

Sagaing Region, Myanmar

After Coup Upper Chindwin River GOLD MINING REPORT 2023



This is the research published by the Kuki Women Human Rights Organization on the ground mining conditions of the Upper Chindwin River and the Uru River after the coup.

After Myanmar Coup Chindwin & Uruk River

GOLD MINING REPORT | 2023

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Contents

1. The Research Purpose
2. In-depth Regional Research and Its Population Chart
3. Methods of Operation
4. Report Summary
5. Gold Mining and Local People Condition
6. Traditional Work and Career
7. Entrepreneurial Companies
8. The Perils of Gold Mining Impacts
 - Youth and Employment
 - Drugs
 - Women and Employment
 - Violence
 - Health
9. Suggestions
10. Case Study

Kuki Women Human Rights Organization

Kuki Women Human Rights Organization is founded by the Kuki schoolgirls who had fled from Myanmar after 1988 student uprising in 2000 Moreh, Manipur, India.

In 2004, it became a member organization of the Women's League of Burma (WLB) based in Thailand. The battle continues for Myanmar's indigenous women's groups and federal democracy, women's rights and human rights. In May 2014, on the basis of a slight improvement in the national situation in Myanmar, the headquarter was opened in Tamu, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, and a branch was opened in Homalin Township.

Goal

1. Improving the standard of living for low-lying Kuki women for generations and reducing cultural gender discrimination.
2. Working to secure the security and peaceful lives of women within their borders.
3. Research into human rights violations in their Kuki region.

Current Procedures

Current handling processes:

1. The Process of Eliminating Violence Against Women
2. Providing comfort discussions with a safe shelter for women.
3. Promoting women's capacity.
4. The process of peace and reconciliation.
5. Land and environmental protection process.
6. Women's Peace and Security

The Research Purpose

Following the 2021 military coup, gold mining operations along the Upper Chindwin River and the Uru River are under way as never before. Taking advantage of the situation in the country by entrepreneurs to inform the public of illegal actions against the locals and to build a future federal country. This is aimed at using as a relevant role in the consultation on the allocation of resources.

Inscribed Research Location and Population Chart

No	Gold Mining site/ Villages	Interview/ Discussion		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Hkenam Village	3	2	5
2	Mai kaing Village	3	2	5
3	Moelin Village	1	2	3
4	Boljang Village	2	1	3
5	Khomunnom Village	1	2	3
6	Marlone Village	2	3	5
7	Khonomphai Village	1	2	3
8	Manly Village	4	1	5
	Total	17	15	32

Action Methods

The current situation of the country is a time that everything is difficult, and there is a lack of law enforcement. Thus, before conducting an in-depth study, they conducted a preliminary study of the local conditions they wanted to do, made information and requests from armed force groups controlled within the area where needed. Additionally, the forms of questions they would use were also prepared with skilled teachers, but they tested a village to see if it was easy for local residents to find out if it was easy.

Although there are many gold mining operations along the upper riverbanks, the road conditions of their members, and the gold industry Consulting with some local residents, they conducted an inspection of four locations along the Chindwin River and (4) along the Uru River.

This Questionnaire is done with the form of interview, especially to the person with a good socio-economic position in the village and to the disadvantaged person for the proportion.

