

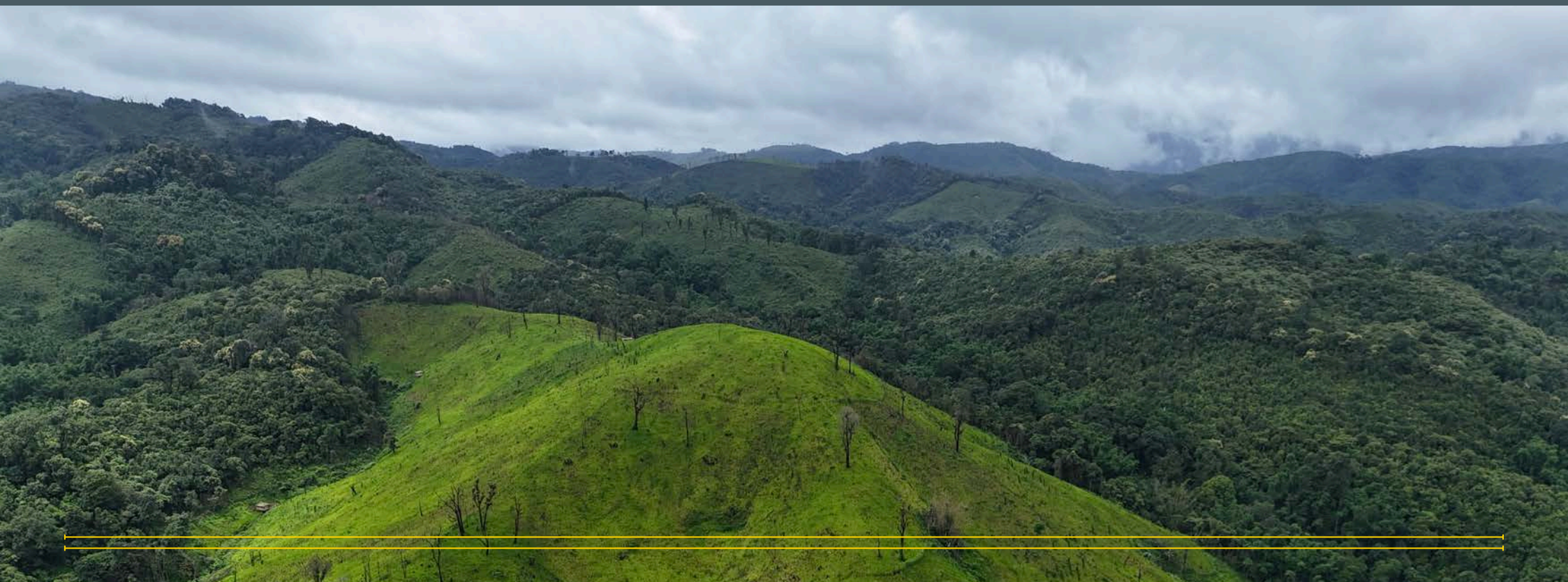


**KESAN**

# Impact report 2024

## Karen Environmental and Social Action Network

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





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# Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisation
ICT	Indigenous Conserved Territories
IDP	Internally Displaced People
KAD	Kawthoolei Agriculture Department
KECD	Karen Education and Culture Department
KESAN	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
KFD	Kawthoolei Forestry Department
KLFD	Kawthoolei Livestock and Fishery Department
KNU	Karen National Union
KPSN	Karen Peace Support Network
KRW	Karen River Watch
KWO	Karen Women’s Organisation
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Product
NUG	National Unity Government
PKLA	Paw Klo Landscape Area
SAC	State Administration Council
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
SPP	Salween Peace Park
SSN	Save Salween Network
TTIP	Thaw Thi Taw Oo Indigenous Park

# About KESAN

## History

KESAN was founded in 2001 by Paul Sein Twa and members of the Karen Nature Conservation Group (KNCG), a group of Karen refugee students and teachers in Mae Ra Moe/Mae Ra Ma Luang Camp who were actively involved in environmental campaigns, watershed conservation and community organic gardens.

