

Impact Review 2023 – 2025

Karen Environmental and Social Action Network





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Acronyms

CBLI	Community-Based Livelihood Initiatives
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ICT	Indigenous Conserved Territory
KAD	Kawthoolei Agriculture Department
KCLC	Kawthoolei Central Land Committee
KECD	Kawthoolei Education and Culture Department
KEEP	Karen Environmental Education Program
KERBWA	Kawthoolei Ecosystem Resilience and Biodiversity Watch Application
KFD	Kawthoolei Forestry Department
KLFD	Kawthoolei Livestock and Fishery Department
KNU	Karen National Union
KPSN	Karen Peace Support Network
KRW	Karen Rivers Watch
KWO	Karen Women’s Organisation
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Product
NUG	National Unity Government
PIST	Paw Klo Indigenous Stewardship Territory
SAC	State Administration Council
SPP	Salween Peace Park
SSN	Save Salween Network
TCI	Thanbyah College and Institutes
TTIP	Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park

Changes in Context

Four years ago, we developed our 2023–2025 Strategic Plan in a context already profoundly shaped by crisis. It had been just over a year since the February 1st military coup, during which the junta illegally seized power, triggering widespread violence, political instability, and systemic human rights violations across Myanmar. While Karen communities have endured more than seventy years of armed struggle marked by military violence, land dispossession, forced displacement, and persistent attempts at cultural erasure, the post-coup period introduced new layers of urgency, risk, and complexity. 2025 marked four years since the 2021 military coup, and 76 years since the beginning of the Karen revolution. For communities across Kawthoolei, these are not distant anniversaries. They are part of daily life shaped by conflict, uncertainty, and continued struggle.

Over the past three years, violence has escalated. Since the SAC's attempted coup in 2021, allied armed resistance groups have expanded territorial control across Kawthoolei, seizing up to 193 Burma Army bases by the end of 2025. As their ground presence has waned, the Burma Army has relied more heavily on attacks from the air, heavily bombing civilian areas in particular.

According to Karen Human Rights Group, there were at least 124 airstrikes in Karen State in 2025, resulting in 125 civilian casualties. These figures can barely begin to reflect the reality on the ground. Our friends, families, and communities have been forced to flee, homes have been destroyed, and most of the communities where we work are living with constant fear.

On March 28th 2025, a powerful earthquake struck near Mandalay and affected much of central Myanmar. Many people were trapped under collapsed buildings, and communities immediately stepped in to help each other using whatever resources they had. In Kawthoolei, Taw Oo District was impacted, with homes damaged and families losing shelter. Even in the aftermath of the earthquake, airstrikes continued, including in affected areas, deepening the crisis for those already struggling to recover. The past three years has also seen unprecedented extreme weather due to climate change - with flooding and extreme heat and shifts in seasons becoming more prevalent and impacting people's livelihoods more, including landslides, crop failures, and an increase in pest problems.

For many decades, local organizations and communities have been the first to respond in times of crisis. Whether facing conflict or natural disaster, they have supported one another with limited resources and strong networks of care. This continues today, even as the challenges grow more severe and funding becomes more uncertain.

Over the past three years, support for Myanmar from major international donors has declined, as the context has become more complex and difficult to operate in, limiting CSOs ability to plan over the long term and increasing pressure on already limited resources.

We, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), have been working with Karen communities and other stakeholders across Kawthoolei, including the *de facto* government Karen National Union, on projects aligned with the overall vision and strategic objectives set in 2022 for a 3-year period.



Our Approach

KESAN's theory of change emphasizes sustainable, community-led development through eight programs designed to safeguard Karen livelihoods by supporting communities to secure their rights, strengthen assets, and enhance their capacity to respond to challenges to food and livelihood security.

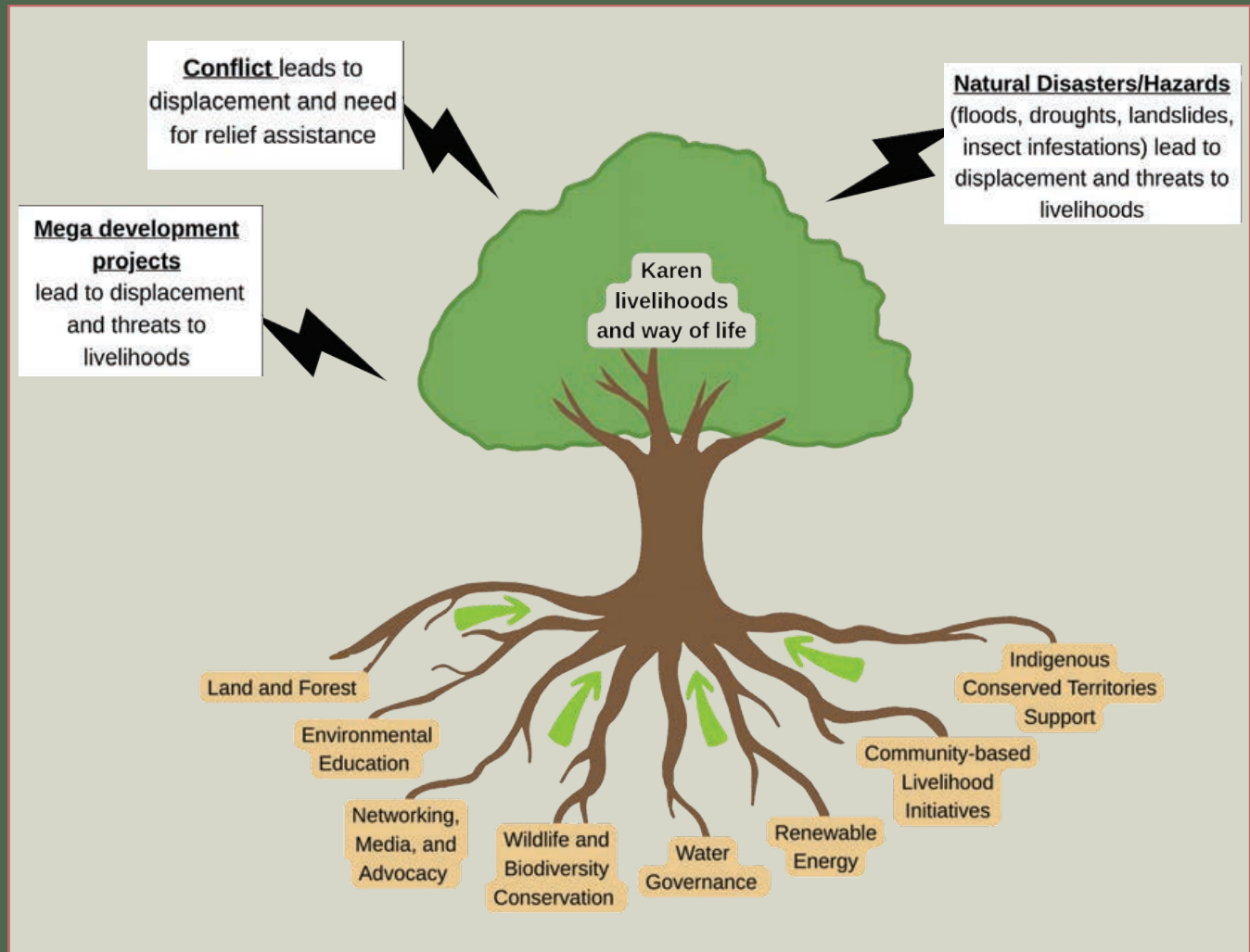
SO1: Access to rights - Utilize a rights-based approach to advocate for implementation of just laws, to ensure community members can attain their rights.