Summary

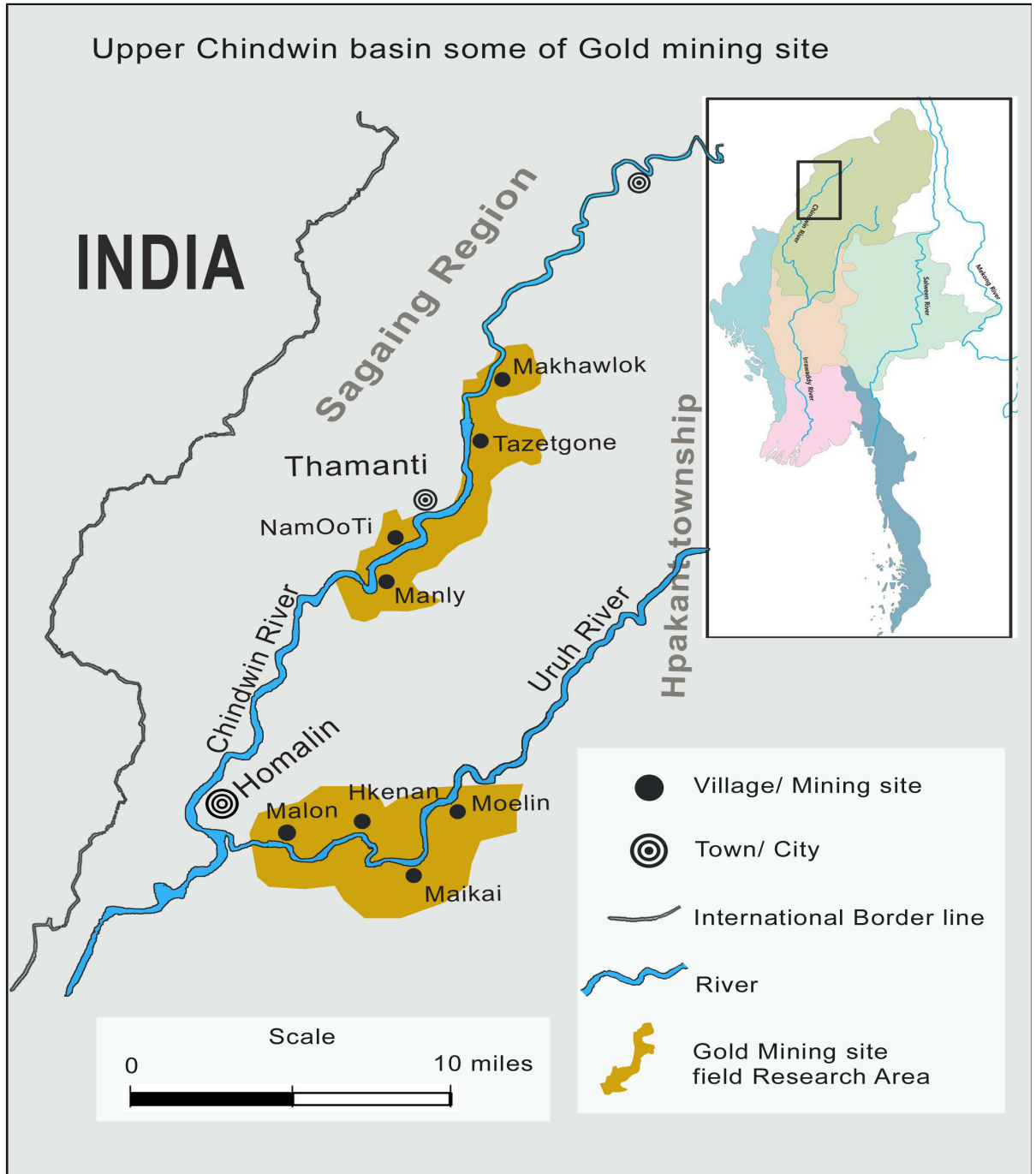
In the upper Chin River, Homalin, Khamty and some parts of Uru River mining workplace were conducted ground research with regard after Coup. According to the research, the upper part of the Chindwin River along with the Uru River is a region of high-quality gold. Instead of using any mechanisms, residents work to facilitate family living costs and school expenses by means of a hand-excavated system. Moreover, the Tamanty Dam, which will be able to transmit 1,200 megawatts on the Chindwin River had been began and in 2007/2008 large gold mining entrepreneurs and timber manufacturing companies entered. In 2015, there were a total of more than 100 small and large companies. In the years since, the Chindwin River has become unclean, full of toxins, and sandbanks along the river have emerged, and boats and ships running along the river have not been able to run life before. Local residents living along the Chindwin River use it as drinking water and agriculture, as well as one of the only navigational communications that is primarily dependent on social and economic activities.

After 2021 coup, though there was no expansion of the new gold mining site, there has been a widespread expansion in the existing workplace, and in other regions, some entrepreneurial companies have also entered.

After Coup, Local workers are unable to operate the work due to Country's chaos, its heavy rise in commodity and diesel prices, and then companies from other regions collaborate with the local armed forces.

Particularly taking advantage of the country's instability after the coup, vendors of a mind-altering pill and a heroin sold cheaper price than ever before with unhindered, transportation and drugs use among teenagers has accelerated.

