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Burma: The Changing Nature of Displacement Crises

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List of Acronyms

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
DKBA	Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army
HRW	Human Right Watch
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNLA	The Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
MNDAA	National Democratic Alliance Army
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NMSP	New Mon State Party
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TBBC	Thailand-Burma Border Consortium
UWSA	United Wa State Party

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Background

Patterns of forced migration in Burma (Myanmar¹) have been structured by the changing nature of conflict in the country. Since independence in 1948, Burma has been subject to armed conflict, in the form of a communist insurgency – which came close to seizing state power in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Taylor 1987) – and a series of inter-linked ethnic rebellions (Smith 1999). Following a turbulent decade of parliamentary politics, the Burma Army (or Tatmadaw) temporarily assumed state power between 1958–60, before consolidating its control, following a coup d’etat in 1962 (Callahan 2003). Since the 1960s, above-ground politics and state-society relations in Burma have been dominated by the military, in the form of a state-socialist polity (1962–88: Taylor 1987) and – since the military coup of September 1988 – in a more market-oriented, but still highly authoritarian form of military rule (South 2005).

In 1989 the once-powerful Communist Party of Burma (CPB) collapsed, allowing the Tatmadaw to concentrate its forces on the ethnic insurgencies, which by this time were mostly confined to the northern and eastern border areas. Between 1989-95, some two dozen ceasefires were agreed between the military regime, and the majority of armed ethnic groups (Smith 1999, South 2005).

By 2007, only two significant insurgent organizations remained at war with the regime in Yangon (Rangoon). However, more than two million people of Burmese origin were still displaced outside the country, including more than 150,000 refugees in Thailand, the first of whom had sought shelter in the kingdom in the mid-1980s (Lang 2002, TBBC July 2006). In addition, over half a million people remained internally displaced within Burma (HRW 2005, TBBC November 2006).

Introduction

The shifting nature of conflict in Burma over the past fifteen years has structured a range of inter-linked displacement crises. In this paper, three main types of forced migration in – and from – the country are identified: Type 1 – armed-conflict-induced displacement; Type 2 – State/society-induced displacement; and Type 3 – livelihood/vulnerability-induced displacement. Each is addressed in a case study, with material drawn from different geographic areas, illustrating different aspects and impacts of (armed and state-society) conflict in Burma.

This paper shows that internal displacement in Burma is not only caused by armed conflict in the insurgent-prone eastern borderlands. While the most acutely vulnerable internally displaced persons (IDPs) do live in those few areas of the country still affected by significant

¹ In June 1989 the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military regime re-named the country *Myanmar Naing-ngan*. Opposition politicians and activists dispute the legitimacy of the military regime, and reject the new name. This paper follows the majority of English language commentators in retaining ‘Burma’.

levels of armed conflict, the phenomenon of forced migration is more complex and widespread – the product of decades of mis-governance by the militarized state.²

The paper is based on more than two hundred interviews and focus groups, conducted between 2001-06 in Kachin, Karen, Mon and Shan States, in Tenasserim and Yangon Divisions, and along the Thailand and China borders. Informants included: different categories of migrants (including IDPs and refugees) from various ethnic, social and gender groups; ‘host communities’; previously displaced communities which have found solutions to their plight; political organisations; armed ethnic groups (with and without ceasefires); local NGOs and CBOs; UN agencies, the ICRC, and INGOs; diplomats, academics and journalists. Secondary material comes from a survey of published (including electronic) sources and limited circulation (‘grey’) literature.

Access, Enquiry and Data

Most research and publications on forced migration in Burma (e.g. Amnesty International 2002; Burma Ethnic Research Group 1998, 2000; Burma Issues 2003; Christian Aid 2004; Cusano, in Vincent & Brigitte Refslund 2001; Grundy-Warr & Yin 2003; Heppner 2005; Humanitarian Affairs Research Project 2003; Human Rights Watch 2005; Shan Human Rights Foundation 2003; Thailand-Burma Border Consortium 2004, 2005, 2006) have a strong human rights orientation, focusing on armed conflict and its impacts in the eastern border zones. Such approaches are obviously important given the widespread violations involved. However this concentration on parts of eastern Burma accessible to agencies working cross-border from Thailand has tended to obscure assessments of forced migration in Burma as a whole. Much less is known about the situations in other geographic areas, or about displaced populations not accessible to the armed opposition groups with which cross-border aid agencies cooperate. One consequence has been a lack of data and analysis on military occupation- and ‘development’-induced displacement, or on livelihoods vulnerability-induced displacement (exceptions include Hudson-Rodd, Myo Nyunt, Saw Thamin Tun & Sein Htay 2003; Human Rights Foundation of Monland 2003; Lambrecht 2004).

In general the literature on the political economy of conflict and displacement in Burma is rather sparse (primarily, Sherman 2003). Those investigating forced migration in Burma generally hold strong views regarding the promotion of socio-political change in the country. These agendas have shaped the types of inquiry undertaken and the questions asked, and thus the nature of the reality ‘uncovered’ by research (see for example, the material included in the Global IDP Database Burma Profile). However, such approaches tend to stop short of focusing attention on certain trends which have emerged in some previously armed conflict-affected areas, over the past decade.

This paper attempts to redress the balance of existing research, by addressing issues of forced migration in non-armed conflict affected areas of Burma, including parts of the country not readily accessible from the Thailand border. It incorporates rights-based perspectives and also describes how people attempt to rehabilitate their lives and communities, under the most difficult of circumstances. The paper identifies new forms of forced migration, which have

² On the development of the military-dominated state in Burma, see Robert Taylor (1987) and Mary Callahan (2003).

emerged with the existence of ceasefires in many previously armed conflict-affected areas, especially in northern Burma. It can be expected that such new patterns of internal migration will emerge in areas currently affected by armed conflict, if/when insurgency comes to an end along the Thailand border. Indeed, patterns of development-induced displacement have emerged in parts of southeast Burma since the 1990s (see below). A better understanding of the issues in areas no longer affected by armed conflict-affected should help to prepare local and international actors for future developments in areas currently beset by the state's often brutal counter-insurgent operations.

Displacement Figures

This paper focuses primarily on the situation of IDPs and other forced migrants in Burma. However, some preliminary notes are required regarding the situation of refugees from Burma, in neighbouring countries.³

Western Border: The Rohingya Muslim minority have long been discriminated against, and are denied Burmese citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law. Following a brutal Tatmadaw campaign in 1991–92 (including massive forced labour and other human rights abuses), some 250,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh as refugees. Most were repatriated by UNHCR in mid-late 1990s; about 28,000 remain in refugee camps around Cox's Bazaar. The UN and other international agencies have struggled to protect Rohingya returnees from further rounds of abuse. The *Rohingyas* “continue to suffer from multiple restrictions and human rights violations ... [including] forced eviction and house destruction; land confiscation and various forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation including financial restrictions on marriage. *Rohingyas* continue to be used as forced laborers on roads and at military camps... In addition, the vast majority of are effectively denied Myanmar citizenship, rendering them stateless” (Amnesty International 2004).

Eastern Border: In Thailand, the first semi-permanent Karen refugee camps were established in the area north of Mae Sot, halfway up the Thailand-Burma border, in the early 1980s (Lang 2002; South 2005, Chapter 12). Since 1984, these camps have been supplied with food (and, more recently, shelter and a range of other necessities) by a consortium of INGOs, currently named the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). The refugees health needs are addressed by a handful of medical agencies; since the late 1990s, a number of INGOs have been active in the border camps in the field of education.

By 2005, about US\$30 million a year was being channelled through Thailand-based organizations supporting displaced people in and from Burma⁴. Most assistance was provided to about 140,000 (Karen and Karenni) refugees in a dozen camps along the border, while some \$2.5 million went to IDPs. Two years later, the number of refugees in Thailand had grown to 152,245 (TBBC January 2007).

IDP Population Estimates: The subject of IDP numbers is problematic. Counting only people who have been forcibly displaced since 2004, the number of IDPs in eastern Burma will probably be no more than 100,000 people. However, the number of previously displaced

³ For more on Burmese refugees, see South (2005), TBBC (July 2006), and Lang (2002).