SO2: Natural resource protection - Integrate local communities' traditional methods of conservation with other innovative approaches to secure natural resources for future generations.

SO3: Self-reliance and Food Sovereignty - Empower communities through community-generated/managed projects that provide them with sustainable and livelihoods and locally-based sources of nourishment.

SO4: Mitigation of threats - Address current and potential future hazards, including Climate Change impacts at local levels (strengthening community resiliency) and through policy advocacy with relevant stakeholders.

SO5: Responding to communities' humanitarian needs - Coordinate with relevant actors so that displaced and threatened communities are provided necessary foods and materials.



Strengthening Access to Rights and Indigenous Self-Determination

Governance and Kawthoolei policies

Over three years, we worked with Kawthoolei departments to support the development, review, and implementation of Kawthoolei agriculture and land policies by facilitating consultations, raising awareness, and bringing community and stakeholder perspectives into policy processes. This work helps ground policies in lived realities, while enhancing community-led land governance and attaining Indigenous territorial rights. It has also contributed to the Kawthoolei Constitution and wider national Indigenous policy discussions.

We have also sustained focus on building practical capacity through trainings and workshops, enabling KNU staff and stakeholders to engage more effectively in policy drafting, communication, and implementation, while navigating ongoing land and agriculture challenges. The Indigenous Conserved Territory program has further reinforced land tenure security and expanded meaningful community participation in governance, while deepening stakeholder understanding of Indigenous systems and authority.



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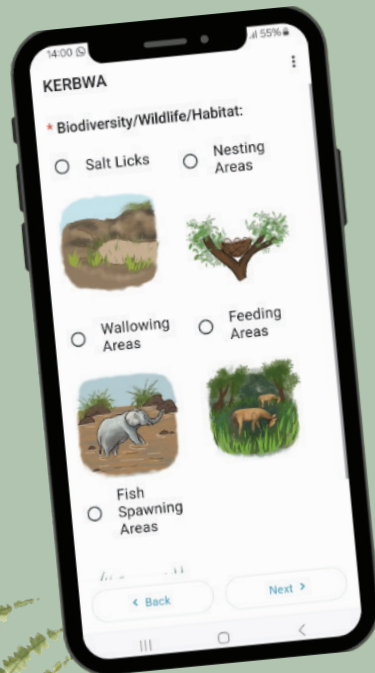
Local government staff developed competency in policy development and dialogue with local communities



Land tenure rights and Indigenous data sovereignty

Since 2016, Karen communities have been mapping, demarcating and documenting their lands to strengthen their own systems of governance and tenure. With support from KESAN, communities have been trained to use secure digital platforms to manage land and forest information. Specifically, trained community representatives use GPS tools to create digital land-use and tenure maps that document family plots, Kaw territories and forest classifications.

By keeping and updating their own land records, communities are able to assert and defend their territories, reduce the risk of land grabbing, and retain authority over how their land and resources are governed. These maps and records are used by the Kawthoolei Central Land Committee (KCLC) to manage land use, monitor changes and support customary land governance processes. Ongoing GIS and data management trainings are supporting governance institutions like the KCLC to maintain and expand these systems over time, and help safeguard ancestral land claims, manage territorial boundaries, and protect sensitive land information in conflict-affected areas.



In 2025, Karen communities, with support from KESAN, launched the Kawthoolei Ecosystem Resilience and Biodiversity Watch Application (KERBWA), a community-based forest monitoring platform built from the ground up through a citizen science process. Indigenous Karen representatives worked together to design the app based on their local knowledge, developing decision-making tools and monitoring systems that reflect how they understand and manage their forests.

The app is designed to work offline, allowing rangers to continue monitoring in remote forest areas without connectivity. Karen rangers use the app to record illegal activities such as hunting, mining, and logging, alongside biodiversity data across protected and reserve forests, wildlife sanctuaries, and community forests. The KERBWA dashboard allows communities to securely store and manage their data, use it to strengthen enforcement, and guide their own decisions on forest protection. By keeping environmental data in community hands, Karen rangers and local leaders are able to monitor, respond to threats, and manage their territories on their own terms.