This is how the military council is using the drug as a strategy. Lands and fields which are their traditional profession were destroyed and no land to continue their traditional cultivation and even their villages were filled with stone-shaped. It is saddened to identify that not only theft, robbery, and rape but also that if there is any problem, justice and truth are lost.



Gold Mining and Local Residents Condition

Initially, young people actively worked while entrepreneurial companies of gold mining entered into their villages. Women are also happy that their village is developing because crops are sold more expensive than ever. But sooner or later, local people have come to calculate the long-term profits and the losses. Nevertheless, most still ignore the ruin of their land, villages, and young people.

The worst is that, no one is aware of Chindwin River, which is used daily as agriculture and drinking water, is damaged by gold mining. In regard of the damage of Chindwin River, Kuki Women Human Rights Organization had been reported since 2015, but no responses have been found by the former government and local authorities till today. Before Coup, one gold miner has received between 2 lakhs to 3 lakhs kyats wages. However, after Coup, commodity prices jumped-up extremely, and the wages of local workers were not increased from entrepreneurs.

Conditions of selling gold quarrying land with entrepreneurial companies have also become the unilateral will of entrepreneurs, and it leads to local people who have lost their land are facing unreliable situations and difficulties.



A damaged plantation while local residents are working

Interview with local resident

“ In the previous time, if companies would like to buy the bamboo fields, farms and any lands for gold mining sites, there were a set prices, and it helps problems lesser. Now, when the country’s settlement is chaos, there is no court to solve the problem and they are taking advantage and humiliating us. On the other hand, the military, police, office supervisor, the village administrator, and the armed forces have raised excessive money, and eventually only our local people are facing losses.”



Some local indigenous peoples who went to their workplace of cultivation

Traditional work and career

Although upper Chindwin River has long been a gold-producing region, local people mainly operate cultivating and farming. Villagers who live along the Chindwin River cultivate groundnut, mustard, bean and other crops along the riverbank. Other commercial farming are orange fields, tea-leaf fields, bamboo fields and daga fields. As a livestock, cattle and oxen are raised to cultivate farms, and other chickens, pigs, and ducks are raised for indoor use.

Men search for fish in the river for indoor consumption, and women are pursuing tea-leaves and crops for meals along the riverbank as traditional careers.

Now, the local people are not able to continue their traditional careers such as cultivating fields, bamboo fields, farms due to whether or not sale agreement, floating abandoned stones, perils of local armed forces threats and compensation. They have no more choice none other than to depend on entrepreneurial companies.

Interview with local resident

“ Before gold mining companies entered into our village, we planted regular seasonal crops in the village, and the rice was sufficient for a year, and we didn’t have to buy vegetables outside. Now gold mining and its floating stone-banks affected our cultivating fields, farms are damaged and crops are stolen. Even if we planted hardly, we didn’t eat, we had to buy outside, and gradually we became supposed to be jobless. On the other hand, when some local people sell their land, it doesn’t mean that they want to sell, but there is both legal and illegal pressure and threats behind. For instance, If their preferred land is farmed by the local people, they demand gram to prove. If they can’t prove, they occupied the land. Some relied on weapons and demand the land that they want, and the villagers have to sell for safety. Some relied on weapons to pay for their own safety, and there were some lands need to be sold due to its geographical position that would be damaged by the floating stones if they did not sell it.”



Some Local residents' cultivating farms in 2020

Entrepreneurial Companies

Even if New gold mining sites were not expanded along the upper Chindwin River and Uru Riverbank after the 2021 coup, the existing gold mining sites are increased and entered numbers of entrepreneurial companies. Most of these entrepreneurial companies come from Monywa and Mandalay, and some of the local wealthy also linked to local authorities and operate it. After 2021 Coup, Shanni Armed Forces and Militants joined together, occupied some nugget lands of the local farms and operate gold mining.

Since 2013 to 2017, one acre land price is set for 15 lakhs Kyats, and from 2018 the price increased 20 to 25 lakhs kyats depending on the gold nugget of the workplace, the purchase was adjusted between local landowners and entrepreneurs.

This allocation reduced much on the problem between entrepreneurs and the local landowners.

However, it is often resolved by the village authorities and cultural leaders whether it is problems with abandoned floating stones between entrepreneurs or problems with land between local landowners and entrepreneurs.

However, after the coup, things changed, and local authorities were not influential to the villagers like before, and silent for their security.



