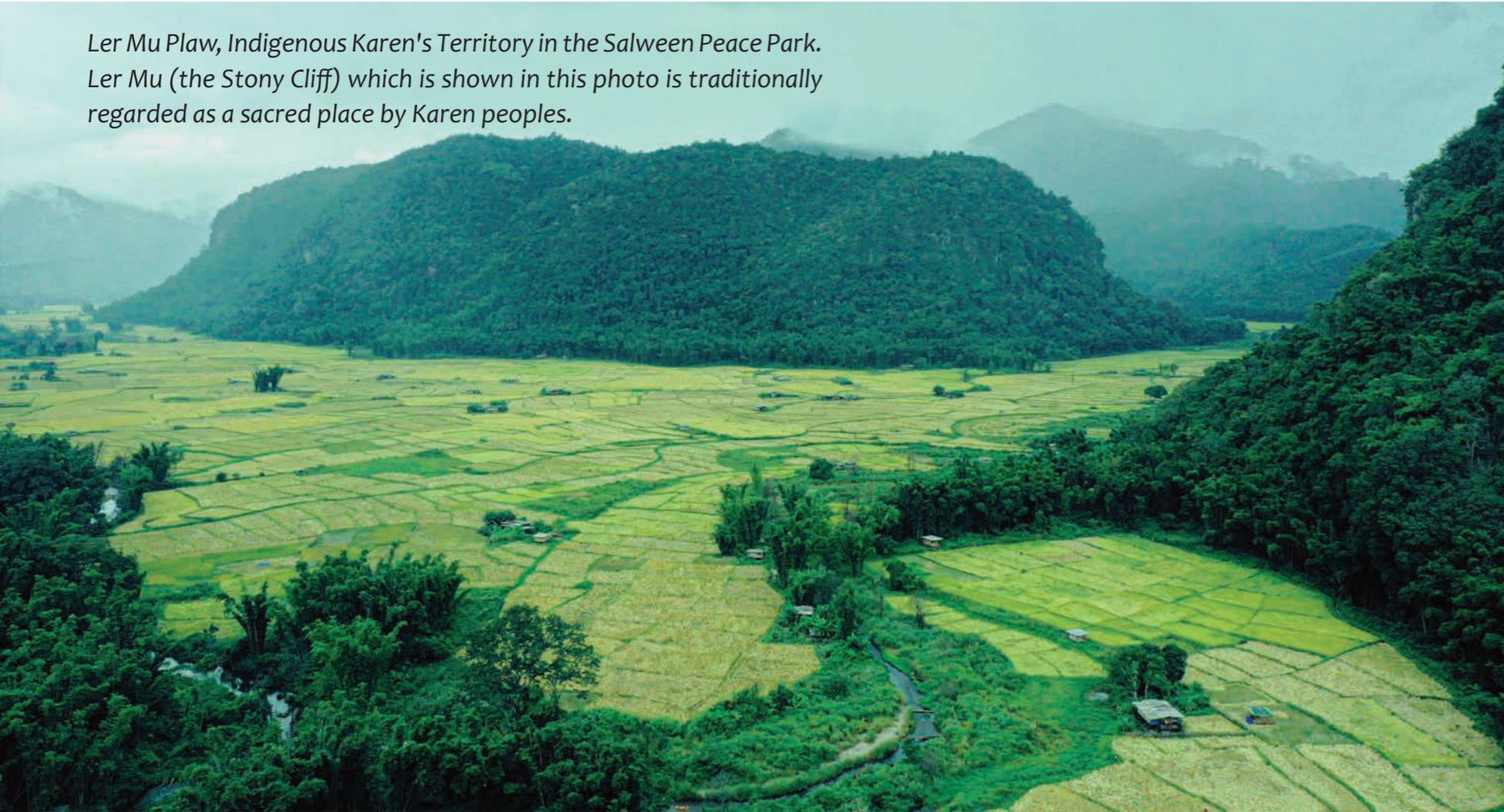
“Properly practiced rotational cultivation uses the land for one year and then leaves it fallow for seven to ten years before it is used again. This method allows the soil to recover and maintain its fertility, making chemical fertilizers unnecessary. This form of cultivation involves long, complex and deliberate systems using extensive forest management techniques”