Indigenous Conserved Territories

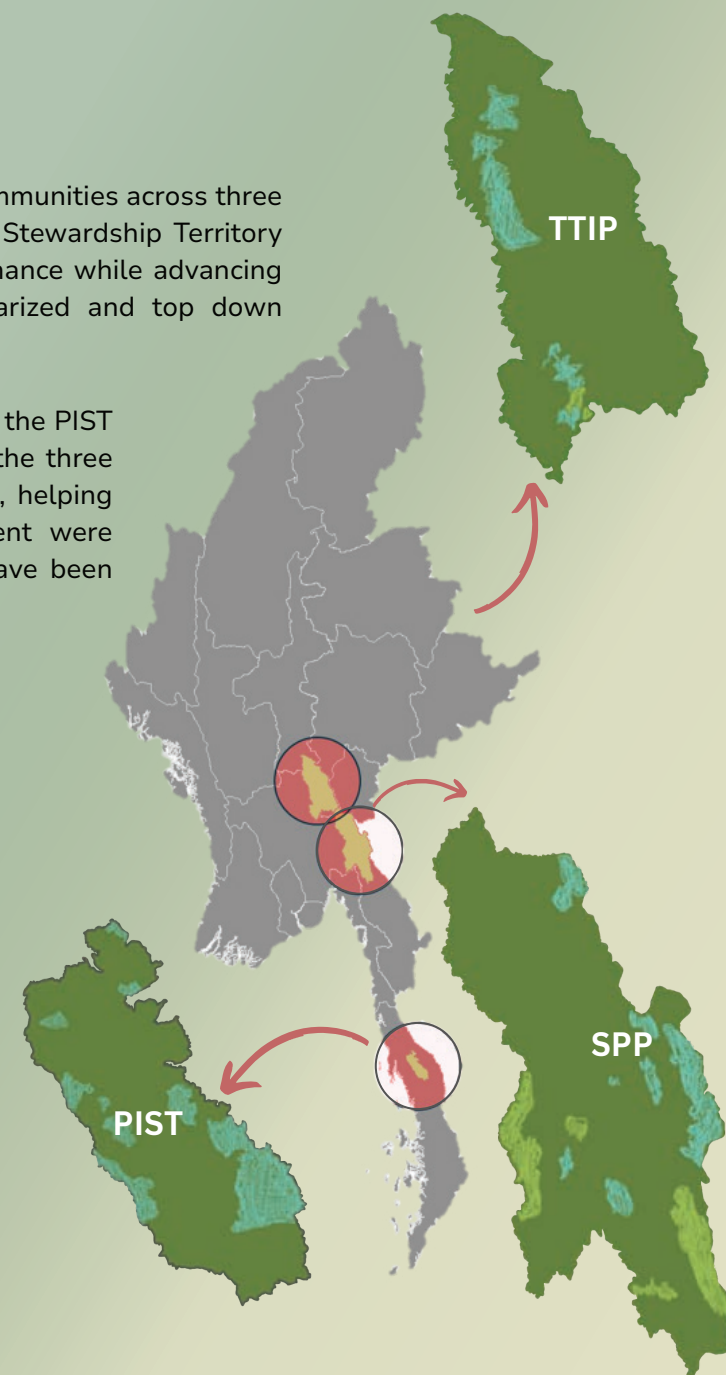
Since 2018, KESAN's Indigenous Conserved Territories (ICT) Program has supported Indigenous and local communities across three territories in Kawthoolei: Salween Peace Park (SPP), Thawthi Oo Indigenous Park (TTIP), and the Pawklo Stewardship Territory (PIST). These territories center Indigenous self-determination and strengthen locally-led democratic governance while advancing peacebuilding, ecological protection, and cultural survival. Together they offer an alternative to militarized and top down development approaches, encompassing almost 1,4 million hectares, with 242,837 residents.

Over the past three years, the Program has expanded significantly: the TTIP was officially launched in 2024; the PIST is preparing for its launch in 2026; and the SPP continues to strengthen its governance systems. Across the three territories, ICT residents have demarcated and titled a total of 7,796 family plots and revitalized 57 Kaw, helping secure community-managed lands. Guidelines for *Kaw* revitalization and community forest management were finalized to strengthen long term land and forest governance. In total, 85,973 hectares of land tenure have been protected.

The SPP has strengthened land security and increased community participation in Indigenous-led governance. Six SPP Annual Assembly sessions have been held since the establishment of the SPP, bringing together SPP residents, KNU administrators and CSOs representatives. By December 2025, the SPP marked three important milestones: holding its second-ever SPP Governing Assembly Election; announcing an official declaration committing the KNU to "upholding and supporting the Salween Peace Park as a durable framework for peacebuilding, Indigenous self-determination, and ecological stewardship in Kawthoolei"; and the official listing of the SPP in the United Nations Environment Program's Global ICCA Registry.

Meanwhile, the TTIP organized TTIP Charter consultation events throughout 2023 and 2024 as part of an inclusive democratic process towards its establishment. After 92% of TTIP's residents endorsed the TTIP Charter and KNU Central granted official recognition of the TTIP, the TTIP was officially launched in December 2024, with 1,020 community members attending the ceremony.

Finally, in the Paw Klo River Basin ecosystems in the Mergui-Tavoy District of Kawthoolei, local residents agreed to form a Paw Klo governing body to promote locally-driven governance and combat growing threats from deforestation and forest resource depletion. Starting in 2018, local stakeholders gathered for numerous consultations, moved forward with land zoning, and finalised the draft PIST Charter, which included their aspirations for the sustainable and inclusive development of the territory. The PIST is to be launched in April 2026.





