

Karenni Refugee Camp 1's environment will be damaged by waste if people use too much plastic and do not dispose of it properly

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Karenni Refugee Camp 1's Environment



Introduction

This report was written by Aye Win Kyaw, Poe Reh Law and Pray Meh. We are three students studying at Karenni Social Development Center, basic course class of 2013-2014. This report concerns plastic use in Karenni Refugee Camp 1. We researched and compiled this report over a one month period. After our research, we wrote this report.

In this report, we discuss about plastic disposal and waste management in Karenni Refugee Camp 1. We have been unable to publish some issues as we were unable to establish their reliability. To make this report, we spoke to the environmental health manager, some members of the public and the shopkeepers. During these discussions, we collected information and wrote this report.

Background of Refugees in Karenni Refugee Camp 1

Karenni Refugee Camp 1 was created on April 5th 1996 when 230 families travelled from Karenni State, Burma to Thailand due to persecution in their native land. After this, the Thai government met with them and reassured them of their safety in Thailand, Khu Ee Reh of Camp Committee told us.

Later in 2003, the camp community organized and set up the camp committee, an executive administration. In 2003, there were about 2,693 families staying in the camp. In Karenni Refugee Camp 1, there are many ethnic groups such as Kayah, Karen, Pa-O, Shan, Kayin and Baman. We live together as a community and we are all Karenni people. The most common religions are animism, a traditional belief, and Roman Catholicism. In June 2005, there were a lot of problems in the camp. These were exacerbated by members of the camp committee resettling to other countries.

If anyone in camp 1 breaks the camp rules then camp security will investigate and find a solution for the problem. However, if a crime is committed outside of the camp, then jurisdiction of the incident will be passed on to Thai government officials. This also applies to crimes of sufficient severity such as murder, rape or theft. There has been a Karenni community in Karenni Refugee Camp 1 for 17 years.

Karenni Refugee Camp 1's environment will be damaged by waste if people use too much plastic and do not dispose of it properly.

Summary

Karenni Refugee Camp 1 is located in Baan Nai Soi area. It is 19km from Mae Hong Son and 4km from the Thai-Burma Border. In Karenni Refugee Camp 1, People can join groups of 10 homes to make one section. There are 20 sections. The 11 sections of 1, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20 are called BT. The 9 sections of 2, 4, 5, 6, 7,

9, 13, 15, 16 are called BK. In 2013, there were 12,649 people (6,461 males and 6,188 females) living in the camp.

Our group researched into Environmental Health (EH) workers. EH cars do not come into section 1, 3 or 19. In these sections, residents throw rubbish into the forest so the waste takes a long time to biodegrade. We already knew this. Furthermore, in section 9, EH workers burn plastic which affects the health of children and elderly in nearby areas. This air pollution has caused 1/3 of people from section 9 to visit the clinic with health problems related to inhaling plastic fumes. The EH secretary said they wrote to people telling them not to dig wells or burn plastic. If people burn plastic, it will affect their health. The EH monitor plans to teach in schools about this.

2) About

2.1) Over use of plastic

In Karenni Refugee Camp 1, we needed to know about over use of plastic. Therefore, our group went to the shop. The shop owners said "if we don't use plastic, we would need to use leaves like past generations. If we were not given plastic, then we would not use it." In the camp, each shop uses 1 kilogram of plastic a day. When they don't use all of it, they throw away the excess. The Shop owners said "if we sell something, plastic is necessary. Also, plastic is useful for carrying things because it is cheap and light." In camp, plastic is used mostly in shops and kitchens. Everyday people use plastic.

“if people use baskets, they will be shy and they will not buy things. Plastic is easy to use and throw away.”

Our group interviewed at the gate to the camp, where there are many shops. One shopkeeper's uncle said "I am unsure of how much plastic we use. Whenever anybody buys anything, we use plastic. For example, fish, vegetables or chicken; we always use plastic. We have used plastic for a long time." We asked the uncle why after living in the camp for a long time, he doesn't have a bamboo basket. He said that if people use baskets, they will be shy and they will not buy things. Plastic is easy to use and throw away. Our group can agree plastic is cheap.

Next, we asked Daw Ngay, a shop owner, about over use of plastic. Daw Ngay said that we have all used plastic for a long time. If we use something, we always use plastic. Every day, Daw Ngay uses plastic more and more. Now, she uses plastic when she sells clothes. She has been a seller for 20 years and she said she did not know students were taught about the impact of plastic on the environment. Before (EH) began, she always threw plastic into the forest. Later, (EH) told people where to put plastic and built a rubbish tip.