## Vision

Empowered communities, securing the peace, and protecting environment, lands and livelihoods

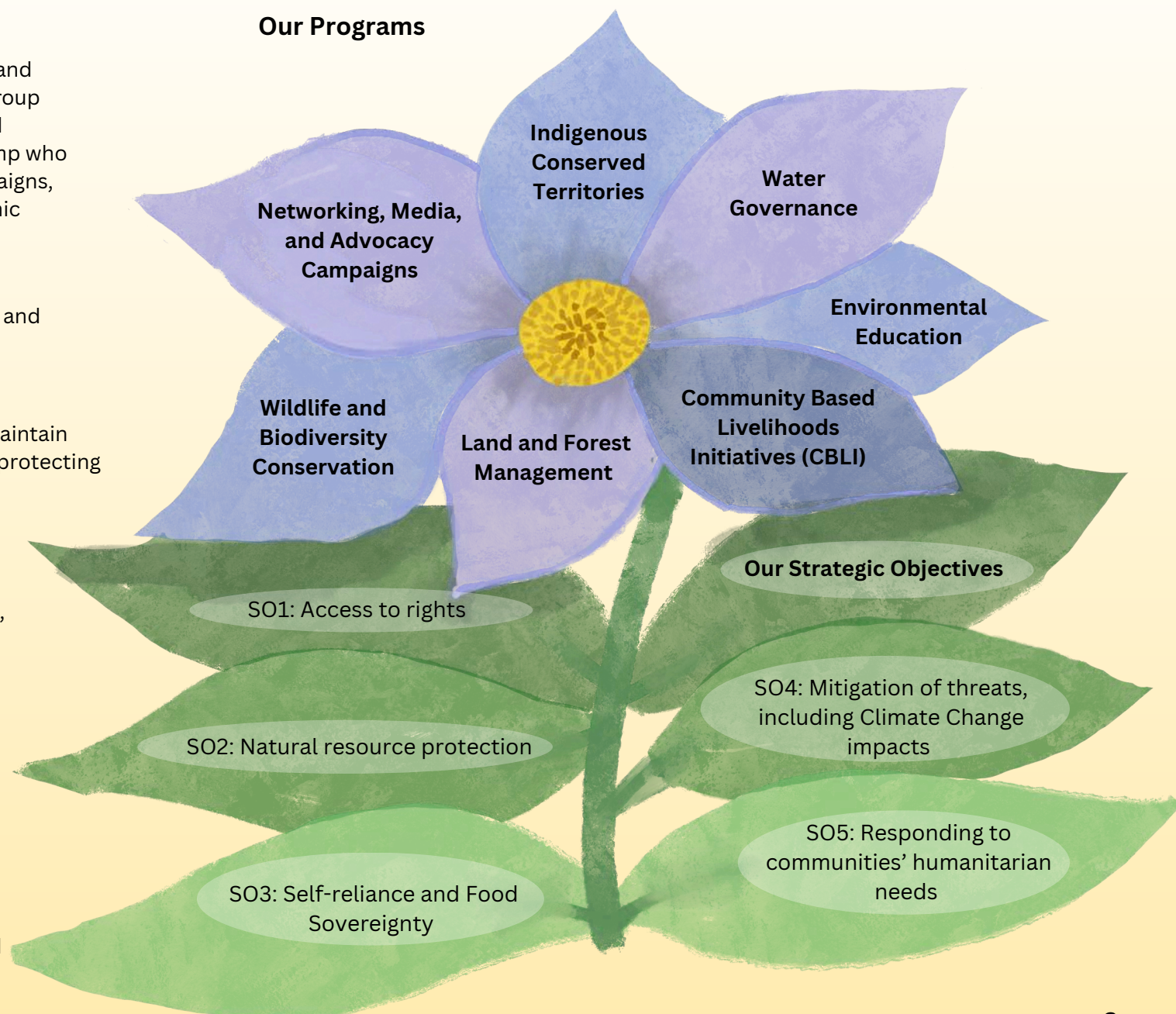
## Mission

To strengthen Karen communities' ability to maintain sustainable livelihoods and ways of life, while protecting Kawthoolei's wildlife and biodiversity