Protection of rights through cultural preservation

Karen communities protect their environment by keeping their culture strong. When cultural practices weaken, the knowledge, values and systems that guide how land, forests and water are cared for are also put at risk – making it harder for communities to care for and defend their territories. Across Kawthoolei, the Indigenous Karen are actively passing on this knowledge to younger generations. Working with the KECD, Karen educators developed and introduced a cultural curriculum across 28 schools, alongside designing trainings for teachers. Through this, students learn about Karen history, values and traditional knowledge, preparing them to take on roles in community governance and stewardship for their lands.

Communities have actively revitalised their *Hta* traditions, rich poetic forms that carry traditional ecological knowledge, through collaborative and intergenerational processes. Thanks to this extensive preparatory effort, including a consultative workshop with Indigenous Karen elders, local communities have protected biocultural knowledge and recorded many *Hta*. These poems reflect Karen perspectives on cosmology, rotational farming practices, seasonal livelihoods, sacred sites, and traditional governance.





In 2023, Karen communities in the SPP had an opportunity to revitalize their seasonal traditional ceremonies, celebrating *Buthaw Kho* ceremony to mark the beginning of new rice crop for consumption for the next season. Alongside this, the community held a wrist-tying ceremony, also an integral part of Indigenous Karen people's spiritual tradition. Both events encompassed 322 community members, including 186 women, who attended and participated in key activities of the ceremonies, contributing to the SPP's strategic goal of cultural revitalisation and survival.

Karen Indigenous elders provided their valuable input to produce research on historical and sacred sites, published as "The Living Cultural Landscape: Sacred and Historical Lands in the Salween Peace Park". Through Participatory Action Research, this documented the deep cultural and spiritual relationships Karen communities maintain with their lands. We also released "Ontologies of Indigenous Karen people: A Case Study in Kawthayghu, Salween Peace Park, Kawthoolei", which explores Indigenous Karen worldviews in relation to the environment, including spiritual beliefs, cultural traditions, and customary approaches to wildlife protection.

To further strengthen intergenerational knowledge exchange, KESAN organized three Intergenerational Dialogue Forums. These gatherings brought together elders and youth from the Salween Peace Park and the broader territories of life, creating space to share traditional ecological knowledge and inspire younger generations to carry forward Karen cultural and environmental stewardship.

Community Water Rights

For Karen communities, waterways hold cultural and spiritual significance as well as being integral sources of food and livelihoods. Extractive industries, proposed megadams, and pollution have all threatened aquatic ecosystems and community water rights. KESAN has supported community awareness of holistic watershed management, alongside monitoring and research on activities such as riverine gravel extraction in Dooطلا.

From 2023 to 2025, KESAN acted as a bridge between communities and the Kawthoolei Livestock and Fishery Department, ensuring that local needs informed policy and decision-making. Through consultations, trainings, and capacity-building efforts, both community members and officials improved their understanding of community water rights, sustainable water management, waste impacts, and ecosystem protection. As a result, inclusive policies and action plans have been developed that integrate community feedback, strengthen transparency and coordination, and support long-term, equitable, and sustainable water governance.



On World Water Day 2025, a **Community Forum** themed “**Where Water Flows, Life Grows**” was held in Doo Tha Htu District, bringing together more than 150 community members, youth, local leaders, and KNU department officials from nine villages. The Forum created space for communities to speak directly about water governance, strengthen local stewardship, and improve coordination with KNU departments.

Through collective reflection, participants assessed their water sources and emphasized their importance beyond basic needs—particularly for displaced communities during conflict. Community members, officials, including some members of our team, also reviewed the status of A Kyu Lake and ongoing community-led conservation efforts developed with the Doo Tha Htu District Kawthoolei Forestry Department. They called for re-verification of boundaries, stronger leadership from the conservation committee, and continued capacity building through rule review, awareness raising, and participatory learning.



Natural Resource Protection

Stewardship of lands and forests

In Kawthoolei, protecting land and forests is inseparable from safeguarding community rights, livelihoods, and resilience. Building on strengthened customary governance systems and improved land management tools, Karen communities continue to lead efforts to secure their territories and steward natural resources despite ongoing conflict. Between 2023 and 2025, KESAN supported large-scale land registration and demarcation across Indigenous communities in Kawthoolei. More than 8,400 family plots have been secured in the three-year period, protecting over 16,187 hectares of land.

Alongside household land registration, communities also demarcated and strengthened governance over more than 65,508 hectares of *Kaw* territories, in addition to substantial areas of community forests, wildlife sanctuaries, and watershed protection zones. These landscapes sustain not only biodiversity and ecosystem services, but also vital traditional knowledge systems and community health practices. For example, in 2025, TTIP conducted a survey with respected local herbalists in Taw Oo District documenting traditional medicinal plant knowledge used to treat approximately 80 common illnesses, including malaria, fevers, skin diseases, muscle injuries, burns, and gastrointestinal conditions, demonstrating the continued importance of protected forest landscapes for Indigenous healthcare and knowledge systems.

Together, these achievements demonstrate the resilience and leadership of Karen communities in securing land rights, protecting forests, sustaining traditional knowledge, and strengthening locally governed conservation systems in Kawthoolei. Through locally led conservation work, local people learned about their forest and were able to responsibly harvest NTFPs such as honey and bamboo supporting their families without depleting the forest.



**16,000+ hectares of
family land secured
between 2023-2025**

**8,409 family plots
registered within
2023-2025**





Protecting wildlife and biodiversity

Kawthoolei is situated in a global biodiversity hotspot, home to several endangered and at risk species. Over the past three years, KESAN has worked to strengthen the deep relationship between Indigenous Karen communities and the natural world, while supporting livelihoods that depend on local ecosystems. For Karen people, “wellbeing” or *Tar Oh Mu So Per* of both human beings and more-than-human beings, such as the spirits of the land, forests, and waters, extends beyond present and future generations to include the world of the afterlife.