⁴ This figure represents a little less than half the total amount of foreign aid dispersed to the entire (estimated) fifty-five million population living in government-controlled 'Myanmar'.

people for whom no durable solution has been found must be calculated in the millions, including vulnerable communities that have been living in displacement for decades.

Since 1996, 3,077 villages are known to have been destroyed (usually burnt) and/or relocated en masse, or otherwise abandoned, due to Tatmadaw activity, including at least 232 villages between 2005-06 alone (TBBC November 2006). While unknown numbers of these villages have since re-settled (either in situ, or at a nearby location), most remain de-populated.

According to the TBBC and its local partner groups, there were a total of 500,000 IDPs in eastern Burma in mid/late-2006. These include 287,000 people in ceasefire areas, 95,000 in areas directly affected by armed conflict, and 118,000 people in government-controlled relocation sites. These figures do not include Type 1 IDPs who have not made themselves available to armed opposition groups, or large numbers of people who have achieved (at least semi-) durable solutions to their plight, especially those living in peri-urban areas. It also does not include hundreds of thousands of Types 2 (state/society-induced) and Type 3 (livelihood/vulnerability-induced) IDPs, in other parts of Burma, especially Kachin and Shan States and the west of the country. These figures are likely to have increased in 2006, due to large-scale Tatmadaw operations in northern Karen State, during the first half of 2006 (see below).

TABLE 1 – Distribution of Internally Displaced Persons in 2005 and 2006
(TBBC November 2006)

DISTRIBUTION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN 2005 AND 2006

States and Divisions	IDPs in Hiding		IDPs in Relocation Sites		IDPs in Ceasefire Areas		Total IDPs	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
South Shan	20,800	13,300	23,700	31,300	174,500	131,000	219,000	175,600
Karenni	9,500	9,300	7,500	6,400	75,500	63,600	92,500	79,300
East Pegu	13,400	17,400	7,900	6,400	0	0	21,300	23,800
Karen	38,800	49,100	6,100	4,300	45,000	45,900	89,900	99,300
Mon	2,500	300	6,200	500	40,000	41,000	48,700	41,800
Tenasserim	7,000	5,600	56,600	69,100	5,000	5,500	68,600	80,200
Overall	92,000	95,000	108,000	118,000	340,000	287,000	540,000	500,000

Long-term Patterns of Displacement: Most studies of forced migration in and from Burma (cited above) focus on peoples' often traumatic experiences, occurring over a relatively short period of time. While important from a rights-based perspective, this approach tends to obscure longer-term patterns of displacement.

Armed conflict-induced displacement (Type 1) often occurs among communities which periodically shift their location for socio-cultural reasons and to access agricultural land (Cusano, in Vincent & Sorensen 2001; HRW 2005). However, the scale of displacement in Karen and other areas over the past fifty years has been out of all proportion to any traditional patterns of migration.

Furthermore, forced migration among significant segments of the Karen and other ethnic nationality communities is not a 'one-off' phenomenon. It is rarely the case that an individual, family or community used to live in 'Place A', fled to 'Place B' (as an IDP, or as a refugee to Thailand), and can thus return in a simple manner to 'Place A'. The original 'Place A' may have been occupied by the Tatmadaw or other hostile groups, and/or re-settled by other displaced people, and/or planted with landmines. Thus it is not unlikely that 'Place A' is in fact a multitude of 'Places A – N'.

In-depth interviews, conducted in 2003–04 with a group of 36 Karen IDPs in the Papun hills, reveal that these people had experienced more than 1,000 migration episodes.⁵ Five had been forcibly displaced more than 100 times, sometimes dating back to the 1940s. For example one old woman first fled to the jungle during WWII, when Japanese soldiers came to her village. The great majority of migration episodes were undertaken as a direct result of fighting, because of severe human rights abuse (including forced labour), or because armed conflict had directly undermined sustainable forms of agriculture.

Terminology and Typology

In this paper, forced migration is conceptualized as a sub-set of population movements in general and 'internal displacement' is a sub-set of forced migration. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (UNCHR 1998) define internally displaced persons (IDPs) as:

persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

The case studies identify three 'ideal types' within the spectrum of forced migration in Burma. These Types are defined according to the root causes of population movement:

Type 1: Armed-Conflict-Induced Displacement having emerged either as a direct consequence of fighting and counter-insurgency operations, or because armed conflict has directly undermined human and food security. Linked to severe human rights abuses across Karen State, in eastern Tenasserim Division, southern Mon State, southern and eastern Karenni State, southern Shan State, and parts of Chin State and

⁵ Documented by the author, for Human Rights Watch (2005).

Sagaing Division. A fair amount of quantitative data is available for Type 1 IDPs in eastern Burma.

Type 2: State-Society Conflict-Induced Displacement (generally, post-armed conflict; due to military occupation and/or ‘development’ activities) having resulted from: land confiscation by the Tatmadaw or other armed groups, including in the context of natural resource extraction (e.g. logging and mining); infrastructure construction, and other forms of large-scale ‘development’ (e.g. roads, bridges, airports); and also as a product of predatory taxation, forced labour and other abuses. This form of displacement is related to the use of force, but does not occur in the context of outright armed conflict. All of the border states and divisions are affected by militarization- and/or ‘development’-induced displacement, including Arakan (Rakhine) and Kachin States, as well as a number of urban areas.

In this typology, Types 1 and 2 forced migrants are ‘IDPs’ whose displacement is a product of conflict. Type 1 is directly caused by armed conflict, whereas Type 2 is caused by latent conflict or the threat of the use of force.

Type 3: Livelihoods/Vulnerability-Induced Displacement having emerged as result of inappropriate government policies and practices, limited availability of productive land, and poor access to markets, resulting in food insecurity; lack of education and health services; plus stresses associated with the transition to a cash economy. Livelihoods/vulnerability-induced displacement occurs across the country, especially in and from remote townships. It represents the primary form of internal and external migration in and from Burma (and many other developing countries).

Here, Type 3 population movements describe a particularly vulnerable sub-group of economic migrants subject to limited choices. As such, they constitute a form of forced migration (or ‘distress migration’). Migration due to opium eradication policies is included under Type 3 because the proximate causes of movement are related to livelihoods issues, that is – with the important exception of some Wa areas – people are not ordered to move. However, opium eradication-induced migration could also be considered under Type 2 forced migration, due to the forcible nature of the opium bans, the severe shock to livelihoods involved, and the links to state-sponsored development activities.

Table 2 – Typology of Forced Migration

FORCED MIGRANTS		
Internally Displaced Persons		Other Forced Migrants
Type 1 Armed conflict-induced	Type 2 State-society conflict-induced (post-armed conflict)	Type 3 Livelihoods vulnerability-induced (‘distress migration’)
Case Study: Karen State	Case Studies: Kachin and Mon States and urban displacement	Case Study: Opium Eradication in Kokang

There are important linkages between these three types of displacement, each of which undermines traditional livelihoods options. Type 1 characterizes zones of on-going armed conflict, and some adjacent areas; Type 2 is particularly prevalent in remote and underdeveloped conflict-affected areas, where ceasefires have been agreed between the government and armed groups, and also affects many of those relocated to urban areas; Type 3 is characteristic of remote areas in general, particularly those where armed conflict has ceased. No strictly linear progression of displacement from Type 1, to Type 2, to Type 3 should be assumed here, many people are in cyclic transit between different phases of displacement, and may be categorized in different ways at different times.

Forced Migration in and from Burma: For many Burmese citizens patterns of migration are often cyclic and involve periods spent as (legal or otherwise) labourers in other countries, and/or more extended periods as (official or otherwise) refugees in neighbouring countries.⁶ The causes and other aspects of population movements within Burma (internal migration) and beyond its borders (external migration) are closely linked – and often relate to serious and systematic abuses of a range of basic rights. Less clear is how these inter-related phenomenon should be conceptualized, in terms of vulnerabilities and needs, and solutions. Issues of IDP rehabilitation (in situ or in the context of resettlement), and its relationship to refugee repatriation are particularly problematic. A number of local and international agencies on both sides of the eastern border are working on these issues, but such approaches currently lack coherence or coordination. This paper focuses primarily on internal migration in Burma, except where external migration issues are directly relevant to population movement within the country.