A shop in camp 1

Outside the gate to section 1, Daw Ngay sells clothes, watches and other materials. She also sells souvenirs from the camp for people who will soon resettle. "If a lot of people resettle to third countries, then we sell more goods" said Daw Ngay. She added that when a lot of people resettle, they use 1 kilogram more of plastic than usual. However, they don't always use plastic. "In my home, we use 9 plastic bags"

Therefore, in Karenni Refugee Camp 1 there is a problem with over use of plastic. People think plastic is modern and they don't know about its impact. Our group revealed to them the impact of plastic.

2.2) Failure to dispose of waste properly

In Karenni Refugee Camp 1, the public don't throw plastic in bins. They do not know the future impact plastic will have on the valley around them and if people live near the stream, they regularly throw plastic into it. They don't use EH's designated places to dispose of plastic. In the school, they don't teach about the impact of plastic on the environment. They would like to teach but they do not have time. Daw Poe said "Rubbish bins are put beside the road in Karenni Refugee Camp 2 but in Camp 1, they are not put there". Next, our group learned that EH's cars cannot go into sections 1, 3 and 19. In these sections, they don't put plastic in rubbish bags.



Karenni Refugee Camp 1 is surrounded by forest

Following this, we asked Oo Pray Reh, a resident of section 1 about this. He said "Since, the section was created. I have always thrown plastic away in the forest. In the forest, there are often fires and the top-layer of soil is destroyed along with the rubbish. Now, in section one all people throw plastic in a new place. EH can carry it from this place. However, if it is rainy, the plastic drains into the stream. Sometimes, the heavy rain erodes the mountain." We don't know what will happen in the future because we do not have anyone teaching about the impact of this. Sometimes, we should put plastic in charcoal sacks. Oo pray Reh continued" I want to burn the rubbish and throw the plastic near the wooded area but I cannot do this alone. If our organization burns rubbish, we won't know what happens later. The most rubbish we have seen was in section one near the houses. However, people also throw rubbish into the river. When it rains, this effects people who live in section one. Most of the people living in section 17, 18 and 20 are also affected more by the flow of waste down the river.

"if its is rainy, the plastic drains into the stream"

Additionally, beside the river, in section 20, we asked Daw Pleh Meh what the effect upon her is from people in section one not disposing of plastic carefully. She said "People who live in section 17, 18 and 20 have been affected more. In 2005-2006, there was a lot of rain so people could not sleep. One morning at about 2:00am all of the property in the house had to be removed because the river flowed into the house and I didn't know what was

included in the rubbish. Sometimes, we have seen dead chickens and dead mice in the rubbish so it is very dirty. If a lot of water came, we could not sleep. The water was never low. There was always a lot of water."

This is the problem we face. The plastic has a bad effect. We don't know about the plastic's effect, EH organization doesn't do their duty. In Karenni Refugee Camp 1, everyone stays beside the stream so everyone is affected by the environmental pollution problem. We have learnt about this for this report.

3) Plastic disposal and waste management

3.1) General refugee community

The people in Karenni Refugee Camp 1 are provided with food, housing and property by The Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). The population of Camp 1 is about 12,649 people. 70% are Kayah nationals. 30% are either Shan, Pa-O, Kayin, Karen, Kayaw, Bamar or other ethnic groups. "In the camp, there are also a lot of shops. Every year, more and more plastic is thrown away" Said the EH director.

Daw Poe Myar said "Each day when I come into the kitchen I throw away about 10 rice sacks of plastic. If we clean and the rice sack is at least half full, we collect about 10 sacks. In a year, we will have thrown a total of 3,600 sacks. This number is for only one house. If we count the whole camp, how much plastic do we throw away?" The shopkeepers said that they throw away 8 sacks of plastic in a year. If we mix the home plastic and shop plastic it is about 1 kilogram.

"In a year, we will have thrown a total of 3,600 sacks."

If this happens, people in the camp will throw away 7 sacks of plastic in one day. In a month, 210 sacks of plastic will have been thrown away. In a year, we can estimate 2, 520 sacks will have been thrown away. How much plastic does the whole camp throw away in one year? So people in refugee camp 1 use more and more plastic. This is our continuing evaluation.