Saw Klaw Poe an indigenous elder, a former KESAN local staff, spending quality time with his buffalo in the paddy field/ 2017

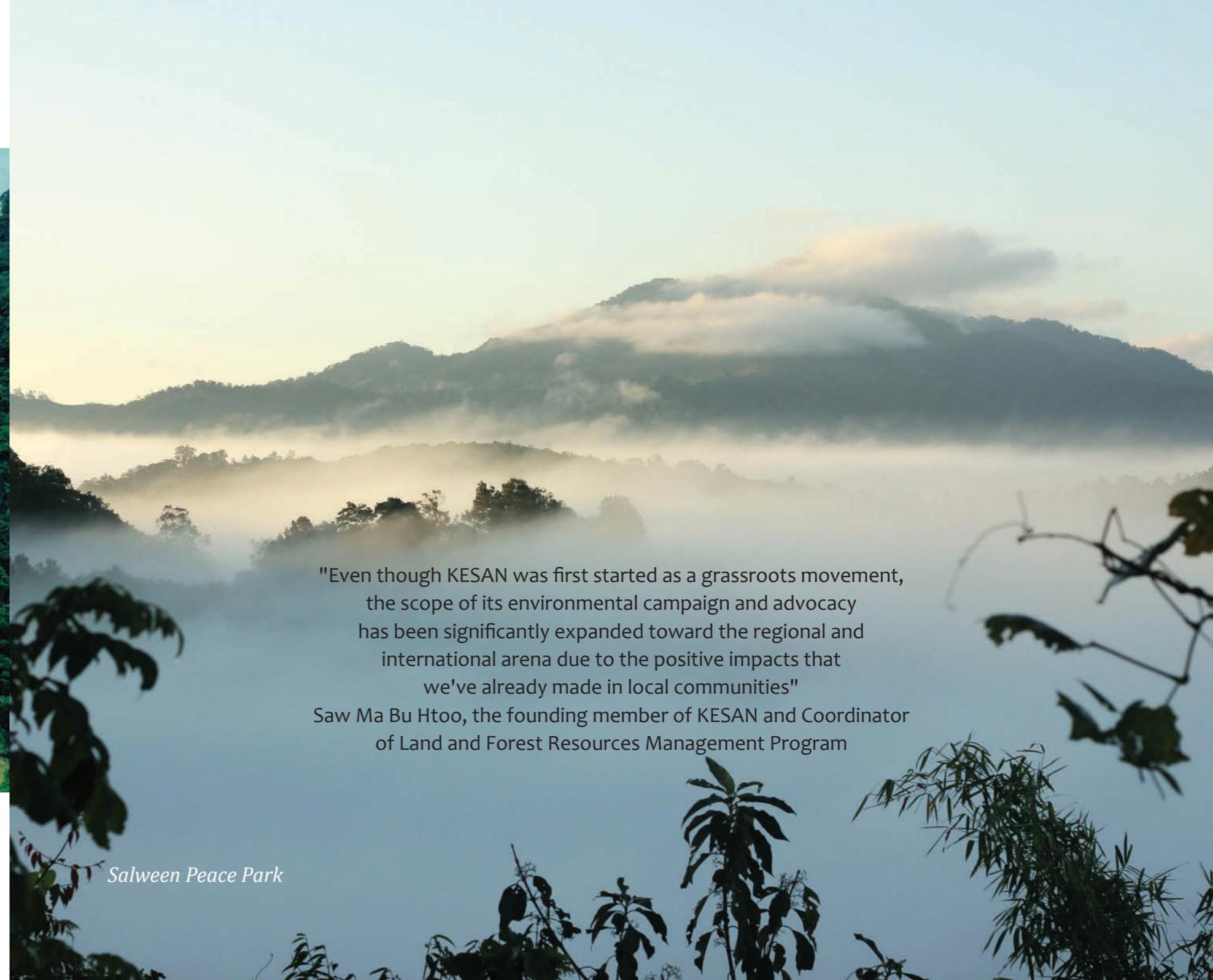


Protecting Ancestral Territories & Forests

Ler Mu Plaw, Indigenous Karen's Territory in the Salween Peace Park. Ler Mu (the Stony Cliff) which is shown in this photo is traditionally regarded as a sacred place by Karen peoples.