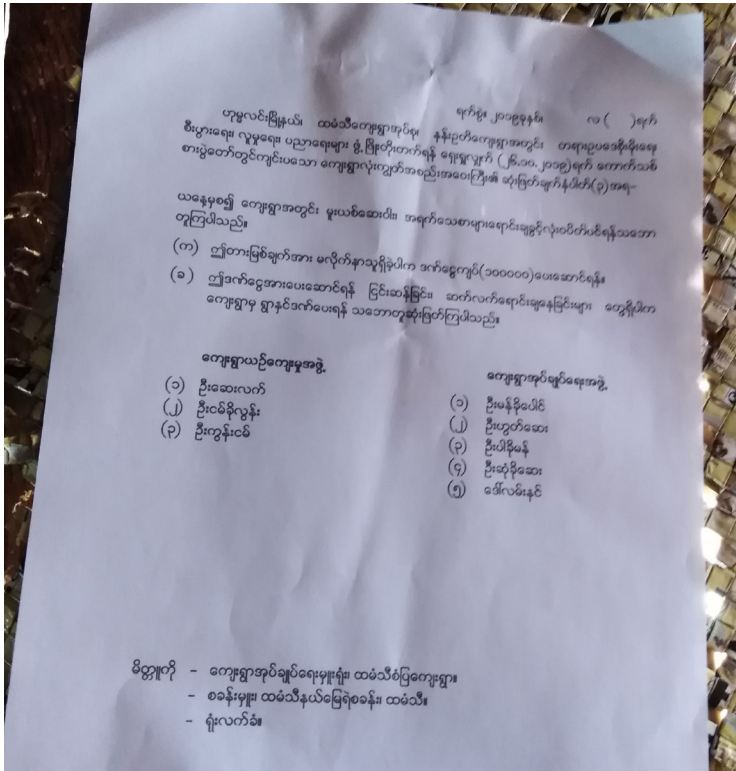
Land destroyed by gold mining along to the Uru Riverbank

They operated with under the rights of military council such as police, local armed forces and local authorities.

They paid to Chief Commander (10) lakhs per gold site, Colonel level was paid (30) lakhs per month, local authorities and police were paid (30) lakhs per month and other Generals were paid (100) lakhs.

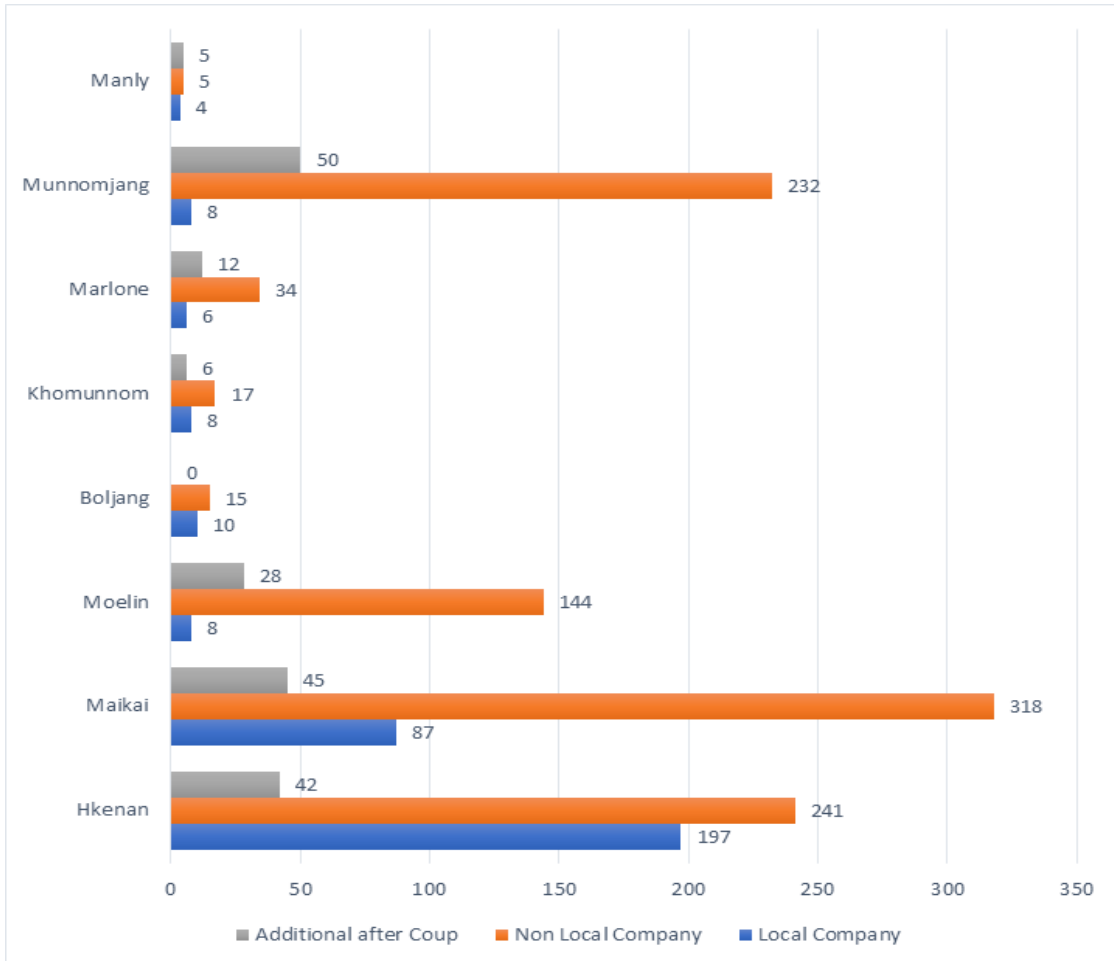
Moreover, the gold mining entrepreneurs still paid to local armed forces and local authorities depending on their gold sites. Some local perspectives who serve under the Military Council despite even though they displeased with their actions and attitudes, they keep silent for their own safety.