Karen women researchers are leading participatory biodiversity research rooted in Indigenous knowledge. With KESAN’s support, the Women’s Research Group team documented how forests, rivers and wildlife sustain Karen culture, health, spirituality and livelihoods. Their work has published research on mushrooms and is expanding on ethnobotany, amphibians, and fish. Between 2024 and 2025, the Women’s Research Group carried out a seasonal ethnobotanical survey in Kheshorter Community Forest and began documenting fish richness, abundance, and environmental conditions in the upper Bwe Lo Klo River. This work identified endangered species that communities rely on for food, medicine, and ceremonies, and informed a community-led strategy to protect them.

Across these three years, Karen rangers carried out 23 total community-led forest patrols in reserve forests, community forests, wildlife sanctuaries, and community-based wildlife protected areas across Kawthoolei, in collaboration with the KFD. Through these patrols, they recorded illegal activities and wildlife movements, and used this information to guide their own forest protection and management strategies. They also installed 32 camera traps across Kawthoolei’s protected areas to document a variety of Endangered and Critically Endangered species such as the Sunda pangolin, endangered tigers, Asian elephants, elongated tortoises, Asiatic black bear, and one of the region’s remaining populations of Indochinese leopards – strengthening community efforts to protect these species and their habitats.

Community rangers play a crucial role in how Karen communities govern their forests and protect their territories across Kawthoolei. Over the last three years, Karen communities have trained and mobilised rangers to care for six wildlife sanctuaries and have established two wildlife sanctuaries — P’Nwe Pwa and Lay Ghwa Pwa — building on traditional stewardship practices. These KESAN-supported efforts are strengthening community forest protection and expanding Indigenous ways of conservation on the ground.



Caring for Waterways

Watershed protection is a cross-cutting priority in much of KESAN's work. For many Karen communities, watershed areas are traditionally considered sacred, with customary taboos and rules regulating activities such as tree cutting, underscoring the importance of protecting water sources and ecosystems for long-term climate resilience and maintaining good relations with the spiritual guardians of watersheds.

Communities have engaged in local research, tree planting, and other initiatives to protect and restore watershed areas. With KESAN's support, they also continue to advocate for a free-flowing Salween River and strengthen their own systems of water governance. In Kawthoolei, healthy watersheds directly influence fish abundance, which is vital for the health, food security, and livelihoods of Karen communities. By strengthening collaboration between local communities, the KNU, and the KLFD, we helped improve local watershed and biodiversity management. International awareness of the Salween River's importance to Karen communities has also helped raise the river's profile amongst wider audiences.

Communities and local administrators engaged in public consultations and participated in educational workshops to align local community needs with official watershed policies. Between 2023 and 2025, local people established 30 fish conservation zones (*Kwee Ta*), built 25 fish conservation huts, and participated in 11 fish conservation workshops to learn about the importance of fish conservation zones for sustaining resilient aquatic ecosystems. In 2025, the KLFD and communities in Doo Tha Htu and Dooطلا Districts organised World Fishery Day. More than 300 people gathered to promote community involvement and resource management, and to raise awareness of the ecocultural value of *Kwee Ta*. These efforts enhance fish conservation efforts by integrating traditional management practices with spiritual beliefs and modern conservation regulations to improve fish populations and water quality in the Salween River basin.

We who eat fish must take care of the fish.

One example of Indigenous Karen fish conservation is with a species known locally as *Nya Nah* (*Garra* spp.), which is endemic to the Bwe Lo Klo River flowing through the heart of the Salween Peace Park. Karen communities maintain a close and reciprocal relationship with this fish. *Nya Nah* is an important food source and also plays a role in traditional feasts and rituals, including the post-harvest ceremony that releases the rice spirit, embodied in the Asian Fairy Bluebird. Because *Nya Nah* spawn over pebbles in shallow water, they are sensitive to changes in water levels. Karen stewards actively maintain suitable spawning habitats by building small rock dams to stabilize the channels and placing tree branches above them to deter predators. This fish relies on this relationship for its successful spawning. This was also documented by the Indigenous Women's Research Group.



Uncle Htoo Say Wah about the fish conservation zone in his village:

"These fish give me great benefits. They keep the river healthy, which supplies water for my rice field. When these fish grow up, they make the pool deeper because of their tail movements.... If each village creates a fish conservation area, they'll spread along the river. Then we can share - sometimes another village will give us fish, and sometimes we will give them ours. This is the lifestyle that we want. If we take care of nature, nature will take care of us, and then we will be able to take care of our neighbours"



Environmental education and advocacy

Environmental education and awareness have been central to KESAN's work for 25 years. In Indigenous Karen communities, effective environmental education means integrating traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary conservation rules and governance systems.

In 2023, the Salween Peace Park Elder Advisory Committee together with KESAN documented and passed on Indigenous knowledge through an Indigenous Wildlife Handbook, recording cultural wildlife taboos and sustainable hunting practices that have guided Karen stewardship of wildlife for generations.

Karen youth participated in workshops on Indigenous environmental governance, where they learned from elders and community leaders about the reciprocal relationship between people and nature, and how Karen rituals, beliefs, and cultural practices help sustain biodiversity, reduce risk, and protect their territories.



44 reels

2,639,400 views

62 videos

From 2023–2025, we produced and shared interviews, and educational videos promoting biodiversity conservation, fish conservation practices, traditional ecological knowledge, and Indigenous conserved territories. Through field documentation and publications such as *Thulei Kawwei* Environmental Magazine, community voices have reached wider audiences, raising awareness of Karen-led conservation efforts while helping younger generations learn about cultural traditions, environmental stewardship, and their responsibilities to future generations.