CASE STUDY 1: KAREN STATE

Type 1: Armed-Conflict-Induced Displacement

For over half a century, life across much of rural Burma has been profoundly affected by armed conflict.⁷ In many ethnic minority-populated areas, repeated incidents of forced displacement – interspersed with occasional periods of relative stability – have been a fact of life for generations.

Karen Nationalism and Insurgency, and State Counter-insurgency.

The Karen community consists of a diverse collection of ethno-linguistic groups, which nevertheless share a number of common characteristics. At least two-thirds of the 5–7 million Karen in Burma are Buddhists.

Conceptions of ethnic identity in contemporary Burma are rooted in the pre-colonial past (South 2005) and in the often traumatic colonial experience (Thant 2001). The Karen ethno-nationalist movement emerged during the British colonial period, when Christian Karen

⁶ According to the International Organization for Migration, there are about three million migrant workers and their dependents in Thailand, most of them from Burma (plus hundreds of thousands in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Singapore). These people often endure very poor social and working conditions; see Amnesty International (June 2005).

⁷ For comprehensive accounts of armed conflict in Burma, see Martin Smith (1999) and South (2005).

elites first began to express the idea of a Karen nation, including all elements of the diverse socio-linguistic community. The Karen National Union (KNU), which went underground in January 1949 (a year after independence), was from the outset led by educated Christian elites – in the name of all Karen. The insurgency was at first conceived of a means of protecting Karen villagers from attacks by Burman-dominated militias, as well as achieving a more-or-less independent Karen State, covering much of lower Burma. Over successive years, the rebellion continued as a response to the repressive policies of successive governments in Yangon, and the perceived ‘Burmanisation’ of the state (Smith 1999).

In the decade after 1962, when General Ne Win’s Tatmadaw took control of the country, the KNU and other ethnic insurgent groups received new injections of recruits from government-controlled Burma. Ne Win’s disastrous ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ also provided the insurgents with new sources of funds, as the economy collapsed, and became dependant on smuggled goods – most of which came from neighbouring Thailand. The KNU and other armed ethnic groups taxed the black market trade, allowing several rebel leaders to prosper, and build up well-equipped armies.

During the ‘cold war’, the KNU and other anti-communist groups also received covert support from the Thai national security establishment, allowing them to administer substantial ‘liberated zones’ along the 2,000-plus km border, where they served as a useful buffer between communist insurgents in Thailand, and the powerful CPB. The KNU and other insurgent ‘liberated zones’ took on some of the characteristics of de facto states, with military and parallel civilian administrations, and health and education systems.

This period saw the emergence of significant economic agendas in the prosecution of armed conflict in Burma (South 2005, Chapter 8). These are epitomized by rise of the KNU’s General Saw Bo Mya, a tough field commander, staunch Christian and anti-communist, who became a key asset in Thai and US strategy in the region. Like most ethnic insurgent groups, the KNU has claimed to be fighting for democracy in Burma – especially since the 1988 ‘democracy uprising’. This position has been reflected in a series of alliances struck with pan- Burma opposition groups which fled to the border areas following the events of 1988 and 1990. However, the democratic ideal has not always been honoured in practice, and the ‘liberated zones’ have often been characterized by a top-down tributary political system, aspects of which recall pre-colonial forms of socio-political organization. Whilst General Bo Mya et al have certainly been inspired in their conflict with the central government by genuine and strongly-held grievances, many insurgent commanders and their families have also benefited financially from protracted armed conflict in Burma – especially from the taxation of ‘black market’ trade, and from natural resource extraction (in the case of the KNU, logging and mining activities (South 2005)).

Under General Bo Mya, S’ghaw-speaking elites from the lowlands began to unify – and dominate – Karen society in the eastern hills. This ‘internal colonization’ had unforeseen consequences in the years to come, as an underclass of (mostly Buddhist) subalterns came to resent the domination of an increasingly corrupt and authoritarian alien elite. The eventual result was rebellion, and the formation of the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA) – see below.

During the early 1980s government forces gained a decisive upper hand in the civil war, and the first semi-permanent Karen refugee camps were established in Thailand, as civilians (and

rebel soldiers) fled Tatmadaw offensives along the border. By 1994, with the fall of their headquarters at Mannerplaw, the KNU was in serious trouble (and the semi-official refugee caseload in Thailand stood at 77,107).⁸ The crisis was compounded by the loss of most of the remaining Karen ‘liberated zones’ (in southern Karen State and Tennasserim Division) during a major dry season Tatmadaw offensive in 1997 (by the end of which year the refugee caseload was 116,264).

The KNU today is a greatly weakened force, and no longer represents a significant military threat to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) still has some 5–7,000 soldiers, deployed in seven Brigades (including mobile battalions and village militia), and well over a thousand active political cadres (including youth and women’s wings). However, at any one time about half of these personnel are located among the more than 152,245 refugees living in 10 camps (7 Karen, 2 Karenni, 1 Shan) in Thailand (TBBC January 2007).⁹

Although the KNU is in danger of becoming marginalized – both on the Burmese political stage, and as an arbiter of Karen affairs – its continuing symbolic importance cannot be denied. The KNU is the oldest – and to many Karen people and Burma-watchers, the only legitimate – Karen ethno-nationalist group. Having fought for independence (later, autonomy) from Yangon since 1949, and not having followed other armed ethnic groups into the ceasefire movement, the KNU retains a strong credibility among the wider Burma opposition (members of which often accuse the ceasefire groups of having ‘sold out’).

Nevertheless, the emergence of the DKBA constituted a massive upheaval within the Karen nationalist movement. The repercussions of this largely self-inflicted disaster are felt to this day. These disputes arose out of years of neglect of the Buddhist (and Pwo dialect speaking) Karen majority by elements within the Christian (and S’ghaw-speaking) KNU elite. Underlying resentment among KNLA foot-soldiers – together with strains generated by the decades-long civil war – came to a head in late 1994, when a group of disaffected Buddhist Karen soldiers deserted their front-line positions, and swore allegiance to U Thuzana, an ambitious Karen monk from ‘inside’ Burma.

The KNU leadership at Mannerplaw failed to deal with the situation effectively, and in December 2004 the rebels established the DKBA, consolidating a major split in the Karen insurgent ranks. From the outset, the DKBA received military and logistical support from local Tatmadaw units, and government agents played a role in stirring up disaffection from the early stages of the rebellion. However, the emergence of the DKBA, at a time of great crisis in the Karen nationalist movement, was a result of genuine grievances within the Buddhist community, combined with poor political skills at the top of the KNU.

The DKBA often acts as a proxy militia army for the Tatmadaw, deflecting some (domestic and international) criticism for the state’s harsh policies. Like the Tatmadaw, it uses displacement as a means of controlling populations and resources, and to undermine the KNU – its main rival for leadership of the Karen community in Burma.

⁸ South (2005), Table Two.

⁹ The ‘Mon returnee’ population was reported at 12,017 people, making a total border caseload of 164,262.

Like some of their counterparts in the KNLA, many DKBA commanders and soldiers must be considered ‘conflict entrepreneurs’, for whom the military-political status quo is a means to personal power (and often personal enrichment). Although some DKBA leaders deploy strong ethno-nationalist rhetoric, and appear concerned for the political emancipation and socio-economic development of ‘their’ people, the organization resembles a loosely-structured warlord enterprise, focused on revenue collection (including through amphetamines trafficking), and the settling of personal scores. Nevertheless, recent research indicates that that conditions for IDPs in ceasefire areas – including presumably DKBA-controlled zones – are better than those in zones of on-going armed conflict, or the range of government-controlled relocation sites (see below).

The DKBA command-and-control structure is extremely weak, and many of these units enjoy almost complete autonomy, and/or answer to local Tatmadaw commanders. DKBA troop strength is difficult to gauge. Informed sources suggest that the number of active soldiers is about 3-4,000, including civilian officials, of whom there are relatively few (the DKBA being primarily a warlord-type militia). There are a number of Christians within the ranks of the DKBA, including some ranking commanders.

