

Press release by Shan State Farmers' Network

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New EIA/SIA causes fear among local villagers of coal mining expansion in Nam Ma

A recent visit by a Burmese environmental consulting company to Nam Ma, Hsipaw township, northern Shan State, has caused local villagers to fear that the coal mining in their area will soon expand.

On May 28, 2017, ten staff of Resource & Environment Myanmar/Social Economic Survey (REM/SEM), led by Dr. Thiha Soe and Dr. Sanda Hlaing arrived in the Nam Ma area, where Ngwe Yi Pale company has been digging for coal since 2004. In the morning, they went to meet villagers of Pang Nga, Hoo Mi, Teung Hai and Kho Na Pha, near the Pang Nga coal mining site.

In the afternoon, the group went to Nam Ma temple, where they met 79 villagers from Wan Long, Pieng Hsai, Koong Pao and Na Koon, near the Na Koon mining site. From 1 to 4 pm, they interviewed 36 villagers, mostly from Na Koon and Koong Pao.

Using questionnaires, the staff interviewed the villagers about their livelihoods, including the annual income from their paddy fields. They also asked how the coal mining affected them.

Most interviewees answered that they didn't agree with the coal mining operations, because of the negative impacts. They said a deep artificial lake had been formed in the old coal mining pit at Pieng Hsai. This was causing nearby land to subside, causing water to flood into surrounding farms, and causing water pollution in nearby streams. They also described how mining waste was dumped on their farms, impacting their water sources, and causing fear of landslides.

Villagers also mentioned a large 200 feet-long crack that had recently appeared in the ground northeast of the Na Koon coal mine.



Villagers being interviewed by REM

The local residents stated that they wanted the coal mining company to withdraw from the Nam Ma area. They said they did not want any compensation. They just wanted the mining to stop.

Villagers were suspicious that the surveyors only asked questions about the existing mines, not about the planned mining expansion at the Ho Na Pha watershed area, which Ngwe Yi Pale has been trying to persuade the villagers to accept for years.

Local youth were also upset when they asked to keep copies of the questionnaires and the surveyors were reluctant to share them. One of the surveyors said: "Who do you think you are? We are here to ask questions. Just tell us the answers."

The week before, on May 20, 2017, the REM/SEM group had called a meeting at the Hsipaw township administrative office, attended by over 80 people from different mining areas in Hsipaw, including Nam Ma. There were also two MPs from the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy. At the meeting, REM/SEM said they were going to visit Nam Ma on May 28, 2017 to conduct an EIA/SIA, and that they were not siding with the government or the companies.

However, the lack of transparency of the consultants when conducting the EIA/SIA, and their disrespectful behavior to local people indicate that they are indeed siding with the company.



Nam Ma villagers

The local villagers of Nam Ma have stated clearly they want a complete stop to the coal mining in their area because of the damaging social and environmental impacts. The Shan State Farmers' Network supports their calls, and urges Ngwe Yi Pale to immediately stop mining in Nam Ma, and to make no further attempts to expand their operations in this area.

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Nam Ma coal mining area