Recognizing that long-term environmental protection depends on the next generation, KESAN began to support an Indigenous-led environmental stewardship curriculum in 2024 in collaboration with Thanbyah College and Institutes (TCI), Thoo Mweh Khee Migrant Learning Centre, and other Karen-led education institutions. Grounded in traditional ecological knowledge and the Karen principle of Aw K'taw ("use and take care"), the curriculum combines Indigenous knowledge systems with practical skills such as land mapping, biodiversity monitoring, water testing, and renewable energy. By 2025, the curriculum was completed and ready for piloting at TCI, marking an important step toward institutionalizing Indigenous-led environmental education at the post-secondary level. Building on this foundation, the initiative hopes to become a full Environmental Stewardship Certificate Program, alongside teacher training and locally adapted learning resources.



Self-Reliance and Food Sovereignty

Food systems

Karen communities have special relationships with their food systems, where, despite protracted conflict, displacement, and climate pressures, they rebuild and manage resilient systems rooted in Indigenous knowledge, collective stewardship, and local decision-making. KESAN has promoted decentralized and grassroots-led food governance, bringing the attention of the KNU authorities to the sustainability of such an approach and moving beyond food security towards the preservation of Indigenous biocultural knowledge and enhanced communal resilience.

Expansion of community rice banks - Managed by village committees, rice banks enable households to borrow rice during times of shortage and repay it after harvest, creating a sustainable and culturally rooted safety net. In contexts where markets and supply chains are often disrupted, these systems help ensure stable access to staple foods while reinforcing community-level governance. By 2025, rice banks across eight clusters in Mutraw District held more than 120,000 kilos of rice, up from 86,400 kilos in 2022. By the end of 2025, a total of 175 rice banks had been established across the District, resulting in a 72% surplus of rice in the banks since 2022.

Following severe flooding in late 2024 that destroyed many paddy fields, thanks to the rice banks, affected communities were able to help each other. Alongside, KESAN provided 277 families with rice production inputs and partnered with the KAD to distribute climate-resilient dry season rice varieties in high-risk villages. This intervention restored food access, enabled seed exchange between communities, and strengthened resilience against future climate disruptions.

Supporting upland farmers - in three years, agricultural tool support helped almost 2,500 Karen farmers in Mutraw District to foster their autonomy and strengthen local food production alongside support for the repair and improvement of irrigation systems. These improvements have helped farmers maintain production despite increasingly unpredictable weather conditions.

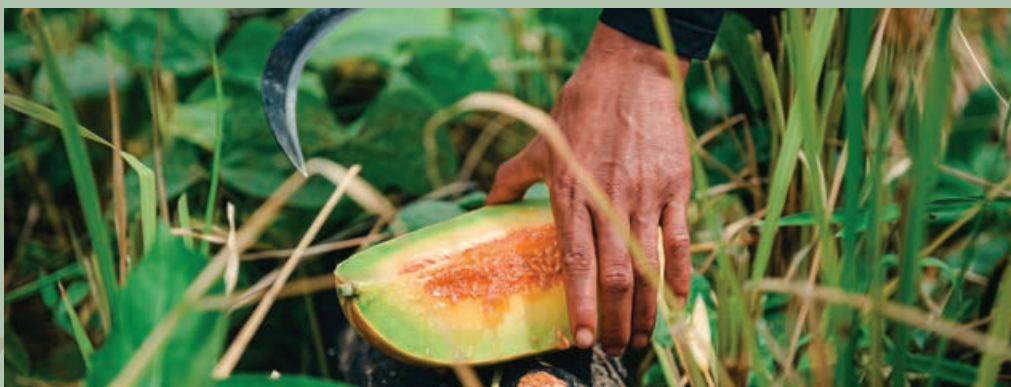


How do Rice Banks work?

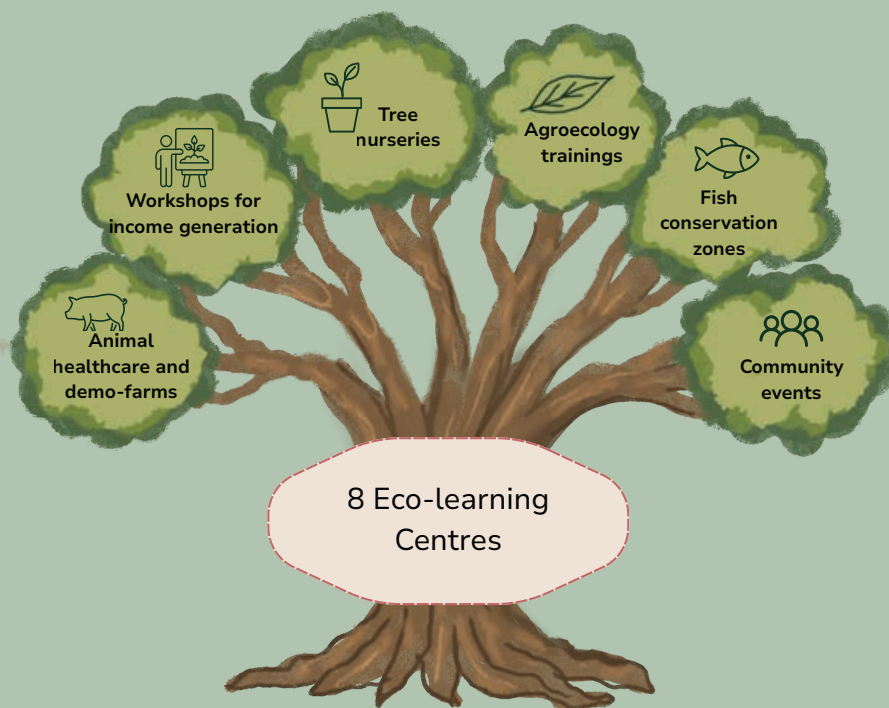
Rice banks support Karen food sovereignty and resilience against conflict and climate change. Rice is distributed first to rice bank families, then assessed for village-wide needs, and finally to the entire Cluster. Households can withdraw rice without money or collateral, repaying in rice or labor based on the principle of reciprocity, or *Ta Madoh Maka*.