## Objectives

- To assist in securing access to lands, water, forests, and the agricultural bio-diversity that is the basis of Karen peoples' lives
- To support improved livelihood capabilities and resilience for displaced local communities
- To strengthen and inform civil society networks that advocate for good environmental governance
- To advocate for local, state and national policies and practices that safeguard the environment and the rights of local people while protecting against unsustainable and harmful development

## Our Programs





## 2024 Overview

In 2024, Myanmar continued to face political and military violence. There was a marked shift in the dynamics of the conflict, with armed revolutionary groups gaining ground, capturing strategic towns and military bases across the country. In Karen districts, 138 SAC military camps were captured by resistance forces between the February 2021 military coup and mid-2024. Over half were lost during the recent period of mid-2023 to mid-2024, marking the reclaiming of Karen indigenous lands by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and its allies during the past year.

Over a third of the camps recently captured were in Mutraw (Hpapun) district, which is now almost completely under Karen National Union (KNU) control, including the entire stretch of the Salween River border with Thailand; bringing large sections of the Thai-Burma border back under Karen control for the first time in 40 years.

Despite this good news, the ongoing armed conflict continued to have a devastating impact on civilians, with a high number of civilian casualties and increasing number of IDPs in Kawthoolei districts- reaching to over one million persons. In response, border-based CBOs have stepped up their relief efforts to assist the growing number of IDPs.

Across the globe, this past year witnessed unprecedented extreme and unpredictable weather events, especially across Southeast Asia where extreme heat waves during the summer months and severe flooding during the monsoon season caused widespread damage. In Karen areas, landslides triggered by these weather patterns resulted in casualties and property loss.

Despite ongoing challenges, the Karen people have shown remarkable resilience, continuing to pursue their vision of community development, environmental protection, and sustainable self-governance with strong support from Karen civil society. In 2024, the official launch of the Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park - a territory of life bordering the Salween Peace Park - marked a significant step in this direction and reflected a broader trend across Myanmar. Ethnic resistance organizations expanded decentralized governance systems in liberated areas, considering a new governance model, that would be inclusive of all political parties and operate within Kawthoolei territories.





## A snapshot of our impacts in 2024



Public launch of the second Karen  
Indigenous Conserved Territory  
*Tawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park*



*Forest restoration impacts*  
has **tripled** since 2024



*Piloted dry season rice planting*  
to strengthen food security



*Surplus of rice*  
in the community rice banks has  
**tripled** since the launch of the  
initiative in 2020



Family plot registration has  
*secured territorial rights for*  
*2,115 women and 3,171 men*



*9 km of roads have been*  
*built or restored,*  
improving market access for the local  
communities



# Strengthening Natural Resource Governance - Land and Forest

## Advancing land tenure of Karen communities



Following community consultations, combined with awareness raising on Indigenous land rights and technical guidance on ground truth surveying and demarcation, KESAN supported local people's in mapping family and community lands.



**91,305 acres**

Kaw customary lands demarcated in 2024

**5,286**

family plots demarcated in 2024

## Promoting restorative tree planting



KESAN teams assisted in organising a tree planting events to reforest depleted areas and support forest wildlife and soil productivity. 393 community members, KFD, KESAN, and community rangers, practised in tree planting and learned about forest conservation practices in the Thoo Mweh Khee migrant school compounds on the Thai-Myanmar border and in Way Boo Hta and Mae Nu Hta-Peh Hta.

