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### Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

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#### **Recent TB cases raise concern for health consequences of longstanding air pollution levels in Nam Ma coal mining area**

Recent tuberculosis (TB) cases among villagers living in the Nam Ma coal mining area in Hsipaw, northern Shan State, have raised concerns over additional, hitherto unforeseen health impacts on local communities of coal mining.

Ten villagers (eight men and two women) from five villages have been diagnosed as suffering from TB by Hsipaw Hospital, almost all since 2015. Half of the patients live in Na Koon village, next to the Na Koon coal mine, where digging has taken place since 2004 and expanded significantly since 2014.

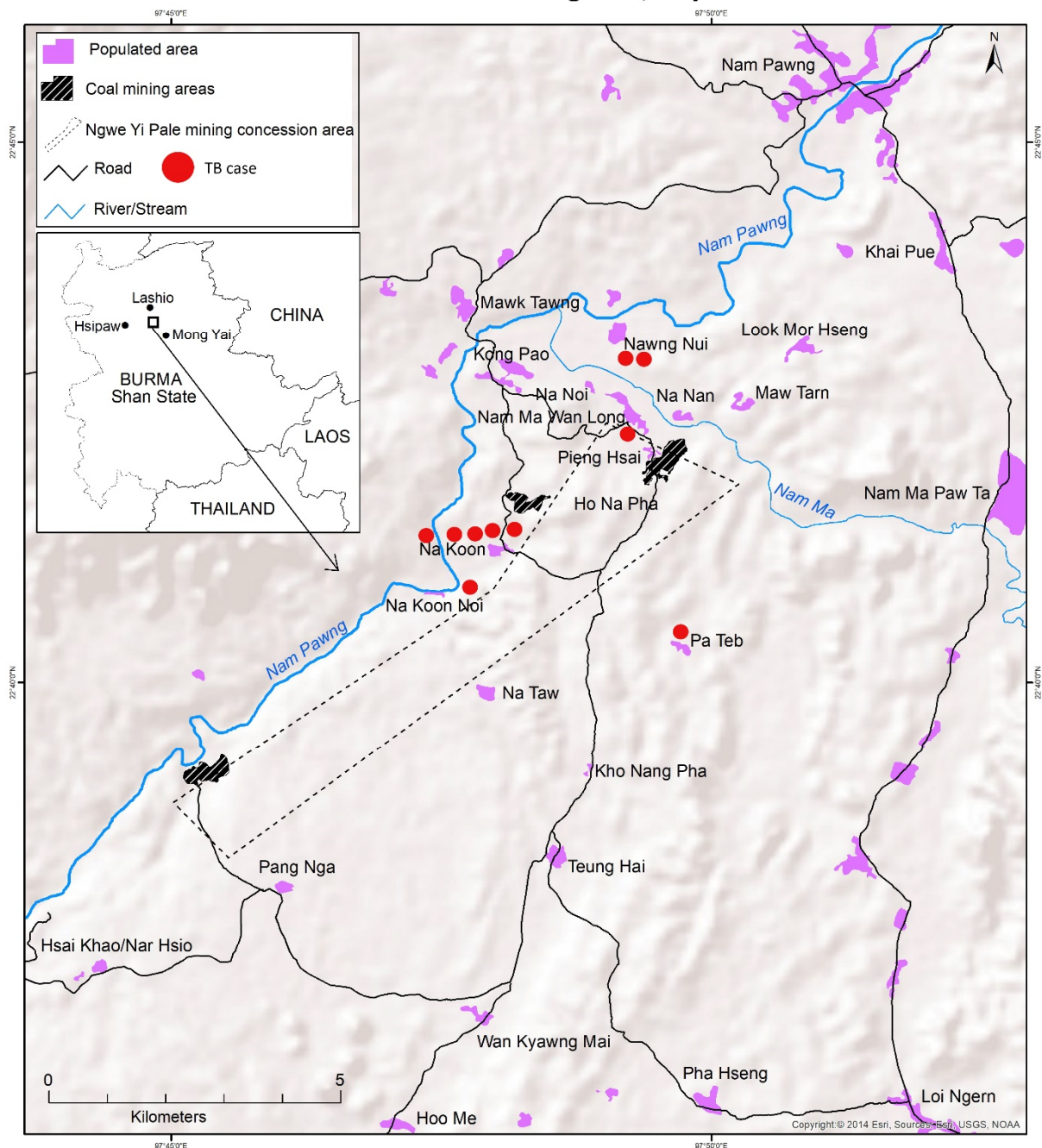
Air pollution has been caused by dust from digging, storage and transport of coal, and by fumes and smoke from large coal-piles stored at the mining sites. Na Koon villagers say that the “smell” of the mining pervades their houses day and night.