Diversifying livelihoods through agroecology - At Kler Lwe Htu, Pu Dooplaya, and Hto Lwe Wah Junior Colleges, Karen National College and Kaw Moo Rah Junior College, students learn sustainable agriculture and ecological stewardship through three organic learning gardens where they cultivate vegetables and raise livestock, expanding opportunities for hands-on learning.

Communities have also strengthened household food production through locally managed gardens and small-scale agricultural initiatives. 73 families either started growing peanuts, established coffee and elephant yam gardens or organic gardens with various seedlings planted, strengthening local food systems and building greater self-reliance through agroecological practices.



Ecolearning centres in Mutraw and Taw Oo Districts serve as key knowledge hubs where farmers, community leaders, and youth gather to exchange skills and strengthen local agricultural systems.



Attaining seed sovereignty - through the Annual Seed Forums, 753 farmers were able to exchange seeds, share Indigenous farming knowledge, and enhance preservation of traditional crop varieties. In 2025, communities established Seed Watch Committees to monitor, protect, and restore endangered seed varieties. These committees help safeguard Indigenous crops, encourage the exchange and documentation of native seeds, and ensure that seed knowledge and heritage are passed on to future generations.

Together, these efforts are increasing seed diversity, expanding agroecological knowledge, and reinforcing local systems of governance that support food sovereignty and self-reliance across Karen territories.



Livelihood development and income opportunities

Resilient livelihoods in times of conflict, uncertainty, global economic fluctuations, and climate change require communities to strengthen their local economies and reduce dependence on external markets. Supporting diversified livelihoods helps households develop income sources beyond subsistence farming, giving people more options so they do not feel compelled to rely on options like hunting or monocrop cash production. This approach allows communities to maintain diverse agroecological and traditional farming systems while strengthening local economic resilience and mutual support networks. A gender-responsive approach also helps ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from livelihood initiatives.



Improving market access

Between 2023 and 2025, KESAN supported communities to repair and construct four roads and five bridges, improving transportation for 17,976 people and strengthening access between villages and local markets. Alongside infrastructure support, KESAN promoted community self-reliance by strengthening savings systems, small enterprises, and vocational skills. Through community funds and livelihood grants, 3,377 people gained opportunities to start or expand small-scale businesses, helping reduce dependence on external markets in conflict-affected areas.

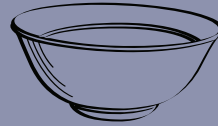
Animal husbandry

Through livestock grants, in 2023, more than 320 households received grants to purchase goats, buffalo, chicken, and piglets helping families



build long-term assets that support income generation and food security. Over the three-year period, more than 1,200 villagers participated in livestock and animal health trainings, delivered in partnership with the KAD and combining Indigenous and scientific knowledge on breeding, disease prevention, and animal care. Communities also piloted improved livestock management practices, including establishing a designated pig-raising area. Together, these initiatives strengthened local knowledge, improved livestock health, and supported more resilient community food systems and livelihoods.

Gender responsiveness, vocational trainings, and value-added production



Gender-responsive livelihood support is key to address the barriers many Karen women face due to conflict, displacement, and limited economic opportunities. In 2024, 41 women-led households received livelihood grants to support livestock raising and small businesses. Additional starter funds supported seven female entrepreneurs in the Swee Lo Traw women's group to expand durian processing enterprises, with 10% of profits reinvested into the group fund to strengthen collective economic support.

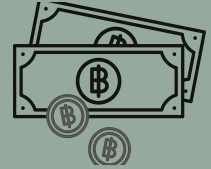
KESAN also supported 36 women-led businesses and a self-help group in Ei Htu Hta IDP camp through small loans, enabling women to generate income through local trade while improving food access within their communities.

Vocational training and value-added production have further expanded livelihood opportunities. Trainings included:

- Traditional wood-carving workshops
- Food processing training for women
- Financial literacy sessions, majority women participants.
- Soap production training
- Starter funds provided to ten women's groups supported income generation for 245 households, contributing to improved household economic stability.

Community savings and self-help funds

Community-managed funds enable members to borrow small amounts for starting businesses, purchasing agricultural inputs, or addressing emergencies, thereby enhancing local support and financial resilience.



Yer Mu Plaw cluster launched its savings in 2020 with a Rice Bank fund, later adding a cooperative fund for small enterprises. By 2025, the fund had grown to 1,044,375 Thai Baht, supporting new livelihoods and emergency responses.

In Swee Lo Traw, a cooperative fund was also created in 2020 to support small enterprises such as durian paste production, with contributions also from rice banks and seed saving funds. As of now, the total deposits amount to 620,720 Thai Baht.



Mitigation of Threats



Water and community-based renewable energy

Kawthoolei is interlaced with several large, free-flowing rivers that are central to Karen livelihoods, culture, and relationships with the natural world. Protecting these rivers is essential not only for biodiversity and food security, but also for maintaining Indigenous ways of life. Together with communities and partners, KESAN has worked to prevent large-scale dam development and promote community-led approaches to water governance and energy access.

From 2023–2025, KESAN strengthened partnerships with the Save the Salween Network and Karen Rivers Watch to advocate for a free-flowing Salween River and defend the rights of river-dependent communities. Joint efforts included strategic planning, coordinated campaigns, public events, and the production of advocacy materials highlighting the risks that projects such as the Hatgyi and proposed Dagwin dams pose to local people, fisheries, ecosystems, and cultural heritage.

Each year, communities mobilized around the International Day of Action for Rivers (March 14), raising awareness of the importance of protecting rivers and opposing harmful dam development. In 2023–2025, more than 2,700 people gathered near the proposed Hatgyi Dam site to call for Indigenous rights, community consent, and decentralized renewable energy alternatives.