**36.4 %**

land title owners are female

## Enhancing community and KNU capacities in forest governance

To advance community-led forest management, the Karen people and KNU held trainings that built shared responsibility and strengthened community capacity to protect forests and watersheds under KNU regulations.



## Leveraging modern technologies for forest and wildlife protection

To promote community-driven and evidence-based environmental governance, in collaboration with community representatives and forest rangers, KESAN initiated the development of a community-based forest monitoring web and mobile app.





# Strengthening Natural Resource Governance - Water

Karen communities have a reciprocal relationship with water. The rivers and streams in the Salween River Basin are the lifeblood of Karen communities, providing food, livelihoods, health and well-being. With threat of planned dams along the Salween River, the protection and governance of water resources through community-led conservation and advocacy is essential.



## Water and Watershed Governance

4 thematic workshops raised awareness and built consensus on fish species protection.

1,387 watershed-dependent residents gained access to dedicated conservation areas with 9 fish conservation zones and 5 centers established in Mutraw and Hpa-an districts.

The newly elected Daw Lar Lake Management Committee, which is responsible for developing and implementing community and ecosystem-driven management plans for Daw Lar Lake, met regularly to oversee the progress.



## Community Capacity Building

Through community forums and trainings in Dooطلا on biodiversity conservation, sustainable fishing, community-based water governance, and how these relate to food sovereignty, over 900 community members have been reached



## Environmental Conservation and Restoration

145 participants joined World Fishery Day events in Doo Tha Htu and Dooطلا district to encourage sustainable fish conservation practices.

A tree planting event at Thoo Mweh Khee migrant school engaged 280 people in environmental education and ecosystem restoration.



## Collaborative work with the Kawthoolei Livestock and Fishery Department (KLFD)

The Kawthoolei Livestock and Fishery Department (KLFD) was founded to support and oversee local communities' animal husbandry activities and water resource management, aiming to improve the food security of the Karen people and safeguard grasslands and local aquatic ecosystems. For over a decade KESAN has been collaborating with KLFD, focusing on bridging communities and policy.

Recent milestones between KESAN and KLFD include:

- A capacity-building program for the KLFD, strengthening competencies in waste and water management, including impacts from mining and household waste.
- 3 community consultations and participatory planning for resource protection, resulting in the development of an action plan.
- Dialogue events with 46 KNU townships and district representatives.

# Strengthening Natural Resource Governance - Water

## Free Flowing Salween River

On 14 March 2024, KESAN teams joined Karen Rivers Watch, alongside local communities and leaders from the SPP, bringing together over 1,000 people, gathered on the bank of the Salween River near the proposed Hatgyi Dam site to peacefully advocate for the free flowing river. The demonstration called for decentralized renewable energy projects, recognition of indigenous people rights, and opposition by ethnic revolution groups to any dam projects in their controlled areas lacking community consent.

KESAN strengthened civil society efforts to protect the river. In collaboration with Karen River Watch and the Save Salween Network, planning meetings with 27 participants assessed conservation efforts, identified challenges, and set strategic goals, including youth engagement. To support advocacy, we produced a campaigners' handbook and invited a legal expert to provide analysis and recommendations for stronger legal strategies.

## Youth Leadership in Water and Environmental Governance

Youth engagement in environmental governance grew through a series of leadership and learning initiatives. More than 140 youth joined an exchange program with the Save the Salween Network, building research skills to amplify ethnic youth voices in water governance. 51 youth leaders completed a three-month leadership program led by the Karen Youth Organization, gaining valuable knowledge in governance to support future community development.

Across 13 schools, 120 students, youth, and educators explored the role of leadership in forest and natural resource governance. Additionally, 80 students and civil society members from seven districts participated in **exchange trips** to Natok Pacharoen National Park, where they learned about Indigenous conservation practices and advocacy tools for environmental justice.



