



Conflict Factsheet

Violent Protests against the Hatgyi Dam in Myanmar

Type of conflict
Sub

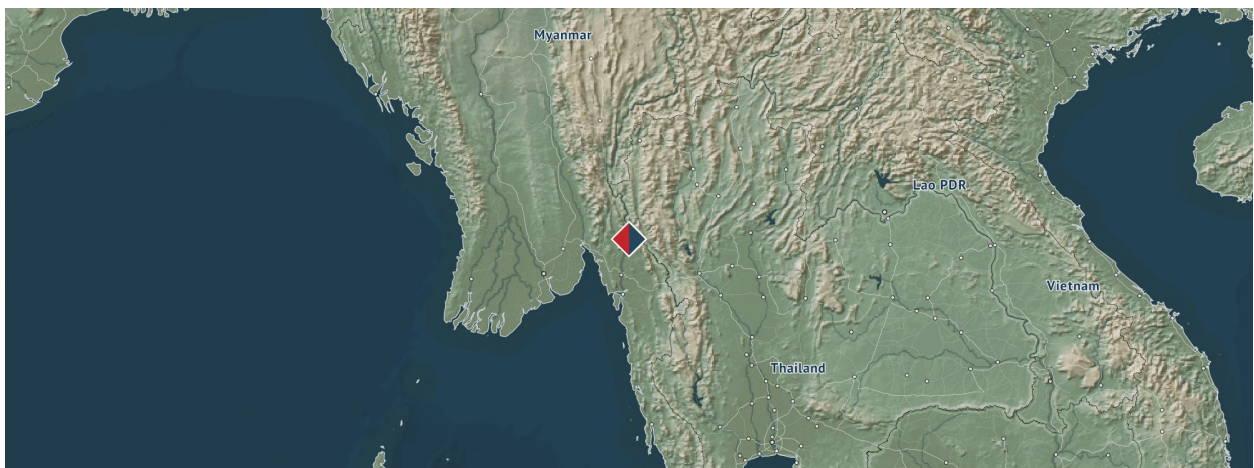
Intensity
3

Conflict Locality
South Eastern Asia

Time
2009– 2009

Countries
Myanmar

Resources
Fish, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

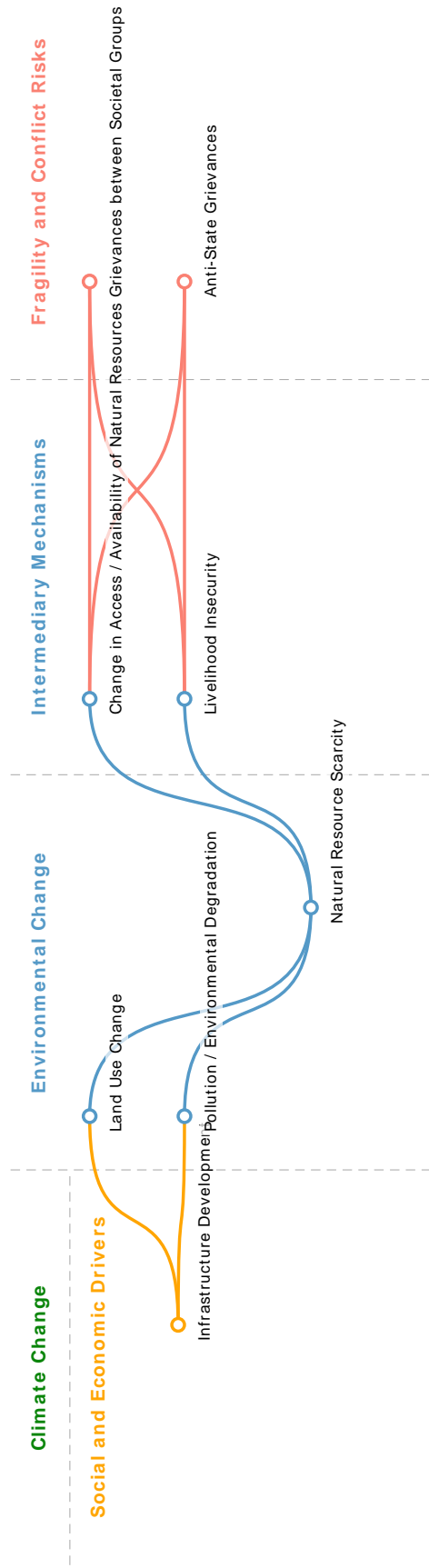


Conflict Summary

Plans to build the Hatgyi Dam in the middle of a civil war zone in the state of Karen in Myanmar, led to violence between the Burma Army and the rebel independence group, the Karen National Union (KNU). The predominantly Thai-backed project and its prospective environmental damage and social impact on Karen minorities have been aggravating factors on already existing civil tensions.