KESAN's Land and Forest Resource Management program works to empower indigenous and local communities to secure their land rights and to effectively and sustainably manage and protect their lands and relevant natural resources across all the seven districts of Kawthoolei. The program was initiated in early 2011 as a way for people threatened by land grabbing and discriminatory Burmese laws to secure and protect ancestral territories and forests.



"Even though KESAN was first started as a grassroots movement, the scope of its environmental campaign and advocacy has been significantly expanded toward the regional and international arena due to the positive impacts that we've already made in local communities"

Saw Ma Bu Htoo, the founding member of KESAN and Coordinator of Land and Forest Resources Management Program

Salween Peace Park



From left to right: Saw Ah Htoo, Saw Wee Eh Htoo's niece, Saw Wee Eh Htoo, Saw Mabu Htoo and Saw August Nu during their trip to Kawthoolei to initiate community livelihood projects in 2004



Local community conducting forest monitoring in Kheshorter Community Forest in Mutraw District/2020



Law Mu Doh Community Forest in Taw Oo District/2019



Saw Aung Shwe Poe, the former staff of KESAN and a friend carrying out a community project evaluation/2005

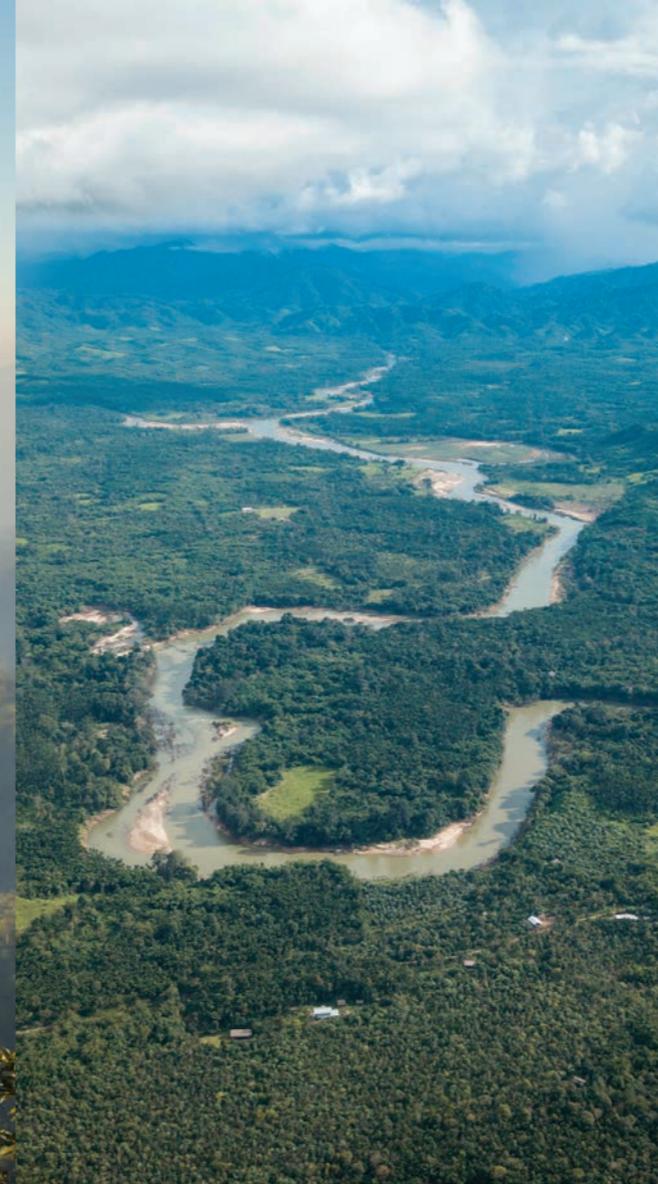


Community Forestry training conducted in 2005 as part of the process of supporting communities and the Karen administration to establish hundreds of community managed forest tracts throughout Kawthoolei.