# Protecting Wildlife and Biodiversity

## Community-Based Participatory Forest Protection

In 2024, community-led conservation efforts in the Salween Peace Park were strengthened through a series of participatory forest patrols, training, and community consultations and awareness initiatives. 7 community-based patrols were conducted over two months across four community-protected areas, enhancing local monitoring and stewardship. In Wai Boo Hta, Butho Township, 6 forest rangers received training for using the SMART app, a spatial monitoring and reporting tool, to improve their skills in mapping patrol routes, collecting and analyzing data, and documenting protected areas.

With support from the Mutraw KFD and KESAN, communities successfully demarcated the P'Ngwe Pwa Community-Based Wildlife Protected Area. Camera trap surveys were carried out in both P'Ngwe Pwa and Lay Ghaw Pwa, followed by consultations with 77 villagers and local leaders to review the findings and raise awareness on wildlife protection and forest regulations. Overall, more than 340 villagers participated in conservation initiatives, contributing to reforestation efforts and deepening their understanding of sustainable forest management.



## Women's Research Group

As primary caretakers of their territories, Indigenous Karen women hold rich ecological knowledge rooted in deep relationships with the land. In the northern Salween Peace Park, the Women's Research Group (WRG) continues to lead community-based research.

In 2024, WRG expanded their ethnobotanical work and conducted fish research along the Yuzalin River. With support from KESAN, they've strengthened research skills and helped deepen local understanding of biodiversity and environmental threats such as fire, invasive species, and land encroachment. WRG also convened 16 community forests to develop collective action plans, share findings, and strengthen enforcement. Their efforts bridge conservation and culture—through initiatives like the annual multi-faith tree ordination ceremony and an illustrated book produced with KESAN to document their journey and share Indigenous eco-cultural knowledge.



# Revitalising Indigenous Territories

## Indigenous Conserved Territories (ICT) Overview

KESAN's ICT Program covers 3 areas in Kawthoolei which centre local democratic governance, with peace, ecological protection, and cultural survival as key tenants. These areas offer an alternative to top-down militarised development, and offer a model for a future Burma with democratic decentralised governance.

274

ICT residents gained capacities in natural resource governance through trainings

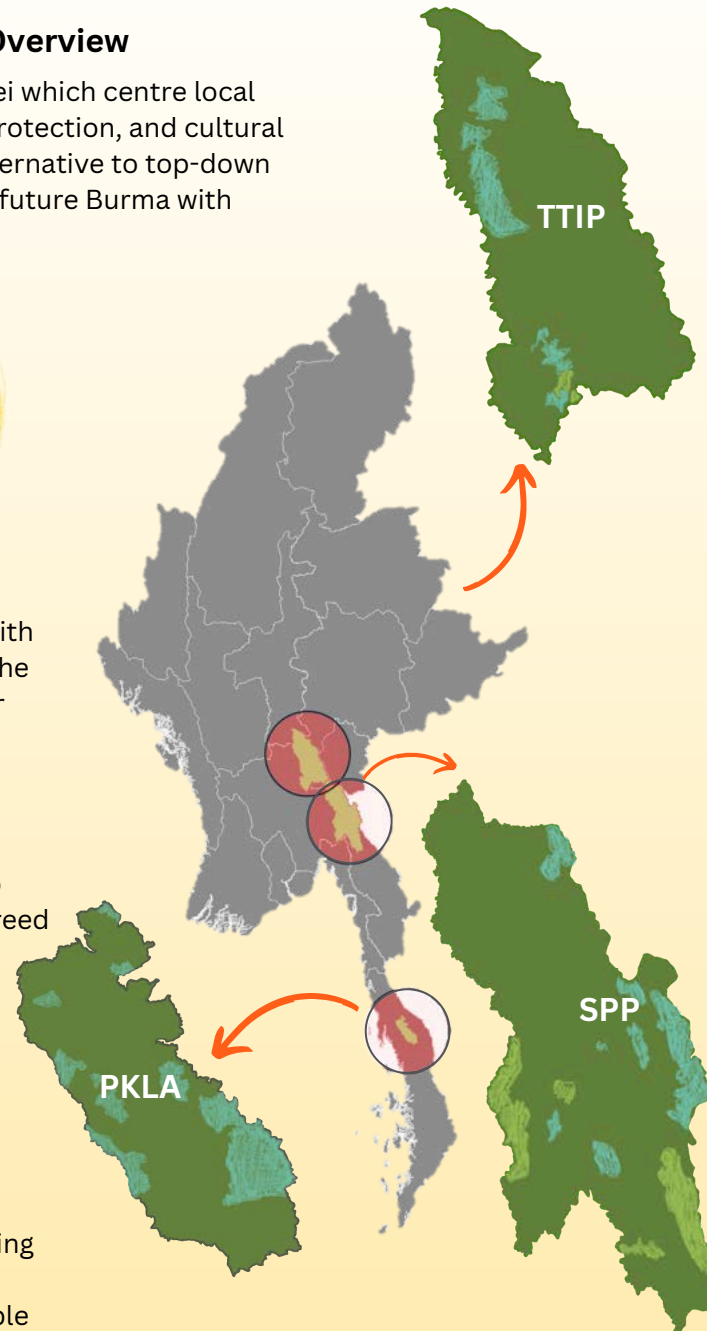
### Paw Klo Landscape Area (PKLA)