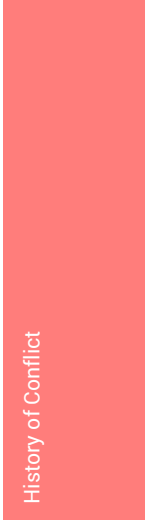
Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Fish, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water





Conflict History

In 2009, tensions over the construction of the Hatgyi Dam along the Salween River bordering with Thailand erupted into violent clashes between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Myanmar Army. Violence displaced 3,500 Karen villagers who fled across the Thai border. Increased militarisation of the dam site has only increased violent incidences. Conflict over the dam has led to fatalities and no comprehensive mitigation effort has been carried out.

Local opposition to the dam

The Hatgyi Dam is one of six dams planned for the Salween River in Myanmar. Plans for Hatgyi were released in 2006. Despite violent clashes between rebels and government forces over the dam site, plans for the Salween dam system, including Hatgyi, were approved in 2013 and construction has begun ([International Rivers, 2013](#)) (see [Salween River Dam Conflict in Myanmar](#)). The dam is to be jointly developed by the state-run Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise, EGAT (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand), and China's Sinohydro Corporation. It is located 50 km downstream of the Thai border, and once filled the reservoir will stretch to the Thai border, thus effecting both Thai and Burmese Karen communities ([Middleton et al., 2014](#)).

The dam is located next to a battle field, currently used by the Burmese Army and their allied militia (the Border Guard Force) to fight against the KNU militias, including the DKBA ([Salween Watch, 2014](#)). The dam is located in an area dominated by the KNU, which ultimately led to clashes between the KNU and government forces in 2009. The KNU opposes the dam because of the significant damage the dam will impose on the livelihoods of thousands of farmers and fishermen, who rely on the Salween River for sustenance.

The current conflict situation

It has been reported that at least five villages will be inundated, along with two wildlife sanctuaries ([Eh Na, 2012](#); [Salween Watch, 2014](#)). The KNU's opposition to the dam successfully halted construction after violent clashes in 2009 ([Eh Na, 2012](#)). The KNU has asked for a suspension of the Hatgyi Dam project until a political settlement to the civil conflict in Burma is reached ([Salween Watch, 2014](#)). However, since the ceasefire in 2012, there has been increased militarisation of the dam site by the Burma Army, which has undermined people's trust in the government to pursue a peaceful resolution.

According to the NGO Salween Watch, objections by local communities at the Hatgyi dam site have not been recorded, recognized, or addressed. Although a ceasefire was signed in 2012, incidences have since occurred, such as the arrest of Chinese surveyors by KNU police. Many fear that the militarisation of the proposed dam site by the Burmese Army and the arrival of construction materials will lead to another outbreak of civil conflict. Conflict over the dam has sprung from existing civil conflict fought between state and rebel actors. As such, little has been done by Burmese authorities to negotiate with rebels.



Resolution Efforts

No attempt has been made by Burmese officials to negotiate with the KNU. Two months after the ceasefire of 2012 between KNU and the Burma Army, the Burmese army moved additional troops to the site. Chinese and Thai developers also began surveying the site, despite opposition by the KNU. Dam workers were subsequently arrested by KNU police. There has been more effort made by Thai authorities to address citizen grievances over the dam.

For example, Thailand's Office of the Prime Minister established a subcommittee to study and monitor the project's human rights impacts in 2009 ([Salween Watch, 2013](#)). They conducted public consultations in 2013, where Thai citizens and IDPs from Karen Myanmar could voice their concerns. The NGO Karen Human Rights Group attended these meetings to assess the validity of the consultation. However, the Hatgyi project remains shrouded in secrecy.

In 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Myanmar and EGAT stating that all project information will be strictly confidential; limiting what information can be attained regarding environmental and social impacts of the dam ([Middleton et al., 2014](#)). As a consequence of this lack of transparency, the dam remains a sensitive situation, which could cause the breakdown of the cease-fire between the KNU and Burma Army at any point.



Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

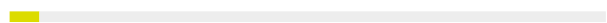


Human Suffering



INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

Less than 100.000 and less than 10% of the population are displaced across borders.



Resolution Success

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.



Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

The decline in intensity can be explained purely by the suppression or killing of grievance holders.





Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

3

A subcommittee was established to monitor the project's human rights impact, and public consultations were held. The NGO Karen Human Rights Group oversaw the validity of the consultations. However, great lack of transparency still surrounds the project.

Resources and Materials

Conflict References

[Salween River Dam Conflict in Myanmar](#)

References with URL

[International Rivers \(2013\). Briefing: Current Status of Dam Projects on Burma's Salween River](#)

[Middleton et al. \(2014\). Hatgyi Dam, Myanmar](#)

[Salween Watch \(2014\). Hydropower Projects on the Salween River: An Update](#)

[Eh Na, S. \(2012\). Dam investment projects put peace at risk](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/violent-protests-against-hatgyi-dam-myanmar>