Alongside this advocacy, KESAN supported climate policy initiatives within the Salween Peace Park and the KNU. These efforts contributed to the development of the Salween Peace Park Renewable Energy Action Plan and a broader KNU Climate Action Plan, providing community-centred alternatives for expanding energy access without undermining local livelihoods or ecosystems, while helping communities prepare for the impacts of climate change.

Building on years of community-based mini-hydro development, KESAN continued expanding renewable energy access between 2023 and 2025, including the installation of two additional mini-hydro systems. In 2025, KESAN formally launched its Renewable Energy Program and expanded support for solar energy, reaching nearly 1,000 people in two remote villages. More than 100 households, schools, and community facilities gained access to reliable, clean energy, reducing dependence on costly diesel and kerosene.

This transition has strengthened community self-reliance and energy sovereignty while improving access to education, information, and safer community life after dark. Across participating communities, 96% of households reported improvements in their daily lives, including lower energy costs and greater opportunities for learning and connectivity.





Climate Change Resilience

Ongoing attacks by the Burma Army, climate change, and top-down development projects continue to threaten Karen communities and the ecosystems they depend on. In response, communities are strengthening their understanding of environmental risks and taking action to protect their territories, with support from KESAN.

Between 2023 and 2025, 430 community members and youth from Mutraw, Taw Oo, and Doo Tha Htu districts participated in 11 climate change trainings, building knowledge of climate impacts and local resilience strategies. To support wider learning, 2,000 copies of a climate change training manual were distributed to communities and schools across Kawthoolei and along the Thailand–Burma border.

Communities have also taken steps to address growing waste management challenges. Between 2024 and 2025, 24 villages developed community waste management systems, while students and teachers in five schools participated in waste management trainings. Each year, communities also come together to mark World Environment Day. Across six locations, 1,310 villagers participated in environmental awareness and restoration activities, reinforcing local stewardship of land, water, and forests.



Information and Communications

To expand access to information and strengthen early warning systems in villages and IDP camps across Kawthoolei, KESAN has distributed radio receivers and established public address (PA) systems in remote communities where radio remains a primary source of communication.

In 2023, KESAN's Media Team expanded PA coverage to Ei Htu Hta IDP camp and Day Bu Noh village, helping provide alerts on military attacks, natural disasters, health information, and school updates.

Between 2023 and 2025, KESAN distributed 1,410 radio receivers, enabling communities to access critical security updates, environmental education, and advocacy messaging through community-run radio broadcasts. Main stations in Mutraw and Taw Oo, supported by relay stations, now provide broad coverage across both districts.



Responding to Humanitarian Needs

Displacement and Information Access

As has been ongoing for 77 years, Burma Army attacks on villagers have displaced millions across Kawthoolei and driven a consistent need for humanitarian support. Over the past two decades, climate change has added another layer to this challenge, increasing the number of extreme weather events and impacting the consistency of farm yields. We collaborate with Karen community based organisations working on humanitarian relief and recovery to ensure the delivery of funds and goods to areas in need.

In 2023, flash flooding and landslides in the Yer Mu Plaw cluster, Luthaw Township, Mutraw District impacted upwards of 200 households. In response, We helped reimburse villagers after they used community savings funds to provide cash grants to upwards of 1,539 beneficiaries. In 2024, to support villagers following flash floods and to ensure villagers had enough stock in the event of future weather events, We provided foodstuffs and grants to 3,392 villagers from across Mutraw, Doo Tha Htu, and Doolaya districts.

The March 2025 earthquake, centred on Sagaing Region in Northern Myanmar proved one of the largest natural disasters in Myanmar in recent memory, flattening houses and leaving thousands of people dead. While Karen areas were not as heavily impacted as those to the north, the earthquake was still devastating for many communities. In response, KESAN helped move funds to other Karen groups with a more humanitarian focus, such as the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN), and provided support ourselves. In Taw Oo District, we provided cash distributions to 508 the most affected families. We also facilitated support for groups working in central Burma areas, such as the Kalyanna Mitta Foundation and Paung Ku, both of which collectively supported basic-needs and health-related assistance for over 50,000 beneficiaries.



Looking Ahead



In December 2025, the military junta staged a sham election that was designed to project an illusion of legitimacy, despite lacking any genuine democratic credibility. In Karen territories, it brought further suffering, displacement, and loss of life. Despite decades of conflict and oppression, Karen communities have remained resilient and steadfast in asserting their right to self-determination.

Over the past three years, we have witnessed villagers become increasingly inspired to strengthen their livelihoods, learn new skills, and engage in environmental conservation for future generations. Through collective action, communities, ethnic governing bodies, and Karen civil society organizations have initiated important dialogues on issues that were once impossible to discuss openly. Together, they established the Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park as a new Indigenous Conserved Territory, piloted a renewable energy project, and expanded community rice banks, which now store three times more rice than when they were first established.

KESAN remains committed to supporting community-led initiatives that deliver both immediate and long-term benefits for people living amid civil war, climate change, and displacement. In the years ahead, we will continue advocating for greater access to funding for Indigenous-led organizations, strengthening Indigenous governing bodies, and building the capacity of community-driven initiatives.

Following the launch of the Pawklo Indigenous Stewardship Territory, KESAN plans to expand community programs that enhance livelihood security while protecting forests from overexploitation through sustainable forest management. We will work closely with Indigenous-led governing bodies and institutions to develop inclusive ethnic and local governance structures that are accountable to the communities they serve. Together with local environmental defenders, we also aim to organize more advocacy campaigns to draw international attention to the challenges facing the Salween River. At the same time, we are excited to expand renewable energy initiatives as part of a broader effort to restore energy justice across Kawthoolei.







K E S A N

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P.O Box 35, San Sai Post Office, Chiang Mai, Thailand 50210

Phone: 098 996 5264, E-mail: info@kesan.asia

Website: www.kesan.asia

[Facebook.com/KarenEnvironment](https://www.facebook.com/KarenEnvironment)