Chief Commander (10) lakhs per gold site, Colonel level was paid (30) lakhs per month, local authorities and police were paid (30) lakhs per month and other Generals were paid (100) lakhs.



A Meeting recorded photo trying to prevent drugs by local residents from the tribal level to the local authority before coup.

The difference of gold mining operation between local residents, immigrants from other territories and a new entered gold miner status after Coup.



“ This picture witnesses that even though the numbers of new entrants gold operations after Coup is less than the existing gold mining, in reality, the new entrants have more opportunities and are operating extensively than the existing entrepreneurs who are normally working. ”

Interview with local resident

“ In these days, it doesn't mean that we are comfortable, we are afraid of the military and its puppet gangs such as Pyusawhtee, local armed force Shanni group, and all the administrative authorities. We can be beaten and killed at any time, we don't know whose to be paid the taxes, and so we are afraid of everyone. Before Coup, we paid to the municipality and even if there is a problem, they negotiate the problem there. Now, whether a land issue or a problem between the employers happen, there is no court to solve the problem. Some gold miners accompany with the armed forces in order to get what they want whether lawful or not, just or unjust but the people who were really hurt are the local residents. ”



Entrepreneurial companies are pumping with machines from the pool

The Perils of Gold Mining Impacts

The upper Chindwin Riverbank is filled with a green natural forest, and local residents rely on the Chindwin River for drinking and for the purpose of agricultural use. Moreover, there is Tamanty Dam Project which will discharge 1200 megawatts on the upper Chindwin River. In 2007/2008, Homalin and Khanty district, along the Chindwin Riverbank, large gold mining entrepreneurs and logging companies entered, with more than (100) small and large companies in 2015. During the regime of U Thein Sein in 2010, entrepreneurial companies using machines have entered, and that leads Chindwin River unclean with toxins.

There are emerging sandbanks along the river. Boats and ships which are running along the river were no longer able to run. Those who live along the riverbank have faced transportation block with other economic and social villages because Chindwin River is the only transportation communication. Since the Chindwin River is no longer possible to drink, the local residents are supposed to dig and drill well expensively, and cattle are also facing disease and death increasingly.



The emerged sandbanks are located around the house and the village

After military coup in 2021, another exacerbated by Covid-19 crisis, and the country fall into chaos situation, commodity prices rose extremely, large entrepreneurial companies are also increasingly trafficking thief, murder, and drugs in the region selling like vegetables, and young people became as drug victims.



