



Food Crisis in the Naga Self-Administered Zone, Sagaing Region, Myanmar



Kesan Community in Donghee Sub-township. Photo: SHANAH

IWGIA is deeply concerned about the food crisis in the remote Naga Self-Administered Zone of Myanmar (Northern Sagaing Region bordering India). IWGIA views the blockage of food supply as a gross violation of the right to food of the indigenous Naga communities in the area.

The mountainous townships of Lahe and Nan-yun routinely deal with food shortages, particularly during wet season when routes are flooded, according to the Council of Naga Affairs (CNA). But this year, the situation has been intensified as the region struggles to cope with the aftermath of a measles outbreak, the destruction of more than 1,000 acres of paddy fields by insects, **and military blocks on both sides of the borders cutting off supplies.**

Area of Famine:

The townships of Lahe, Nanyun, and sub-townships of Donghee, Pangsau as well as a vast number of villages (Lahe Township – 10 villages, Nanyun Township – 11 villages, Donghee Sub-Township – 13 villages, Pangsau Sub-township – 6 villages). Total population app. 50.000 people.

“Food shortages in the area are not only in the villages, but also in Nanyun town,” says Nanyun MP U Sein Maung “I’ve already reported it to the township administrator but have had no response yet. Locals recently shared food with many of those who were in need.”

According to Lahe MP U Law Yone, residents of Lahe town have rice, but its surrounding villages have little food. “Lahe elders discussed the crisis with a member of the Indian parliament yesterday and asked for the [Indian military] gate to open for the supply of food and basic commodities,” U Law Yone said.

The CNA President Athong Makury sent a letter to the Indian Governor of Nagaland PB Acharya, asking to allow “the famine-ridden villagers” to cross the border on “humanitarian grounds.”

More than 92 villages are located in the border area, noted the letter, populated by Konyak, Lainong and Tangshang tribes. The only accessible location where basic needs such as rice, salt, and medicine can be retrieved is Mon town on the Indian side of Nagaland, it reads.

CNA also called on the Myanmar government to negotiate with its Indian counterpart about allowing for the flow of supplies and aid across the border to stop the suffering of the people in Nagaland. CNA spokesperson Ke Jung said, “The [Myanmar] government is well-informed of this problem. It is shocking to see that it has no proper plans to address the matter.” The struggle for food has been exasperated by a measles outbreak last year, which drove locals to abandon their crops. Meanwhile, residents in Pangsau town in Nanyun saw insects destroy more than 1,000 acres of paddy fields.

After clashes with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) last December, the Myanmar Army imposed a strategy in line with a “four-cuts” policy, blocking access to food, funds, information, and recruitment in the area around the historic Stilwell Road, the main transportation route for supplies to Nanyun. In its handling of a local insurgency, Indian security forces have blocked border points between Pangsau and Nampong town of Arunachal Pradesh and other areas in Mon and Lahe since January 2017.



Crops destroyed by rats in Nanyun

IWGIA is seriously concerned about the situation and the lack of respect for the lives of the indigenous communities in Sagaing region, and we call on the international community to raise the issue with the Government of Myanmar as a matter of urgency. IWGIA has appealed to the following institutions to address the situation:

- The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples.
- The National Institute for Human Rights in Myanmar.
- The International Labor Organization (ILO)
- UN World Food Programme
- FAO, Rome
- Myanmar Red Cross
- The Danish Ministry for Development Cooperation
- The Embassies of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland
- The EU

IWGIA calls on these institutions to urge the Government of Myanmar to:

Provide the following emergency relief immediately:

- Food packages to the affected communities (mainly rice, and nutritional food for children and elderly persons)
- Medicines (seasonal flues, TB, Malaria, Diarrhea, Typhoid, malnutrition etc.)
- The Government of India to open “Pangsua Pass” and “Lungwa” border points to allow people to access rice and other basic commodities.
- The Government of Myanmar to respond to this food crisis immediately by lifting the 4-cut policy
- UN World Food Program and Myanmar Red Cross to attend to this matter
- Conduct an investigation by an independent team to document the human rights violations occurring design mitigation plan

In the longer term, IWGIA calls on the above mentioned institutions to:

- Put pressure on the Government of Myanmar to develop proper policies and programmes to address the issues of food- and health-crisis every year in these areas.
- Urge the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement to develop preventative programmes to strengthen the resilience of the communities in the Naga area.
- Allow UNICEF and WHO to set up operational offices in the Naga area.
- Allow International UN (and other) agencies to work on in the area – both during emergency situations, as well as longer term development work strengthening the education, health and access to justice for the communities in the area.

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- Guarantee that the land, natural resources and livelihood rights of the indigenous Naga communities are respected as per international law.



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