‘Greed and Grievance’

After more than half a century, armed conflict in Burma has become institutionalized, and associated with deep-rooted political economies (Jelsma, Kramer and Vervest 2005; Smith 1999; South 2005). Commanders on both sides of the ‘front lines’ (including those which have agreed ceasefires with the government: see below) often rely on the taxation of ‘black market’ goods, extraction of natural resources (logging and mining), and other un-regulated practices (including the drugs trade) to enrich themselves and their retinues, and to support the armed groups, control over which brings the power to extract further ‘tribute’ and political power.

The prevalence of such ‘greed-based’ models of conflict worldwide tends to provoke scepticism of elite claims to represent ethnic communities. This is especially the case among international agencies and observers with experience of armed conflict and its impacts in other parts of the world, who tend to focus on ‘greed’ models, and the political economy of conflict in Burma. However, such perspectives under-appreciate the often-contested legitimacy of many insurgent and ceasefire groups and underestimate the levels of support they enjoy in ‘their’ constituencies. In contrast, opposition supporters – especially those based outside Burma – tend to emphasize the struggle against a repressive regime and ‘justice/ legitimate grievance’ models of conflict. They are often uncritically supportive of elite-generated ethno-nationalist agendas, without questioning whose interests they serve.

Armed Conflict and Displacement: The ‘Four Cuts’.

Burma’s ethnic insurgent groups have positioned themselves as the defenders of minority populations, against the aggression of state forces. They have adopted guerrilla-style tactics, which have invited retaliation against the civilian population – but against which the armed groups have been unable to defend villagers. Since the 1960s – in response to protracted insurgencies in most ethnic nationality-populated areas – state forces have pursued often brutal counter-insurgency strategies, including the forced relocation of civilian populations deemed sympathetic to armed ethnic and communist groups (Taylor 1985).

The KNU and other insurgent groups have an interest in controlling, or at least maintaining, civilian populations in traditionally Karen lands – as a source of legitimacy, and of food, intelligence and soldiers, porters etc. Therefore, KNU cadres regularly organize village evacuations, to ‘protect’ villagers from Tatmadaw incursions (a service which is appreciated by many IDPs).

Clearly, the KNU and other insurgent organizations bear some responsibility for the plight of civilians in areas where they operate. For nearly 60 years, they have pursued an armed conflict against the central government, although the possibility of any military victory probably disappeared during the 1970s (or at the latest, after the fall of the last KNU ‘liberated zones’, in the mid-1990s).

Such complexities notwithstanding, most forms of forced displacement – and associated serious human rights abuses – still occur in the context of the Tatmadaw’s ‘Four Cuts’ counter-insurgency strategy (and more recently, as a result of the activities government-aligned militias). Having issued orders to relocate to areas firmly under state control, Tatmadaw columns often return to remote areas which have been ‘cleared’, to ensure that they are not re-settled (which they often are): many villages are therefore ‘serially displaced’.

Armed conflict and counter-insurgency operations in rural Burma have severely disrupted traditional ways of life. Most of the rural and peri-urban population of eastern Burma has been displaced or otherwise affected at some point during the last fifty years (although in many areas, such as the Pegu Yomas, armed conflict and forced displacement are memories of the 1960s). Since the late 1980s, several hundred thousand IDPs have been forced to flee their homes and live under particularly difficult conditions in zones of on-going armed conflict, or government-controlled relocation sites (for population estimates, see below). While some of these people have achieved a level of stability in their new settlements, many have yet to find ‘durable solutions’ to their plight.

The KNU Ceasefire: Pockets of Relative Stability, Amidst Continuing Armed Conflict

Following an aborted series of meetings in the mid-1990s, ceasefire negotiations between the SPDC and KNU commenced in December 2003, with the announcement of a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ to cease fighting. Although substantial talks began in January the following year, the purge of the relatively progressive prime minister (and Military Intelligence (MI) chief), General Khin Nyunt, in October 2004, presented a serious set-back to the peace process.

If the provisional KNU-SPDC ceasefire can be consolidated, it may yet deliver a substantial improvement in the human rights situation on the ground, creating the space in which local and international organizations can begin to address the urgent needs of a war-ravaged population. However, developments since mid-2005 indicate that the government lacks the political will to make peace. Across much of northern Karen State, the situation remains dire, with the Tatmadaw launching major operations against a diminished KNU insurgency.

Between February 2006 and January 2007, approximately 25,000 people were displaced by *Tatmadaw* attacks on villages in northwest Karen State (Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Papun Districts), where the *Tatmadaw* has responded aggressively to provocation by the KNLA’s Second Brigade. Of these, some 5,000 have crossed the border, to seek refuge in Thailand. (Free Burma Rangers, 3-2-2007).

Recent Tatmadaw offensives in Karen areas seem designed – in part, at least – to gain control over previously contested areas, in order to undertake major infrastructure developments – such as the construction of a series of hydroelectric dams on the Salween River. If built, at an estimated cost of about over \$5 billion, the dams will flood an estimated 995 Km sq. of forest.

In November 2004 a coalition of Karen NGOs reported that three-quarters of the 85 villages in the vicinity of the planned dam sites had been forcibly relocated, since 1995, displacing tens of thousands of civilians. According to Karen Rivers Watch (KRW, p. 49), “the regime is using ‘development’ to justify its subjugation and militarization of the ethnic-controlled areas ... and mask the root causes of civil war in Burma.” It seems therefore, that the nature armed conflict is changing, in those parts of Burma where civil war has not come to an end. This finding may challenge the distinction, presented in this paper, between Types 1 and 2 forced migration: the fundamental causes of displacement for many new IDPs in Karen (and Karenni and Shan¹⁰) areas are related to proposed new development projects.¹¹ Nevertheless, the proximate causes of these peoples’ plight remains armed conflict, and related abuses and deprivations. These disturbing developments notwithstanding, since the provisional KNU ceasefire, the situation in other Karen areas has begun to stabilize. In parts of Tenasserim Division, and across much of central and southern Karen State, there is less fighting and somewhat fewer human rights violations than before.

Changing Patterns of Displacement and Rehabilitation

Since 2004, and the (provisional) KNU ceasefire, in some parts of Karen State, Type 1 IDPs have begun to return ‘spontaneously’ from hiding places in the jungle (and from relocation sites, and some refugee camps in Thailand), to build more permanent (wooden) houses and grow crops other than swidden rice. Especially in central and southern Karen State, many IDPs have moved from ceasefire zones into relatively more secure villages and peri-urban areas, influenced by both the government and armed groups (the KNU controls no ‘ceasefire zones’).

The total number of IDPs in Karen areas (eastern Pegu Division, Karen State and Tenasserim Division) recorded by the TBBC and partner groups in 2005 was 179,800 people, compared to about 190,400 in 2004 (TBBC October 2005). These changes reflected a decrease in the number of IDPs in hiding, relocation sites and ceasefire areas, since the KNU ceasefire.

As noted above, upon receiving relocation orders, or becoming subject to other forced migration pressures, some people enter relocation sites, while others go into ‘hiding in the jungle’, or move to other villages (including in ceasefire zones), and/or urban and peri-urban areas. Most relocation sites seem to disperse within a few years of their establishment, as the authorities ‘turn a blind eye’ to forcibly relocated communities’ efforts to return to their original land, or re-settle elsewhere. In many cases however conditions in relocation sites return to normalcy over time (by the standards of rural Burma), as people rebuild their

¹⁰ Between 1996-98, villagers in the vicinity of the proposed Tasang Dam, in central/southern Shan State, were subject to extensive and well-documented bouts of forced relocation; about 300,000 people (56,000 families) were forced to move to relocation sites, or to flee ([Shan Human Rights Foundation 2003](#)). Further rounds of forced relocation were reported in these areas, in 2005-06.

¹¹ Similar patterns emerged in the 1990s, when Mon and Karen civilians were forcibly displaced, prior to the construction of the Yadana Gas Pipeline between Burma and Thailand: South (2005, Chapter 13).

communities in the new location, often in partnership with CBOs and local NGOs. In such cases, residents may prefer life in the ‘new village’, to the uncertainties of return or resettlement elsewhere (and the possibility of being subject to a new round of displacement, in the future). Such rehabilitated relocation sites may offer better health and education services, and access to markets etc., than the remote village which people were originally forced to vacate.