3.2) Environmental health (EH) workers management of the situation

In Karenni Refugee camp 1, K.D.D ran EH from 1996-1997 until 2008-2009. Since 2008-2009, IRC has run EH. The EH director, Nga Reh, guaranteed plastic management will be improved. EH workers in Camp 1 carry rubbish and dispose of it. This began in 2005-2006. He said their cars have a capacity of 1 ton. Every day, the cars collect rubbish from the camp three times. They carry to section 9 and throw away at the rubbish tip.

Camp 1 EH workers get support from IRC. They support gloves, masks, shoes and other equipment. They teach school classes about environmental problems. Our group recognizes that EH says they will take care of the rubbish

but camp residents don't follow their rules. A worker from EH said that in the future, they will try to wash and recycle waste. These observations come both from our interviews and what we have seen.

In camp, sections 1, 5, 6 and 8 have the most rubbish. The workers told us some sections such as 19, 3 and 1 are not accessible by car. In conclusion, refugee camp 1's EH workers said to us they collect and care about the plastic issue.

4) Future effect of plastic after disposal

4.1) Air pollution

Karenni Refugee Camp 1 has an air pollution problem. In order to know about this, we went to section 1 and interviewed Teacher Meh Reh from BHCC. Teacher Meh Reh has worked in Karenni health for 11 years. He answered us that citizens

Beh Reh, 6, often has breathing difficulties but the medics are angry when his mother takes him to the clinic so she always cries

often come to the clinic with breathing difficulties. He said this was mostly children and elderly people. When he worked in the clinic, he saw a lot of plastic and gloves and that when citizens burned plastic, it created lung disease and breathing difficulties. Next, he said we must not burn plastic and we must take care of its disposal. This also creates a soil problem. Around the world, poor countries usually have the most rubbish. In our camp, EH cannot collect and deal with all the rubbish so it creates a lot of disease and problems. He said to reduce diseases the clinic teaches about this issue.

Around the rubbish tip in section 9, we asked people about the rubbish situation. Daw Taw Meh replied that plastic is burnt and the smell drifts into our area." think this is the reason that I often have to go to the clinic for breathing problems and a sore throat. If we drink medicine, it is okay. However, a medic told me not to come to the clinic for this problem. If we see this medic, we are afraid." Daw Taw Meh has been at the refugee camp since it first opened. Now, Taw Meh's son, Beh Reh, 6 years old, has stomach and leg pains. She said Beh Reh often has breathing difficulties but when she takes him to the clinic, the medics are angry at her so she always cries.

Daw Mi Meh also lives near the section 9 rubbish tip. She says this is a problem for other people but her children are bigger. However, her neighbor's children are 5 years old and usually have breathing difficulties. She added she does not know about this problem and other problems. Teacher Meh Reh said 1/3 of Refugee Camp 1's citizens are affected by the air pollution problem. He said to our group that hearing about Beh Reh's health problems made him feel really sad.

4.2) Water pollution

There are two main types of rubbish. Rubbish from homes and from factories. Another type of rubbish is old

clothes and extra materials. After using these, people don't need them and throw them away. In Karenni Refugee camp 1, residents throw away their home's rubbish. They do not put it in rubbish bags. This impacts water, air and soil. There are three types of water pollution from rubbish. Karenni Refugee Camp 1's water pollution is caused by rubbish. EH Manager, Mi Reh, said rubbish can block water pipes. There is plastic in this rubbish. If there is rubbish in the pipe, the water cannot flow. It causes water pollution. Water is used for cooking, washing and making traditional wine. Everyone needs to drink water daily and for washing. In the camp, plastic isn't thrown in the rubbish bag so people get rashes on their body. If there is flooding, people easily get illnesses. Therefore, plastic should be put in the rubbish bag said BHCC Teacher Meh Reh.

Then, in section 9, Daw Mi Meh said there is a well. In section 9, a lot of people use the well. Many people throw plastic away so the well gets blocked. EH said that people should not dig wells. Around this area there is a lot of plastic so they shouldn't dig, they should move it to another place.

*If there is rubbish in the pipe,
the water cannot flow.*

Daw Mi Meh said if you are careful when throwing away plastic, we will not have to go far to collect water. "But, people don't throw away carefully so we have to go to other places to carry water". Therefore, a lot of people in Karenni Refugee Camp 1 have problems getting water said the EH manager. This is because in rainy season the water is not good. There is a lot of rubbish in the water, including plastic, so water cannot flow through the pipe. In these situations, people in camp come to the EH office and cause problems about this water issue. People throw rubbish in the dyke so the water becomes polluted. Then, many people get rashes. In our opinion, sometimes there is not enough water.