Local resident's farmlands destroyed by wastewater from gold mining

Youth and Employment

The upper Sagaing region of Homalin and Khanty are a remote cities area. In this Spring Revolution, young people holding Sagaing registration number (5/) were strictly surveillance by the Military Council and the young people who didn't involve in the People Defence Force (PDF) have faced difficulty leaving abroad for work and study. Especially Homalin, Nantaw and Khanty areas extremely faced risk transportation to connect with another regions. Teenagers in the village who are schooling help their parents only in the vocation day working in groundnut field and mustard field. Some teenagers also help their parents working nearby the gold mining sites and schooling when the school reopens. Nevertheless, most of the teenagers were hesitated to go to the school which is open by military council. They stop schooling and start working in the gold mining sites in where they could help their parents somehow. Since they are missing opportunities to study, most women choose to work nearby the gold mining sites in cooking.

Drugs

In the past many years, morphine drug has been used as medicine from the elderly in the areas of upper Chindwin Riverbank. However, in 2008 later, heroin (local named No.4) and drug pills entered along with gold mining companies. During the former regime, drug-prevention activities were being carried out somehow and it is not so obvious. Drugs are being sold in most gold nuggets, since they pay tribute to government departments, it is done to keep the village elderly unaware. In some village, women drug-prevention groups also arrested drug dealers and handed to the municipal drug committee.

But sadly, after the military coup 2021, Drug dealers and users behave openly and fearlessly. They use and sell not only in the gold sites but also in the villages. Drug is available to buy with 500 kyats and selling like a vegetable. There is no one to prevent and arrest. Drug users in the village have increased speedily as amateur user and fallen into addiction. Currently drug addicted are mostly young people. Before Coup, drug users were mostly from (30s to 50s) years people, but after the military coup, they were around 20 years old and estimated 70 % of young people are becoming drug users in the village.

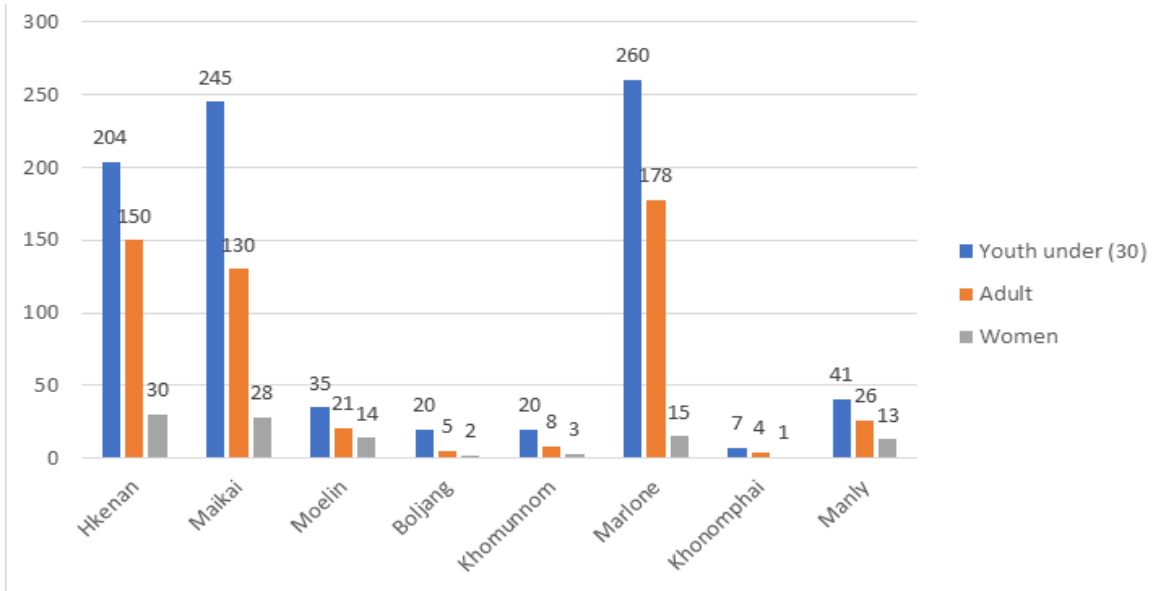


some Mining site the Gold workers play gambling night time



Gold mining workplace

Drug Users Stand by Age



The above list is only by drug users in the local residents (villagers) and not included workers and entrepreneurs from other regions.

Women and Employment

When it is claimed to be a woman around us, people immediately thought they are for child bearer and household chore. According to field-research, it is real in gold mining sites. Women are not allowed to enter and work in the workplace. But it is undoubted fact that women are working from early morning to till night bed at dawn.