Paw Klo residents significantly moved forward with laying the groundwork for the official launch of the Paw Klo Landscape Area (PKLA), reaffirming their collective endeavour for practising self-determination.

Following consultation meetings, Paw Klo Landscape Protection Committee was formed to lead the implementation and coordination of agreed plans on PKLA development with environmental and cultural activities.

PKLA Charter has been further developed, incorporating community feedback.

Discussions around PKLA integration in Khersherdoh Conservation Area have continued during a coordination meeting, focused on creating a cohesive, sustainable community and natural resource governance, with PKLA playing a valuable role.



### Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park (TTIP)

Following the SPP model, years of consultations, and TTIP Charter development, the TTIP was officially launched. The event was attended by more than 1,500 people, with its culturally and ethnically diverse population, and the KNU central administration giving out a letter of official recognition of Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park as a Karen Indigenous Conserved Territory. 5 Kaws were demarcated to attain territorial rights of the people.

“ Born in this country known as Burma, we the Indigenous people have never had our rights ... Our lands are being labeled as vacant/fallow lands which can be given to companies at any time in the name of development ... we must find a way to assert our own rights. ”

**P'doh Saw Eh Wah**, a chairperson of **TTIP** Steering Committee and secretary of **Taw Oo** District

### Salween Peace Park (SPP)

The Salween Peace Park continued to strengthen its strategic goal of empowering its residents to govern their ancestral lands and protect nature and local livelihoods, offering an alternative to top-down governance models.

The newly elected SPP Governing Committee members developed an action plan for encouraging and enforcing sustainable hunting, illegal land selling cases and management strategies for people residing in the Kheshorter community forest.

To secure tenure rights for Indigenous people's and rural communities' customary lands, 6 Kaw outer boundary demarcations and land use zoning were carried out in the SPP, protecting 500 people across 19,786 acres.



# Food Sovereignty and Livelihoods

## Rice Banks

Karen people in Mutraw district are reclaiming control over their food systems by expanding the community rice bank system. Launched 5 years ago, the rice banks now support 1,647 households with accessible, fairly distributed staple food. Locally appointed rice bank committees manage the banks, meeting regularly and joining practical workshops. At the Annual Rice Bank Forum, farmers and committee members promoted seed saving and sharing practices.

12,417

villagers have their food security strengthened by being able to access local rice banks

## Women Empowerment

48 Karen women were empowered to try their hand at entrepreneurship by utilising the starter grants distributed. They began producing durian paste and reselling goats and pigs to fellow community members, thereby expanding livelihood opportunities. Besides women, their family members and the whole community also benefited, as each woman-led household that resold her pigs or durians, contributed 10% to the community fund to support individuals in times of crisis.