Kaydoh Mae Nyaw Wildlife Sanctuary in Mutraw District

Thawthi Kho (‘Nattaung’ on Burmese maps) is the highest peak in Kawthoolei. It is considered sacred by Indigenous Karen peoples. In 2011 local communities established their community forest on part of this vast sacred mountain, naming it **Thawthi Pworghaw Community Forest**



Paw Klo Landscape

The Paw Klo Landscape in the southernmost Mergui-Tavoy District of Kawthoolei is a biodiverse-rich area comprised of wildlife sanctuaries, community forests and customary rotational farmlands/ Saw Mort



Wildlife & Biodiversity Conservation

KESAN's Wildlife and Biodiversity Program works closely with local indigenous communities, the Kawthoolei Forestry Department of KNU and likeminded conservation organizations to protect, conserve and research extraordinary biodiversity in Kawthoolei. Our work emphasizes collaborative efforts in strengthening and promoting indigenous knowledge in biodiversity conservation.



The Karen are intimately connected to the land and the transmission of conservation-based knowledge is an integral part of their culture. Biodiversity is the most critical component of the sustainability and integrity of the natural ecosystem, and it's regarded as the life-supporting systems of the Planet. Indigenous Karen peoples play a critical role in effective wildlife conservation. For them, effective conservation of wildlife, biodiversity and their natural habitats are reciprocally vital for their sustainable livelihoods and biocultural system.

“Indigenous Karen peoples’ territories are rich with biodiversity because of the Karen belief that ensuring ecosystem health and biodiversity sustainability is a moral and ecological responsibility that they need to hold profoundly. As nature has no boundaries, Karen indigenous-led wildlife conservation is vitally important for biodiversity conservation and globally significant species. Besides this, during this time of climate change resulting from the massive emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) by industrialized countries that has accelerated global warming, our efforts towards sustainable forest management also plays a critical role in climate factor.”

As an Indigenous person and wildlife conservationist, I’ve always been proud to have gained traditional knowledge and practices for biodiversity conservation from the elders. Moreover, when combining scientific knowledge that I gained from the university with the traditional environmental conservation knowledge from the local elders, I couldn’t be prouder for myself.”

*Saw Blaw Htoo,
Karen Indigenous Nature Research Expert*



One of our fallen leaders, Saw O Moo (fourth from right), conducting hoolock gibbon research in Khershorter Community Forest/ 2010

Water Governance

The Lifeblood of Indigenous Peoples

In 2012, KESAN's Community -Based Water Governance Program was initiated with the aim to empower local communities to have a stronger voice in the governance and management of the Salween River Basin. This program has worked with local peoples to strengthen inclusive, holistic and community-led governance of water resources.





Daw La Lake is a seasonally river-fed wetland complex on the western bank of the Salween River that is home to more than eight thousand people living in the villages of Mi Kayin, Mote Kadi, Kan Gyi, Kan Kalay, and Ke Dauk. The lake is considered the lifeblood for these five indigenous communities, a vital source of food and economic wellbeing. It is known as the largest freshwater lake in Karen State, a unique floodplain ecosystem with underwater limestone caves that harbor a diversity of fish, birds, turtles and other flora and fauna.