In such cases the label ‘relocation site’ is not particularly helpful. Certainly, people’s vulnerabilities and needs – and the options for outside intervention – will be different to those of people in ‘classic’ relocation sites. Thus the importance of a community-based approach to needs analysis, which takes account of local responses to displacement. These distinctions also indicate that for many displaced people, rehabilitation in situ (a form of ‘spontaneous rehabilitation’) will be a preferred durable solution. In this paper, such rehabilitated communities have been included under the rubric of ‘Relatively More Secure Villages and Peri-urban Areas’.

These comments notwithstanding, many villagers remain ready to flee at short notice, and still often spend a night under the stars, if a Tatmadaw patrol approaches the village. Furthermore, many armed conflict-affected (especially border) areas remain heavily landmined – with important implications on any future refugee/IDP repatriation/rehabilitation activities.

Type 1: Responses and Impacts

Type 1 forced migrants’ vulnerabilities – and consequent needs – vary according to their response to displacement pressures. For example, given orders to relocate, villagers may adopt one or more of the following strategies (plus the increasingly difficult and dangerous option of seeking refuge in a neighbouring country) (Cusano, in Vincent & Sorensen 2001; HRW 2005; Field Notes passim):

1. Hide in – or close to – zones affected by on-going armed conflict and forced relocation (with the hope of returning home, but often remaining mobile for years);
2. Move to a relocation site;
3. Enter a ceasefire area;
4. Move to relatively more secure villages, towns or peri-urban areas, including ‘behind the front lines’ in war zones, in ceasefire zones, and in government-controlled locations.

In many cases, civilians from the same community, subject to the same migration pressure (e.g. a relocation order), will adopt a variety of different responses (Field Notes). Indeed, this is often the case within an individual family: elderly folks may attempt to stay at home; adults will go into hiding in the jungle, enter a relocation site, or seek new livelihood options in relatively more secure and stable villages, towns or urban areas; while some children may be sent to join relatives in town.

A displaced family or individual is more likely to adopt a life ‘in hiding’, in a zone of on-going armed conflict, if they have some form of pre-established relationship with an armed opposition group – such as relatives already living in insurgent-controlled areas, or family or

friends in the KNU (for example). Similarly, Type 1 IDPs will tend to enter a ceasefire area, or relocation site, if they have non-threatening relations with the relevant ceasefire group, or government/ Tatmadaw authorities.

CASE STUDY 2: KACHIN AND MON STATES

Type 2: State-Society Conflict-Induced Displacement

The case studies present mixed pictures of forced migration in Kachin and Mon States, since the agreement of ceasefires between the government and most insurgent groups in the mid-1990s. Patterns of (Type 1) armed conflict-induced displacement have come to an end (with the exception of some parts of southern Mon State, which are subject to on-going armed conflict). This section focuses on post-ceasefire local, national and international rehabilitation and resettlement activities in Kachin and Mon States, and what lessons these responses might have for the future in Karen and other areas.

Unfortunately, forced displacement has not come to an end in Kachin and Mon States, since the ceasefires. Over the past ten years, local communities have lost large amounts of land (and associated livelihoods), confiscated by the Tatmadaw, often in the context of its self-support policy, and by local authorities and business groups, including in the context of ‘development projects’, and due to unsustainable natural resource extraction. Furthermore, civilians in these areas continue to be subject to widespread forced labour, and other human rights abuses. These factors are all causes of on-going forced migration.

Nevertheless, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), New Mon State Party (NMSP) and some other ceasefire groups, and their local civil society partners, have implemented a range of resettlement, rehabilitation and development programs, despite limited human and financial resources. More could have been achieved, with greater government and international (financial and capacity building) support. There has though, been a ‘peace dividend’ in Kachin and Mon States, and the post-ceasefire re-emergence of civil-society networks is particularly encouraging.

As noted above, humanitarian conditions are generally better in ceasefire zones, than in government-controlled regions, relocation sites, or areas of on-going armed conflict. In general however, those who have benefited most from the ceasefires (villagers and community workers) have had the least ability to influence advocacy and political agendas – i.e. are denied ‘voice’. The advocacy literature regarding conditions in ceasefire areas is therefore rather distorted, and focuses disproportionately on negative developments. The lack of objective information and analysis makes it difficult for observers and actors to judge the desirability and prospects of ceasefires in areas of on-going armed conflict (e.g. Karen, Karenni and Southern Shan States).

Political Context

Between 1989 and 1995, ceasefire arrangements were brokered between General Khin Nyunt’s MI and a total of fifteen insurgent organisations (Smith 1999; South 2005). (At least a dozen local militias also agreed unofficial truces with the Burma Army during this period; these rarely had political agendas, beyond the maintenance of local autonomy). The

ceasefires are not peace treaties, and generally lack all but the most rudimentary accommodation of the ex-insurgents' political and developmental demands.

As Jake Sherman notes (in Sherman and Ballentine 2003, 241-42, 245):

the ceasefires have improved physical security in some former combat zones. Still, promised political dialogue and economic development have not been forthcoming, and thus the deeper causes of conflict remain unaddressed.

However, Sherman acknowledges that ceasefires do open space for basic economic development and that many ethnic minority organizations see this as a priority that is equal to that of democracy. He concludes that:

“the ceasefires have been driven and maintained both by a desire to avoid conflict and its humanitarian impact, as well as by the economic self-interest of leaders from rival sides, for whom increased access to resource wealth is a key motivation for ceasing hostilities.”

In most cases, the ex-insurgents have been allowed retain their arms, and have been granted de facto autonomy, and control of sometimes extensive blocks of territory. In some cases (e.g. the NMSP and KIO – see below), there is a clear demarcation between ceasefire group- and government-controlled territory; in the case of ceasefire groups which enjoy better relations with the government (e.g. the Pa-O National Organization: PNO), there is more overlap in zones of influence.

The significance of the ceasefires is a contested subject. Positive and negative assessments are summarized below:

TABLE 3 – Ceasefires in Burma: Positive and Negative Developments

Positive Post-ceasefire Developments	Negative Post-ceasefire Developments
<p>Positive assessments of the ‘ceasefire movement’ focus as much on process, as on the substance of short-middle term results.</p>	<p>Following ceasefires, the Tatmadaw has generally expanded into previously contested zones (on the ‘frontiers’ of demarcated ceasefire areas), increasing militarization, and undertaking widespread land confiscation, in the context of ‘development projects’ (bridge, road, airport construction), and in order to fulfil the Tatmadaw’s self-support policy (leaders of some ceasefire groups have also confiscated village land). Causes forced migration (internal displacement).</p>
<p>Relative decrease in most serious forms of human rights abuse (less murder, rape, torture, forced displacement – although incidents still occur), in those areas where ceasefires have held. Research indicates that humanitarian conditions are significantly better in ceasefire areas, than in government-controlled or war zones.</p>	<p>Continuing incidence of forced labour and other human and civil rights abuses in areas adjacent to ceasefire zones. Also, resumption of acute human rights abuses in the two main areas where truces have broken down, and armed conflict recommenced (Karenni State and southern Mon State). Causes forced migration (internal displacement).</p>
<p>Efforts to rehabilitate and resettle displaced populations, and reconstruct communities. Some successful community and economic development activities. If international donors had done more to support the KIO and other ceasefires, more could have been achieved.</p>	<p>Chronically under-resourced welfare services. Lack of state and international assistance has often undermined local rehabilitation and development activities (although some beneficial projects have been carried out under the Border Areas Development Program).</p>
<p>Expansion of indigenous language school and literacy programs, and the re-emergence of civil society networks within and between conflict-affected communities – among the most significant (but under-appreciated) aspects of the social and political situation in Burma over the past decade. Civil society initiatives, building local participation in the education, community development and welfare sectors, are better established in some geographic areas (e.g. Mon and Kachin States), and among some socio-religious communities (e.g. Christians) than others; local capacities are often quite limited.</p>	<p>Environmentally damaging and unsustainable natural resource extraction, by companies associated with government and ceasefire groups: logging (widespread), gold and jade mining (Kachin State).</p>
	<p>Civilians who previously only had to pay tax to one (state or insurgent) group, have subsequently had to provide money, goods and services to both the Tatmadaw and one or more ceasefire groups. Such problems are particularly acute and widespread in areas where more than one (often predatory) ceasefire group has claims over the populace (e.g. in parts of north and south Shan State).</p>