## Practising Agroecology

Karen upland and lowland farmers continue to adopt agroecological practices that improve yields, preserves Indigenous seeds, and enrich diets with home-grown vegetables. 332 families began using new tools that increased cultivation productivity and repaired their irrigation canals for reliable watering. Many Karen farmers also established locally-run organic gardens to grow food without the use of chemicals.

## Livestock Management

Several communities in SPP improved their skills in sustainable livestock management. 275 farmers received training and several households received livestock, including buffaloes, cows goats, pigs, and chickens. In a pilot area, a designated pigpen was build to support safe, disease-preventive animal raising. Veterinary training was also provided to residents in Mutraw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts.



## Skill Development

At community learning hubs under the supervision of the Kawthoolei Agricultural Department, motivated farmers gathered and received training in biochar production and natural farming to reduce reliance on harmful chemicals and further boost their harvests, while also preparing 200 litres of organic compost liquid. To support income diversification and decrease household expenses, villagers learned about soap making and packaging. A total of 149 community members participated in these vocational trainings, acquiring practical skills to support their families and enhance overall economic security.



# Community and Climate Resilience



## Raising Climate Awareness

Over 130 young women leaders, civil society members, students, and KNU representatives in the Salween Peace Park and Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park engaged in awareness raising sessions and strengthened their climate literacy and explored together community-led solutions to the climate crisis.



## Climate change manual

Karen communities were empowered to get deeper understanding of climate impacts and responses in a systematic way. Covering topics from ecological footprints to climate resilience—alongside a case study on the Salween Peace Park—the manual includes participatory exercises across five chapters. 2,000 copies were distributed to communities and schools along the Thailand-Burma border and in Kawthoolei.



## World Environment Day

World Environment Day was celebrated across three locations in the SPP, bringing together nearly 600 people—including youth, community leaders, Indigenous elders, and KNU representatives. The event inspired reflection and action, especially among younger generations, highlighting the importance of restoring the environment to protect vital ecosystems and support sustainable, community-driven development.



## Waste management systems

In 2024, 13 communities within the TTIP came together to tackle local water and waste issues. Teachers, students, parents, and community members launched new waste management committees and took part in educational events at Hto Lwe Wah High School and nearby villages.

Over 230 people, 140 of them women, joined these efforts, including students, teachers, health workers, and members of the Karen Women's Organization. To support long-term impact, KESAN distributed waste management toolkits, educational materials, and segregation bins, helping communities build the infrastructure needed for cleaner, healthier environments.

“If we are committed to improving our environmental health and well-being, changing our mindsets will be fundamental, which will consequently bring positive and beneficial outcomes for us and the future generations”

Saw Poe Lah Doh, Indigenous elder





## Humanitarian Support

In August and September, heavy rain caused canal and river levels to surge, leading to flash flooding and landslides, especially in Mutraw district. The flooding destroyed rice paddies, damaged homes, and killed animals. Washed-out roads isolated communities from markets, raising prices of essential goods.

After holding community consultations, together with the cluster and rice bank committee leaders, KESAN distributed small grants. This support helped 1,836 farmers from 14 villages receive vital assistance, enabling them to purchase rice tins to protect those who had lost their paddy fields and couldn't replant before the harvest. Households replanting their paddies could buy rice seeds for their upcoming harvest.

KESAN was involved in an emergency response for Waw Lay Khee, Thoo Mwe Khee and Oo Hu Hta communities, distributing food and hygiene items, including 10 kg bags of rice, 1 liter of cooking oil, 2 packs of salt, and toothpaste/ toothbrushes to provide relief for 316 displaced people struggling to prevent food shortages and especially meet hygiene needs for children. In Doo Tha Htoo district, 248 households from 7 villages were supported with rice to ensure they had enough food to withstand shocks from weather events.