After coup, commodity prices increased speedily and the worst place is gold mining sites. The commodities price has increased three times due to transportation block and travel crisis. Some women leave their children behind and work in the gold mining sites. Some young women even enter into the entrepreneurial companies for cook. When it is unskilled work though tiring, one ordinary worker in the gold mining site received (30) thousands per month, a woman's wage ranged from (10) thousand to (15) thousand kyats.



Picture of lake dried up, filled with sandbanks by gold mining

Women Against Violence

Most entrepreneurial company owners called the young women fluent in cooking. As young women stay among the male crowds, they often faced not only mental harassment but also physical harm and danger indeed. Even if they want to resign the job because of such unbearable harassment, they keep quite due to the poor condition of the family. There are sexual abused, raped and killed everywhere. Thus, they quit and financial solutions are common. If they are dissatisfied, there is no court to go to.

Interview with local resident

“ If we plan for schooling, there is no school, if plan going to city for finding job, travel is inconvenient and insecure, so we have none other choice than working in the gold mining sites to solve the family problems. Though the job is for cooking, gold mining owners order us to do in all areas and there is no rest time. Since the site is in the forest, there is no safety for a woman. As we stay among males, we afraid of the unseen dangers and pretending everything is well. If so, we are being abused, if not, we are insecure. If we give up and plan to return, we are being called as lazy girls, if we hold money, we are gossiped by the people saying that it's not by hard work, being accused to be cunning on her boss and discriminated to be concubine. And sometimes we even don't want to live anymore” said, a woman who had ever worked as cooking in gold mining sites confessed.”

Health

In 2014, Kuki Women Human Rights Organization conducted awareness seminar to the local people regarding the rising of toxicity from gold mining companies with machinery that used mercenary in order to extract gold. In the awareness seminar, we explored how cyanide turn to poison the Chindwin River and Uru River. However, the local residents can't accept the term "water" which can be poisonous because they can't miss the idea of drinking any water. As the result of gold mining companies that used mercenary, it turned into poison and have spread widespread into lakes, rivers increasing disease of livestock and deaths.

Although there is no poisoned significance in children and young people, a look back at the survival situation among the elderly reveals that the elderly's deaths are accelerating compared to when there is no gold mining. One local resident stated that "this is the consequences of drinking unclean water and gold mining destroyed trees and hills, climate change, and increased temperatures". Entrepreneurs have dig water wells for local residents in some villages, but chemical poisoning that penetrates the ground has also resulted and 2015 later, it can be known that Genetic Pregnancy Crash have been increased compared to the past.



Image filled with wasted mud around the village



Suggestion

to the future federal democratic government

To immediately halt political instability, lack of law enforcement, and all gold mining upper Chindwin River.

To halt local armed forces groups and forcing local residents to sell their lands as soon as possible.

To draft the needed laws and regulations for the management of the country's natural resources, strong laws protecting the preservation of the traditional heritage of indigenous peoples.

To provide the necessary facilities to rehabilitate the damaged sites.

CASE STUDY - 1

Village - [REDACTED]
House - 00 (Name change - Leikot)

Background and Traditional Career

Leikot locally named “Laykoh) is a small village of Kuki ethnic and was established in 1957. This Kuki small village is included in Malin group of Homalin township and located east of the Chindwin Riverbank and is currently being damaged by gold mining.

Local residents relied primarily on the migrant cultivation system, and crops are grown seasonally for family consumption and local minority were farming. To generate family income, they also worked on bamboo fields, daga fields and grown groundnut and mustard along the riverbank during summer. In the past, the villagers excavated with handy-work system to generate school fees for their children and Christmas expenses. The uniqueness of Leikot (Laykoh) village is that gold can be excavated not only underground but also around the surface soil (one feet). Thus, local residents can easily take gold in their own bamboo fields without any machinery.



Notice : Due to the security situation the name of the village is given in false name.

The Influx of Machinery Companies

After 2010, gold-mining companies began to enter along with Tin Win Tun's timber manufacturing company. Initially, they purchased the local resident's cultivated land 3 to 4 miles from the village with 40000 to 50000 kyats and operated the gold mining but later their bamboo field and farms around the village were slowly damaged.

After 2015, the local resident's farms and lands were begun to destroy and faced scarce farming and then they themselves began to make gold mining as their career.