Positive Post-ceasefire Developments	Negative Post-ceasefire Developments
	<p>‘Top-down’ political cultures, and lack of accountability, transparency and effective governance in many Special Region administrations (also a problem among non-ceasefire groups, and in state agencies). Consolidation of opportunistic local power-holders (ceasefire group commanders, and their financial backers) whose motivation is primarily economic-extractive, many of whom are involved in illegal drugs production and trafficking (or the protection and taxation thereof).</p>
	<p>In many respects, the ‘ceasefire movement’ has frozen – rather than addressed – the socio-political issues structuring half a century of armed conflict in Burma. Lack of progress on the national political stage has been frustrating for the KIO in particular, as the prospect of political dialogue with Yangon was one of the key reasons for leaving the (KNU-dominated) National Democratic Front/Democratic Alliance of Burma (NDF-DAB) alliance, and negotiating a ceasefire between 1992-94.</p>
	<p>Recent moves by the government (and KIO) to restrict the activities of local NGOs and CBOs, in ceasefire and adjacent areas.</p>

Case Study Summary

Following a ceasefire agreed with the government in 1994, the KIO oversaw the return of 10,000 refugees from China, and helped to resettle about 60,000 IDPs within Kachin State (Field Notes and KIO reports). Although the KIO and local Kachin NGOs’ resettlement and reconstruction activities generally exhibited poor strategic and site planning (due to limited human and financial resources), they nevertheless implemented an impressive range of infrastructure and community development projects (Tosakul-Boonmathya 2002; Field Notes and KIO reports).

The post-ceasefire re-emergence of civil-society networks in Kachin State over the past decade is particularly encouraging (South 2004). Today there are many more CBOs and local NGOs than before ceasefire – although the KIO remains ambivalent regarding the roles of civil society groups, and the government may be moving to further restrict the sector. Such local associations grow out of a war-ravaged population, and provide services to resettled IDPs and others, while slowly building local capacity (Heidel 2006).

However, the post-ceasefire situation in Kachin State presents a mixed picture. The government’s attitude towards the Kachin and other ceasefire areas has been one of neglect –

or active obstruction.¹² In the context of a KNU ceasefire several other negative developments present worrying precedents. Although, since 1993, there have been no ‘Four Cuts’-type forced relocations in Kachin State, communities continue to still lose their land especially due to the following developments (all citations from Field Notes; see also HRW 2005):

Post-ceasefire Military Occupation and Confiscation of Farmland. For example, before the ceasefire, there were four Tatmadaw battalions in Bhamo District, southern Kachin State; by 2004, there were eleven, each of which had reportedly confiscated 3–400 acres of land.

Natural Resource Extraction. Up to 4000 people have been displaced by large-scale jade mining around Phakant, western Kachin State. Increased post-ceasefire logging and gold mining activities have also brought environmental damage to several areas (as well as charges of corruption against ceasefire groups officials).

Large-scale Agriculture and Development Projects. The state’s leasing of land to private companies often involves land confiscation, as does ‘development’-induced displacement – e.g. road, bridge and airport construction in the state capital of Myitkyina.

All of these factors have been causes of continued forced migration since the ceasefire – i.e. people are still being displaced, although the reasons why have changed. In many cases, the abuses outlined above, particularly land loss and forced labour, undermine villagers’ livelihoods so severely, that they have little choice but to migrate, either within Burma, or to a neighbouring country (see further below on livelihoods/vulnerability-induced migration).

The Mon State case study illustrates similar themes. Between 1993-96 – and especially after the 1995 NMSP ceasefire – about 10,000 Mon refugees were forced up to and across the border, by the Thai authorities. The Mon refugees were repatriated to NMSP-controlled ceasefire zones, with assistance from INGOs; UNHCR offered neither protection nor assistance (South 2005).

Some refugees returned home, but most remained in limbo, in camp-like conditions just over the border, with only limited access to agricultural land. Although now largely ‘invisible’ to Thailand and the international community, few of the Mon returnees have actually returned home – but continue to face chronic livelihoods and food security problems, and remain partially dependant on decreasing amounts of humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, as a consequence of on-going human rights abuses (and renewed outbreaks of insurgency) in Mon State, newly displaced villagers continue to seek refuge in the Mon ceasefire zones and refugee resettlement sites.

As in Kachin State, the most serious post-ceasefire problems in Mon State relate to housing, land and property rights:

¹² Kachin leaders claim that the SPDC wants to keep their area under-developed, and undermine the KIO’s standing within Kachin communities: Authors Field Notes

Post-ceasefire Military Occupation and Confiscation of Farmland. Since 1998, more than 11,000 acres of farmland have been confiscated by the Tatmadaw, mostly in order to build new garrisons in previously contested areas. Adding insult to injury, farmers have sometimes been forced to work on the confiscated land, building barracks and farming on behalf of the army (HURFOM 2003).

'Development'-induced Displacement. This includes the government's practice of building roads, bridges etc. on confiscated land, using conscripted labour.

Nevertheless, there have also been positive developments in Mon State over the past decade. An end to the armed conflict has generally improved conditions of human security – at least in areas where the ceasefire has held. As in Kachin State, the ceasefires have brought new opportunities to develop agriculture, and opportunities for travel and local trade (especially important to villagers; less highly valued by exiles and political elites). In many villages, livelihoods have improved considerably over the past decade.

Mon civil society has also seen impressive growth since the mid-1990s, as local NGOs and CBOs have implemented community development activities in the NMSP-controlled zones, and among Mon communities across lower Burma (cite your article here?). The NMSP-administered education system has also accomplished a great deal during this period. Despite some serious setbacks, during the 2004–05 school year the party administered 187 Mon National Schools and 186 'mixed' schools (shared with the state system), attended by nearly 50,000 pupils, 70% of whom live in government-controlled areas and previously had no access to indigenous language education.

Situation Update

Since the purge of General Khin Nyunt and his relatively 'progressive' faction, in October 2004, positive developments associated with the ceasefires have come under pressure from an increasingly 'hard-line' military government. (The ceasefire groups were among Khin Nyunt's major clients; the existence of these agreements lent the ex-PM kudos and political power.)

In April 2005 two (Shan and Palaung) ceasefire groups in northern Shan State were more-or-less forcibly disarmed by the Tatmadaw, and transformed into government-controlled militias (HRW 2005). Observers and actors expect more ceasefires to come under pressure, as powerful regional army commanders restrict the space available to non-state actors (Field Notes). A probable scenario is that, if/when the order to disarm comes from Yangon (possibly on conclusion of the on-going, government-controlled National Convention process, which is drawing up a new constitution for the country, in an attempt to institutionalize military rule: South 2004), elements of most ceasefire groups will comply, while some units will resume armed conflict.

Type 2: Responses and Impacts

Forced migrants' vulnerabilities vary according to their response to displacement pressures. When villagers are forced to move, alongside the difficult and dangerous option of seeking refuge in neighbouring China or Thailand, they may adopt one or more of the following strategies:

1. Re-settle close to their original location;
2. Move to a resettlement site (where one is provided);
3. Move to relatively more secure villages, towns or peri-urban areas (ceasefire zones or government-controlled areas, and/or 'mixed administration areas').

URBAN DISPLACEMENT (Type 2 Forced Migration)

The large-scale forced relocation of urban populations in Burma has been practiced by governments since the 1950s. The practice has intensified since 1988-1990, when several hundred residents of Yangon and other cities were forcibly moved to outlying 'satellite towns'. In late 2005, the SPDC ordered the relocation of Burma's administrative capital, and military command-and-control centre, from Yangon to the central Burma hill town of Pyinmana, 400 Km to the north. Construction of Senior General Than Shwe's new capital has reportedly displaced at least 10,000 local people, while thousands of government employees have been forced to move north, where living and working conditions are said to be Spartan at best. Urban displacement is considered a cause of Type 2 forced migration, as movement is forced (based on the threat or actual use of violence), and is often conducted in the name of 'development'.