Salween Peace Park

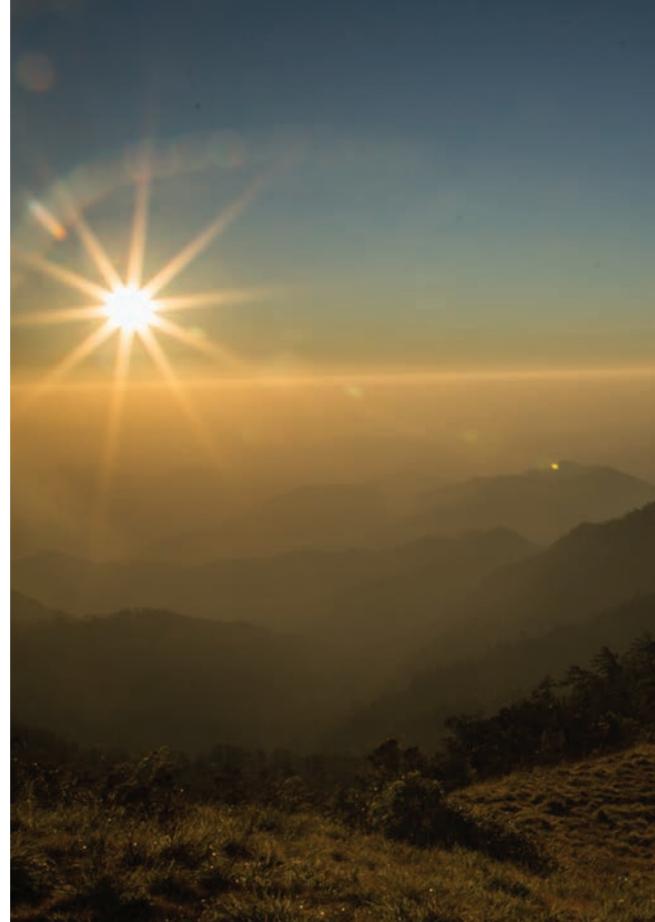
The Struggle for Self-Determination

In 2015, KESAN began their Salween Peace Park Initiative Program with a vision of achieving the Indigenous Karen communities' aspiration for genuine peace. This is a community-driven initiative with three main goals: peace and self-determination, environmental integrity and cultural revitalization. The SPP is rooted in Karen traditional belief in the possibility of harmonious and peaceful co-existence between human and non-human beings.





Peace & Self-determination



Environmental Integrity



Cultural Survival



Clockwise from the top: The official declaration of the Salween Peace Park in 2018. Members of indigenous communities jointly demarcating the boundaries of their 'Kaw' customary lands. Indigenous elder from within the Salween Peace Park sharing traditional knowledge during the SPP General Assembly in 2020.

The Salween Peace Park's vision is to foster peace, cooperation, cultural resilience, sustainable natural resource management, biocultural conservation and local livelihood improvement

"The Salween Peace Park is territory that will be governed on the basis of self-determination and inclusive democracy in order to better protect and preserve the Indigenous Karen people's natural and cultural heritage"
- Salween Peace Park Charter



**The official declaration
of the Salween Peace Park in 2018.**



In 2020, the Salween Peace Park was one of the 10 winners of the United Nations Development Program's Equator Prize. There were more than 600 nominations from 120 countries for this annual award. The Salween Peace Park received this award as an outstanding example of indigenous communities joining together to be part of the solution to the world's ecological crisis.





In 2020, KESAN's Executive Director-who also serves as the Salween Peace Park Chairperson - was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize-also referred to as the "Green Nobel Prize"- for his remarkable role in protecting ancestral territories and preserving traditional culture of the Indigenous Karen peoples in the Salween Peace Park.



KESAN staff, local communities and KNU's officials participating in the fourth annual Blaw meeting in Mae Pleh village, Dooplaya District /2014

Thank you!

With this book, KESAN celebrates the 20th Anniversary of its founding back on November 18th, 2001. Despite many challenges and adversities that we've faced over the last 20 years in the pursuit of social and environmental justice we have been able to overcome these because of all the generous support, unfailing commitment, concerted efforts and dedication of people in the local indigenous communities, Kawthoolei leaders, our partner organizations and generous donors. We acknowledge that it would never have been possible for us to have succeeded in our work without your trust in us and your participation. We therefore - as individuals and as an organization - sincerely thank you for being with us to partake in this journey. Furthermore, in celebrating this special event, we also pay our tribute to our fallen colleagues who we regard as our Indigenous Heroes that dedicated their lives for our land and our people up until their last breath.