Currently, there are 10 local gold miners in the site of Boljang (Tayetkong) village, and 15 people are from another regions. Among those who came from another regions, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are most significant companies' owners.

Interview with a local resident regarding the situation after the coup

“ After the coup, there has been a growing entrepreneurial company, but existing entrepreneurs have greatly expanded their work. There are new entrepreneurs' arrival. In the past, local residents used small machines and did not use machinery, but were unable to operate because of the high price of diesel. We are giving money to local armed forces, the military and everyone who come. After coup, drug is cheap, most of the villagers including some women were addicted.

There were no more former bamboo fields, the farmlands were left with floating sandbanks. If we cultivate and grow vegetables, we wouldn't eat, if we went to the cultivated field to collect crops nothing is remained. When seeing people from other regions are coming and digging gold in our own place, we also decided to excavate. Now I can't even imagine what we are going to do, eat and drink when they left our fields empty after they return.”

CASE STUDY - 2

Village - [REDACTED]
House - 230 (Name change - Naunghke)

Background and Traditional Career

Naunghke village is included in Naungtaw group, Homalin Township, Khamti district and is located along the Uru Riverbank. There is a lake around the village, and is now damaged by gold mining. Formerly, local residents cultivated farming and seasonal crops such as beans, mustard and fishing in the lake. Only minority worked gold mining with a handy-work system. Now, however, it is impossible to work the traditional careers anymore, and most of them do gold mining.

The local resident's main transportation is Uru River for travel. But after 2000s, Uru River have become full of sandbanks and line-boats, express couldn't travel in summer.

Notice : Due to the security situation the name of the village is given in false name.



The Influx of Machinery Companies

It has been a long time that entrepreneurial companies operated gold mining along the Uru River-bank in Nantaw and other regions. But in 2000, entrepreneurial companies have begun entering in Naungkhke village and operated gold mining. Khenam gold mining site is large enough and there are more than (500) gold mining sites. There are 197 local gold-miners and 241 immigrants in another regions. Among them, [REDACTED] are prominent entrepreneurs. After the 2021 military coup, there were 42 newly infiltrated gold mining sites.

Interview with a local resident regarding the situation after the coup

“ Sepai After the coup, there has been a growing entrepreneurial company, but existing entrepreneurs have greatly expanded their work. There are new entrepreneurs' arrival. In the past, local residents used small machines and did not use machinery, but were unable to operate because of the high price of diesel. We are giving money to local armed forces, the military and everyone who come. After coup, drug is cheap, most of the villagers including some women were addicted. There were no more former bamboo fields, the farmlands were left with floating sandbanks. If we cultivate and grow vegetables, we wouldn't eat, if we went to the cultivated field to collect crops nothing is remained. When seeing people from other regions are coming and digging gold in our own place, we also decided to excavate. Now I can't even imagine what we are going to do, eat and drink when they left our fields empty after they return ahi”



Appendix file

List of gold-mining companies and additional companies after the coup

No	Village /Gold Mining site	Local Company	Non Local Company	Additional After Coup	Total
1	Hkenam kho	197	241	42	480
2	Maikai kho	87	318	45	450
3	Molin kho	8	144	28	180
4	Boljang kho	10	15	-	25
5	Khomunnom kho	8	17	6	31
6	Marlone	6	34	12	52
7	Khonomphai	8	232	50	290
8	Manly	4	5	5	14
	Total	328	1006	188	1522

The Collected List of Drug Use According to the Level and Age

No	Village/Gold Mining site	Male		Women	Level of Used		Total
		Youth	Adult		Inhale	Injected	
1	Hkenam kho (230)	204	150	30	40		384
2	Maikai (280)	245	130	28		10	403
3	Moelin (40)	35	21	14	49	20	70
4	Boljang (20)	20	5	2	25	5	27
5	Khomunnom (50)	20	8	3			31
6	Marlone (300)	260	178	15	70		453
7	Khonomphai (25)	7	4	1			12
8	Manly (130)	41	26	13		29	80
	Total	832	522	106			1380

Note:- The above-mentioned list includes only those who use drugs in the local (villages) and does not include immigrant workers or entrepreneurs from other regions.

1. Kuki CSOs in 2015 kum'a lekhaleng aso Chindwin vadunga mining bol ngah ding.

PHOTO REPORT