Conditions, vulnerabilities and needs in 'new villages' vary, but are often similar to those in other government-controlled relocation sites. Also, like relocation site residents, many urban relocatees demonstrate great tenacity and resilience, in re-building their lives and communities in a new setting, under often very difficult circumstances. For people who relocate elsewhere (i.e. who do not move to the 'new villages'), vulnerabilities and needs will be similar to those in other relatively stable areas. Urban relocatees also have similar protection needs to other Type 2 forced migrants, especially in the field of land and property rights.

Local NGO and international agency programs with urban relocatees are mostly limited to some substitution and support activities, with occasional denunciatory advocacy conducted by non-Burma based groups. There are major gaps in both the data regarding urban relocation in Burma and its analysis. This in part explains the limited awareness of this as a protection issue among agencies 'inside' the country, and the subsequent lack of advocacy initiatives.

LIVELIHOOD VULNERABILITY-INDUCED MIGRATION (Type 3 Forced Migration)

Type 3 (livelihoods insecurity-induced) internal migration is more widespread than the more acute types of forced migration in Burma (Types 1 and 2). Type 3 migrants are not ordered, or physically compelled to move, by the use or threat of force. However, the types of migration described below are forced, inasmuch as people generally have little or no meaningful choice, other than to move (there is little or no 'option to remain': see typology and discussion above). This type of movement may be referred to as 'distress migration' or 'migration for survival'. Type 3 forced migrants therefore constitute a particularly vulnerable sub-group of the larger 'economic migrant' population.

The limited available evidence suggests that both temporary (seasonal and ‘commuting’) and permanent migration are on the increase in Burma. The type of periphery-centre population movement described here often increases following the agreement of ceasefires between the state and insurgent groups. During periods of armed conflict, travel in rural areas is usually difficult and dangerous, while the political economies of war, and control over civilian populations, are priorities for combatants on all sides. (As noted above, the state has pursued a policy of forcibly relocating civilians in war zones, while insurgent groups often encourage ‘their’ people to stay put, or to retreat behind the ‘front lines’ of conflict). Following the cessation of hostilities, civilians often exploit the new movement opportunities brought by relative peace.

Push and Pull Factors. Among the very large (but un-quantified) number of ‘economic migrants’, who move primarily because of ‘pull factors’, are a sub-group, whose migration is to a significant degree determined by ‘push factors’. Obviously, the patterns of abuse and displacement associated with forced migration Types 1 and 2 undermine livelihoods, often leading eventually to migration. Other ‘push factors’ include natural disaster (floods and tsunamis, fires etc.), population pressure, soil depletion and land fragmentation, and the impossibility of sustaining family livelihoods in remote areas. The proximate causes of ‘Type 3’ migration are human insecurity, lack of access to education and health services, and poor access to markets for local produce. The roots causes are structured by decades of poor governance, and the underdevelopment of remote, ethnic nationality-populated (often conflict-affected) border areas.

People also move to access labour markets. Although attitudes in the mainstream development industry are sometimes negative – and programs often aim to reduce migration – for many of those involved, internal migration is an important coping and livelihood strategy, which can lead to the accumulation of household wealth.

Type 3: Responses and Impact. Migrants’ vulnerabilities – and consequent needs – vary according to the phase of migration:

1. Pre-migration phase, and remaining inhabitants;
2. Migrants in transit (including to neighbouring countries);
3. Migrants in peri-urban and urban areas.

Opium Eradication and Displacement in the Kokang Special Region

Migration due to opium eradication programs is categorized as Type 3 forced migration (‘distress migration’), because the proximate causes of movement are related to livelihoods issues – i.e. with the important exception of some Wa areas, people are not ordered to move. However, opium eradication-induced migration could also be considered under Type 2 forced migration, due to the forcible nature of the opium bans, the severe shock to livelihoods involved, and the links to development activities. As people who have “been forced or obliged ... to leave their homes ... as a result of ... human-made disasters” they may be considered IDPs according to the Guiding Principles.

The third case study focuses on the situation in the Kokang Special Region 1, a ceasefire zone controlled by the ex-CPB National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) – but

strongly (and increasingly) influenced by the Tatmadaw. Following a 1989 ceasefire with the government, the Kokang ceasefire zone underwent an economic boom (and considerable immigration from China), as a result of increased opium harvests and heroin refining activities, from which both the MNDAA and regional Tatmadaw commanders benefited financially (even if most were not involved directly). The local Kokang and other ethnic minority communities also benefited somewhat from the 'opium boom' of the 1990s. However, most villagers remained very poor, and grew opium poppy only to fill a rice deficit of (in many cases) up to nine months per year, caused by the poor growing conditions for paddy in the steep Kokang hills (Field Notes: UN sources).

In 1997 the MNDAA announced a ban on growing and processing opium. This was due to a combination of national (government) and international (Chinese and UN) pressure – and the example of drugs-free development in neighbouring China. Although initially unsuccessful, by 2002 the ban had been implemented across much of Kokang.

Responses and Impacts. The opium ban resulted in farmers' incomes dropping by an average of 70%, leading to extreme livelihoods and human security shocks (Field Notes: UN sources). Strangely, the humanitarian crisis produced by the poppy ban was unforeseen by the Kokang or SPDC authorities – or by their main development partner, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), whose buckwheat crop substitution plan had clearly failed by 2002 (though the agency has provided some useful infrastructure).

Plummeting standards of living have led to health and nutrition crises, and caused high school drop-out rates, as well as having serious environmental impacts. The humanitarian crisis caused extensive (mostly non-voluntary) out-migration, to China and the Wa ceasefire areas (where villagers could continue to grow poppy, for a while at least). One third of the population reportedly migrated from Sri in 2003, after the opium ban (60,000 people, out of an estimated population of 180-200,000: Field Notes).

Protection Issues. The steep, and relatively densely-populated, hillsides of Kokang are ideally suited to poppy cultivation. However, even for those who own land, it seems unlikely that this terrain could support more than 6-9 months of rice needs.

The future looks particularly bleak for the 20-30% of the ceasefire zone population who are not ethnic Kokang. Few Palaung, Miao and Lisu villagers own their own fields, having previously worked as day labourers for Kokang villagers, and/or Chinese and other opium entrepreneurs. These communities are finding it particularly difficult to switch to alternative livelihoods (Field Notes).

In the event of humanitarian aid being withdrawn¹³, a significant proportion of the population will have little choice but to leave Kokang. It seems likely that most migrants would come from the marginalized and especially vulnerable non-Kokang communities. The primary protection issue in Kokang therefore relates to the vulnerability to forced migration of local (especially non-Kokang) populations – which could alter the ethnic make-up of the region.

¹³ In 2003 the UN World Food Program started emergency food distributions in Kokang. With a proposed budget of \$8 million, the agency plans to assist 347,600 people in Shan State during 2005-06. A number of other international and local agencies have projects in the Kokang and other ex-opium producing areas of Shan State.

If lessons are not learned from Kokang, the impacts of the opium ban – and resulting vulnerabilities – are likely to be reproduced in United Wa State Party (UWSA)-controlled zones and elsewhere. One by-product of opium eradication policies in Wa areas has already been the forcible relocation of at least 50,000 villagers (probably more), from opium growing areas in the northern Wa sub-state (Jelsma, Kramer and Vervest 2005; Field Notes).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has focussed on some crucial, but generally overlooked, aspects of forced migration in Burma, including the phenomenon of serial displacement. Many IDPs and others move repeatedly, sometimes for a combination of different reasons (i.e. a mixture of the ‘ideal’ Types 1-3); others have been displaced for some time, and have found at least semi-durable solutions to their plight; many are living inter-mixed with communities who are not – or have not recently been – displaced.

Forced migrants’ needs can only be assessed, and appropriate interventions planned, if the full complexity of displacement situations in Burma are understood. Humanitarian (and political) actors should therefore respect, and respond to, the voice and agency of forced migrants, and enrol their participation in all aspects of program planning and implementation.

In most cases, forced migrants, and communities threatened by displacement, have distinct vulnerabilities and special protection needs related to the causes of migration (especially armed and state-society conflict). These concerns link humanitarian needs to explicitly political issues.

Effective conflict resolution in Burma must address underlying issues, which have structured decades of conflict in the country. However, it is not necessary to wait for political solutions before addressing the needs outlined in this paper. The acute humanitarian crises faced by IDPs and other forced migrant populations in Burma demands immediate action.