**802**

households received small grants and essential supplies to help prevent hunger and repair their homes

**5,640**

kilograms of rice have been distributed to communities in need

**17**

villages were supported in recovering from floods





# Raising Community Voices

## International advocacy

Throughout the year, we advocated for Indigenous rights and gender justice in key regional and global forums. At CBD COP16, we pushed for gender-responsive action and support for conflict-affected communities. We joined the 8th US-Mekong Partnership policy dialogue, and a regional energy strategy meeting in the Philippines. We also contributed to the 15th AWID Forum, UNRBHR Forum, International Festival for Peoples' Rights and Struggles, and international human rights reporting processes.

70%

of community beneficiaries listen to the radio daily

## Community Radio

5 community radio stations run by local volunteers in Mutraw and Taw Oo Districts provide vital information access. KESAN supported the production of 30 radio programs touching on IDP news, community-led resource management and Indigenous rights. **130 radio receivers were distributed**, safeguarding the right to information for remote communities.

## Capacity Building

KESAN's media team held 5 hands-on trainings to build storytelling and media skills among Karen youth, SPP and local CBOs. These sessions covered journalism, editing, and radio maintenance, supporting community-led media and challenging state-controlled narratives. Young women led in producing gender-responsive content and amplifying women's rights.

## Thulei Kawwei

2 issues of Thulei Kawwei environmental magazine were produced, with 7,000 copies distributed across all districts of Kawthoolei, including IDP and refugee camps. These issues focus on sustaining bio-cultural heritage through documenting biodiversity.

## Videos

We produced 24 short videos and documentaries, on topics including biodiversity, fish conservation, community radio, catastrophic flood impacts, and Indigenous Conserved Territories (namely the Salween Peace Park and Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park). An interview series with young Karen professionals highlighted their contributions. Shared on KESAN's social media, the videos reached over 100,000 viewers.





## Preserving Culture and Knowledge

Preserving Indigenous Karen culture and knowledge is especially important now as communities face growing threats from conflict, environmental degradation, and cultural erosion. Their deep understanding of the land, passed down through generations, offers vital solutions for sustainable resource management and climate resilience. Safeguarding this knowledge not only protects Karen identity and self-determination but also contributes to broader efforts for ecological justice and Indigenous rights.

### Research on cultural and sacred sites

KESAN supported local researchers who have led sacred historical and cultural site research and documentation in 14 Salween Peace Park areas. Before the data collection, there was a two-day community-based participatory research training workshop about Indigenous and Western archaeology research methods, ethics and best practices. In the coming year, research findings will serve as a tool for strengthening community natural resource governance, preservation of cultural norms and wisdom and educational sources for younger generations at SPP schools. The findings will also be incorporated into the SPP cultural curriculum.

We have also been working with the Karen Education and Culture Department to introduce the curriculum in the SPP schools. By providing cultural curriculum training to local educators, 42 school teachers and educational staff and 28 schools were able to introduce thematic classes on Karen cultural traditions and taboos, including developing assessment materials for checking the obtained knowledge.

### International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Thanks to the convening of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, KESAN supported Indigenous communities' efforts to safeguard the sustainability of planetary ecosystems for humanity's well-being and provided an opportunity to reaffirm Peoples' collective commitment to achieve self-determination rights over Karen ancestral lands, culture, and biodiverse natural resources, as well as to strengthen self-governance systems. This massive event took place in four locations of the Salween Peace Park. 911 people, more than half of whom were women, engaged in intergenerational dialogues and knowledge-sharing sessions about Indigenous rights, and the biocultural knowledge transfer took place.

### Herbal medicine centre

To preserve Indigenous knowledge on medicinal herbs and trees, KESAN supported the establishment of a herbal medicine centre near Ei Thu Hta IDP camp. Now operational, the centre provides a space for local herbalists to conduct trainings, share remedies, and care for medicinal plants. Managed by a volunteer committee, it strengthens traditional healing practices and ensures accessible, community-based health solutions.







**KESAN**

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