Villagers diagnosed with TB are as follows:

No.	Age	Sex	Village	Year diagnosed	Details
1	45	M	Na Koon Noi	2017	
2	30	F	Na Koon	2017	In serious condition, being treated at Hsipaw Hospital; she has 3 children
3	23	M	Wan Long Nam Ma	2016	
4	15	M	Na Koon	2016	
5	41	M	Na Koon	2015	
6	70s	M	Na Koon	2015	His wife died 2 months ago with bad coughing. It is suspected she had TB
7	58	M	Pa Deb	2015	

8	51	M	Nawng Nui	2015	
9	43	M	Nawng Nui	2015	
10	55	F	Na Koon	2013	She moved out of Na Koon after being diagnosed

**TB cases in Nam Ma coal mining area, July 2017**



The TB patients have to travel to Hsipaw each month for check ups and to receive treatment.

One of the patients from Na Koon village, who is in his seventies, said he was diagnosed with TB in June 2015. The illness has caused a great financial burden for him. He works as a farmer, growing corn and cassia. Before becoming ill, his total annual income from farming was 300,000 kyat (220 USD). Now, due to ill health, and the air pollution (dust and fumes) from the mining site in his farm, he earns only about 50,000 kyat (36 USD) a year.

He said, “I have a corn farm about two acres in size, about 130 meters from the Na Koon coal mining site. Whenever I go to work at my farm, there is an awful smell from there. I can’t even eat my meal there due to the awful smell.”

Since becoming ill, he has had to spend 3-4 days each month in Hsipaw for medical treatment, further limiting his ability to earn income. Earlier this year, his wife fell ill, with bad coughing, and died two months ago. It is suspected that she also had TB, but they did not have enough money to send her to hospital for a check-up.



*Smoke emission from piles of coal near Na Koon*

Most of the TB cases have been diagnosed since 2015, when the Nam Ma tract chairman noticed that increased numbers of people were coughing severely and therefore arranged for them to travel to Hsipaw for health checks. Before that, people had been unwilling to go to the government hospital in Hsipaw because of the distance (two hours away by car), cost, and their inability to speak Burmese and communicate with the hospital staff, many of whom do not speak Shan.

Villagers say that the air pollution from the mining is worse in 2017 than in past years.

The coal mines in the Nam Ma area have been operated by the Mandalay-based Ngwe Yi Pale company since 2004. Out of three main mining sites, one site – at Pieng Hsai – ceased operation in 2015. The two



There are about 1,500 people living in seven villages in Nam Ma tract, who rely on farming as their main livelihood. Apart from air pollution, mining impacts suffered by villagers include loss of agricultural lands, obstruction and contamination of water sources, and road accidents from coal trucks.

Nam Ma residents have repeatedly called for an end to coal mining in their area. In April 2016, over 250 villagers met the Ngwe Yi Pale head manager in Nam Ma to demand a stop to the mining, and again ask the company to fill in the abandoned mining pit in Pieng Hsai, where a large toxic lake had formed. However, the pit was not refilled and mining continued unabated until May 2016, when the Burma Army launched a large-scale offensive in Nam Ma, including aerial bombing, to secure control of the mines and drive out SSPP/SSA troops south of the mining area, despite an existing ceasefire. Villagers were tortured and killed during the operation. After brief suspension, mining resumed at full scale one week after fighting stopped.

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