The Need for Effective Protection

The presence of international and local agencies in conflict-affected and other parts of Burma presents opportunities to assist vulnerable populations.¹⁴ However, humanitarian assistance is

¹⁴ The period from November 2003 to September 2004 saw the rapid opening of humanitarian space in Burma. Unfortunately, since the October 2004 demise of Khin Nyunt, and subsequent purge of his MI establishment, the extent of humanitarian space in the country has begun to constrict. Nevertheless, the situation in early/mid-2006, although less favorable than in 2004, is still better than in 2000–02. The recent overall decline in the quality and amount of ‘humanitarian space’ available in Burma is reflected in a set of draft *Guidelines for UN Agencies, International Organizations and NGO/INGOs on Cooperation Program in Burma*, produced by the Prime Minister’s office in February 2006. Among the more worrying proposals included in these *Guidelines* are the suggestion that the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development should accompany UN and INGO staff on all field trips; the proposed supervisory roles to be played by Central and State-Divisional Coordinating Committees; and the government’s plan to vet Burmese national UN and INGO staff. If the *Guidelines* are implemented as presently drafted, it seems likely that many international aid operations in Burma will be forced to cease (as has already been the case with the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis – although in this case, there were additional, politically-driven consideration behind the decision to withdraw). Indeed, in February 2006 MSF-France quit Burma, claiming that increased government

not a substitute for protection, and humanitarian access is not in itself sufficient to ensure protection. In order to be effective, protection activities must be devised as part of a coherent and conscious strategy (Hugo and Bonwick 2005). One of the greatest challenges facing international agencies in Burma is how to achieve a dynamic balance between short- and longer-term assistance interventions, while keeping a focus on protection concerns.

By employing a range of strategies – including supporting the practices of affected communities, and local NGOs and CBOs – it is often possible to address protection concerns, in the process of meeting other basic needs. As well as providing services (directly or through local structures), the range of protection activities includes ‘securing compliance’ with international norms, by state and other armed groups.

One of the main types of action required to stop abuse (or its recurrence) is advocacy. Humanitarian advocacy aims at protecting civilians from – or alleviating the impacts of – abuse, and falls under three broad modes: denunciation, mobilization and persuasion (‘responsibilization’). Some agencies – primarily human rights-oriented groups based outside the country – rightly denounce the violation of basic rights involved in forced displacement, and call for fundamental changes in Burma (i.e. appropriate conflict resolution), or at least radically improved behaviour on the part of the state and armed groups. However, in most cases, their recommendations have been rather general, with few attempts to seriously consider what might be achieved in practice.

The production of large volumes of public advocacy material has prompted some international agencies operating inside Burma to acknowledge the protection deficit in many areas, and become more pro-active in attempting to address these concerns. However, organizations working inside the country cannot afford to be as bold in their advocacy roles as those in Thailand and overseas. They have sometimes adopted more subtle strategies, of attempting to persuade perpetrators to change their behaviour – or using their access to conflict areas, and awareness of human rights abuses, to ‘mobilize’ those agencies operating in persuasive or denunciation modes. For example, CBOs ‘inside’ Burma may pass on human rights information to their local and international counterparts in Thailand or elsewhere. There is evidence that the existence of such ‘protection and advocacy networks’ has served to reduce the incidence of human rights abuses in some parts of Karen and Karenni States.

Indirect and behind-the-scenes advocacy are areas where UN agencies, INGOs and the ICRC in Burma have made some progress in the past few years. Action at the national level has in many cases been reflected in genuine cooperation ‘on the ground’, between some state and UN agencies, and local and international NGOs. Behind-the-scenes advocacy with national, state and local authorities has helped to build a more ‘protective environment’ – especially in the fields of HIV/AIDS and harm reduction, and human trafficking and child rights. Efforts should be made to strengthen and extend such models to other areas.

This would involve international agencies in policy discussions with government (and ceasefire group) authorities, on governance and reform in a range of sectors – e.g. sustainable

restrictions had made its operations in Mon and Karen States untenable. (As MSF avoids working with local structures, and thus does little to build local capacities, it was ill-prepared to operate in an increasingly constricted humanitarian environment.)

rural development (including in the context of opium eradication in Shan State); agriculture, taxation and livelihoods policies; and the provision of health and education services in remote areas. Efforts should also be made to expand engagement on better governance to cover legal issues, such as the development of enhanced standards of – and respect for – individual and community land and property rights.¹⁵

The ICRC’s ‘protective presence’, in those areas of on-going armed conflict to which the red cross has access, is reportedly very effective. However, most other international (and especially UN) agencies in Burma undertake only limited advocacy activities on behalf of forced migrants.

Collaborative protection activities can sometimes be undertaken in partnership between international and local organizations. Civil society groups in Burma are often present in remote, conflict-affected areas, but rarely have access to the ‘corridors of power’. In contrast, international agencies cannot always reach populations with the most acute needs, but do have access to a range of national and international powerholders. It is therefore important that international agencies continue to develop dialogue and partnerships with appropriate civil society networks in Burma.

Durable Solutions, and Rehabilitation

Substantial and sustained protection from forced migration, and the rehabilitation of displaced populations and reconstruction of communities, depend ultimately on settlements to the conflicts which cause displacement in Burma. Unfortunately, efforts at conflict resolution have met with only limited success.

As noted, humanitarian, development and political actors’ ability to understand long-term patterns of forced migration in Burma are particularly important, given the evidence from Kachin and Mon States that conflict and displacement may not come to an end with the cessation of insurgency. These findings should alert local, national and international agencies to the fact that civilians in supposedly ‘post-conflict’ settings in Burma experience continuing humanitarian (including protection) needs.

Nevertheless, the Mon and Kachin case studies illustrate the range of projects that can be implemented by local authorities (ceasefire groups) and civil society (CBOs and local NGOs), in the context of less-than-ideal ceasefires, in previously armed conflict-affected areas. More might have been (and still might be) achieved, with greater support from the government and international agencies.

As noted above, since a provisional ceasefire was agreed between the government and KNU, the situation in some Karen areas has begun to stabilize. Across parts of lower and western Karen State, there is less fighting, and fewer acute human rights violations than before. However, civilians are still subject to a range of abuses, including new problems similar to those experienced post-ceasefire in Kachin and Mon States.

¹⁵ Displaced people have ‘a right to a remedy’, as recognized in the *Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Person* (UNHCR 2005).

These developments raise the subject of displaced people's rehabilitation, including issues of resettlement and return. The primary concern relates to 'durable solutions' – both political settlements, and aid interventions which link relief and development.

Due to the prevalence of refugee-oriented mindsets, humanitarian and political strategists often assume that most IDPs will want to go home (the equivalent of refugee repatriation – but without the legal protection element). However, the primary research cautions against such assumptions: at least some (Type 1 and other) forced migrants may prefer to remain in situ – especially if their concerns for physical security are adequately addressed. Other displaced people will want to resettle elsewhere – either returning home, or moving to a new location – especially if sustainable solutions are found to long-running armed and state-society conflicts in Burma.

The 'durable solution' of local integration may allow IDPs to escape cycles of displacement, and begin to re-build their lives. Whether they want to stay in their present settlement, or return to a previous place (which may, or may not, constitute 'home'¹⁶) will in part depend on IDPs' current degree of livelihoods and human security in situ (i.e. whether they have found at least semi-durable solutions to their plight). Another important factor in the decision will be their knowledge of what has happened to their old homes, land and other property, and whether these have since been occupied – by the state or Tatmadaw (or other armed group), by private commercial interests (often linked to state or para-state agencies), or by other civilians (quite possibly, other IDPs). As in refugee repatriation, the principle of informed voluntariness should be central to any decisions regarding solutions to internal displacement in Burma.

¹⁶ A recent publication (Vincent and Sorensen 2001, p. 266) suggests that "studying displaced people's longer-term strategies of mobility and locality will help humanitarian organisations to avoid basing their assistance on false assumptions about 'home' and 'belonging'.... [Such an approach] should underscore the importance of designing actions not according to preconceived notions, but according to the way internally displaced persons live their lives, in all their complexity."

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