4.3) Land pollution

Karenni Refugee Camp 1 uses a lot of plastic and people do not throw in the rubbish bins. This causes land pollution. We have not seen this so we are not sure. There are a lot of people living in the valley around camp 1. There are no fences.

The plants cannot grow.

After the plastic is burned in section 9, the environment is damaged. The land is not green. Also, the plants cannot grow. In other areas, the water under the ground impacts the environment above it. We are sure of this.

In camp, even though there is not pollution. We have seen that when the stream is high, the soil changes the direction of it and there is a little land pollution. The most land pollution is in section 9, where they burn plastic. We did not see much land pollution in other places. However, some big countries have more pollution than in Karenni Refugee Camp 1. So, in Karenni Refugee Camp 1, we see land pollution but in the valley there is no pollution.

5) The effect of water, air and land on health

5.1) Water

Water is necessary for people and also important for health. If drinking water is not clean, you might get a disease but clean water is good for your health. In Karenni Refugee Camp 1, even though we protect the water, sometimes we can't receive clean water because it is contaminated by rubbish.

5.2) Air

Also, if you breathe dirty air, you may get a disease and you will often be sick. When people burn plastic, a lot of people are affected by air pollution so a lot of people regularly go to the clinic. 1/3 of people, in camp, have been to the clinic with health problems from air pollution.

1/3 of people, in camp, have been to the clinic with health problems from air pollution.

5.3) Land

The land is negatively impacted. It is not good for soil. At this time, we need to use chemical fertilizers more to maintain the soil quality. However, if we use the chemical fertilizer, it has a negative impact on the health of people who grow and eat fruit.

6) Recommendations

6.1) To residents of Karenni Refugee Camp 1

- Please be careful when disposing of plastic and rubbish.
- Don't use plastic when we don't need to.
- For people to be careful who live near the rubbish tip in section 9.
- Please listen and educate yourselves about rubbish if you don't know about it.
- Please don't throw plastic into the stream.
- Please put your plastic where EH suggests.

6.2) To schools

- Please educate about the environment in the coming year.
- Please invite environmental organizations to teach about the environment.
- Put rubbish bins in the school.

Please note down the illnesses students get.

6.3) To shopkeepers

- Please don't use plastic again and again unless you need to.
- Please educate about the negative impact of plastics.
- Follow the 5 R's
 1. Reuse
 2. Reduce
 3. Recycle
 4. Rethink
 5. Recreate
- Don't use plastic when selling something that does not require it to be used.

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Karenni Refugee Camp 1

Interviewee List

Number	Name	Age	Sex	Nationality	Religion	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview	Section
1	Teacher Ee Reh	64	Male	Kayah	Catholic	Camp Committee	Camp Committee	11/10/13	17
2	Nga Reh	24	Male	Kayah	Buddhist	EH director	Nai Soi rubbish tip	11/10/13	14
3	Maria	42	Male	Kayah	Catholic	EH worker	Nai Soi rubbish tip	11/10/13	14
4	Neh meh	40	Female	Kayah	Buddhist	Shopkeeper	Section 8 shop	14/10/13	8
5	Taw Meh	29	Female	Kayah	Animist	Cleaner	Section 9	15/10/13	9
6	Taw Meh	43	Female	Kayah	Animist	Cleaner	Section 9	15/10/13	9
7	Mi Meh	35	Female	Kayah	Buddhist	Shopkeeper	Section 9	15/10/13	9
8	Oo Reh	21	Male	Kayah	Animist	Medic	Section 9	15/10/13	5
9	Teacher Mi Reh	41	Male	Kayah	Buddhist	EH Manager	EH office	11/10/13	14
10	Daw Poe	40	Female	Kayah	Baptist	Shopkeeper	Shop	16/10/13	20
11	Poe Meh	25	Female	Kayah	Animist	Shopkeeper	Section 19	16/10/13	19
12	Daw Ngay	40	Female	Kayah	Baptist	Shopkeeper	Shop	16/10/13	19
13	Cecilia	22	Female	Kayah	Baptist	Housewife	House	16/10/13	19
14	Pleh Meh	43	Female	Kayah	Catholic	Unemployed	House	17/10/13	20
15	Pray Reh	34	Male	Kayah	Animist	Traditional Committee	House	17/10/13	1
16	Du Reh	31	Male	Kayah	Buddhist	Farmer	Agriculture office	22/10/13	Thailand
17	Meh Reh	26	Male	Kayah	Animist	B.H.C.C	Section 1	14/10/13	1

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Thank you!



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