

Shan farmers oppose the Shwe pipelines

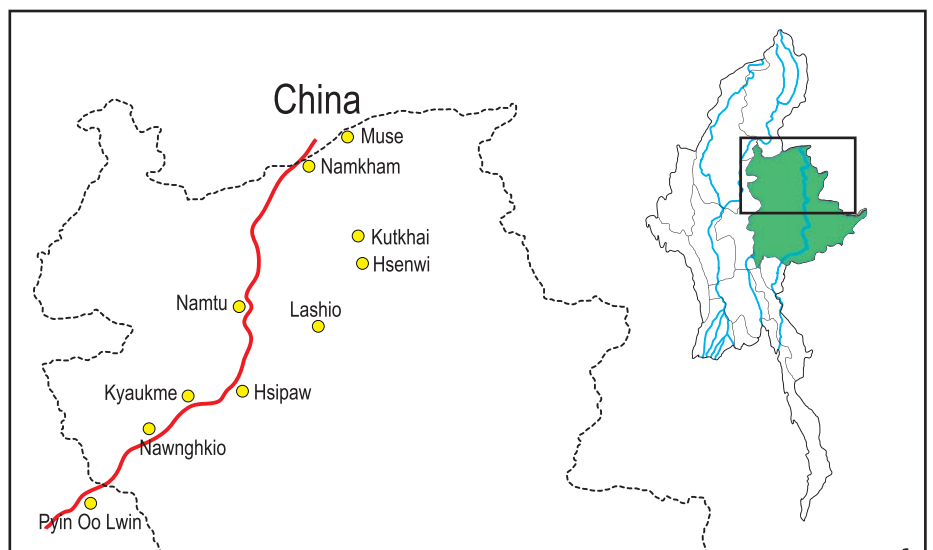


The approaching May 2013 deadline for the completion of China's giant oil and gas pipelines across Burma is causing growing alarm among thousands of Shans along the pipeline route.

A third of the 800-kilometer route crosses northern Shan State, through almost 2,000 acres of forests and farmlands. Since 2011, vast tracts of rice fields and orchards have been bulldozed, with soil dumping and water blockage causing crop damage far beyond the 100-foot wide pipeline corridor.

Impacted Shan communities from six townships have been given no information about the impacts of the project, and been forced into accepting unfair and unequal amounts of compensation. Now, with billions of cubic meters of gas and oil about to start flowing, they are fearful of dangerous leaks and explosions due to poor construction.

The Northern Shan Farmers' Committee is strongly opposed to this pipeline project. It is threatening our security, livelihoods and environment and is benefiting only China and the Burmese government. We are not opposed to development, but we want projects that will benefit local people and be sustainable. For the health and safety of our communities, we call for the pipelines to be removed from our lands immediately.



Shwe pipeline route in Shan State

The Shwe project is a joint venture between the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). The Myanmar government will earn an estimated US\$ 29 billion from sale of gas to China over 30 years.

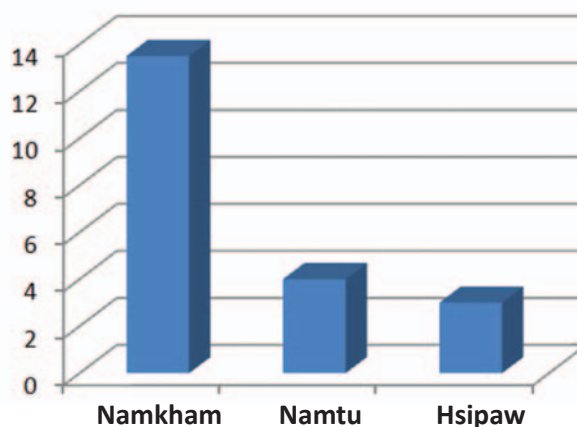
Unjust, unequal compensation

Before construction, farmers were summoned by government officials and told to sign Burmese language documents (which some could not read) accepting that the pipelines would pass through their land. Rates of compensation were non-negotiable. In Namkham, farmers tried to resist signing but were told their lands would be confiscated anyway, and they would get nothing if they didn't sign.

Compensation differed hugely between townships. Farmers in Namkham, close to China – where compensation was reported to be much higher – received four times as much as those in Hsipaw for loss of rice fields. Compensation was offered only for cultivated farms within the 100 feet of the pipeline corridor; water channels and fallow land within the corridor were not counted. The lack of transparency around compensation led to widespread corruption, with villagers being asked to “repay” as much as 10% to corrupt authorities.

In several villages in Hsipaw, houses were pulled down to make way for the pipelines. The compensation given was not enough to build a new house.

compensation per acre (million kyat)
for rice fields



Damage to crops

There has been large scale damage to farmlands outside the 100-foot pipeline corridor. During construction, fleets of trucks and bulldozers crushed crops. Piles of earth were dumped in adjoining fields, and irrigation channels were blocked, causing crops to be either flooded or parched. Orchards were completely destroyed when the Namtu River was diverted during construction.

Villagers who dared complain eventually received small amounts of compensation, with promises to restore lands to their original state. However, some fields adjoining the pipeline corridor remain uncultivable due to the stony earth piled there.



Damage to roads, accidents

Local roads were badly damaged by the constant passage of heavy trucks and machinery during construction. In some places the roads became impassable for local transport. The trucks have also caused many road accidents. A 12-year-old schoolboy was killed by a pipeline truck on the Muse-Namkham road on January 11, 2012.



Household water shortages

While digging trenches for the pipelines beneath the Nam Mao (Shweli) River, ground water had to be pumped out continually to stop flooding. This caused the wells in the nearby village of Nong Kham to run dry, causing severe hardship for hundreds of people.



In Mong Wee, south of Namkham, the pipelines were laid uphill of the town, cutting across the town's water supplies, affecting 400 families.



Ignorance of local soil hazards

Chinese engineers have ignored soil conditions that could endanger the pipelines. Near Nam Ti village, Namkham, the pipes have been laid through a marshland. Only months after they were buried, the pipelines rose up to the surface.



In the Bawger (Bawgyo) area of Hsipaw, famous for salt farming, locals fear that salt deposits in the ground will cause corrosion and rupture of the pipes. In December 2012, hundreds of farmers, MPs and monks gathered at Bawgyo to pray for protection from the threat of a pipeline explosion.



Increased military security

In the mountainous areas between Namtu and Namkham, where Kachin, Palaung and Shan resistance forces operate, Burma Army troops and pro-government militia have been providing security to the Chinese workers. Fighting and human rights abuses, including forced portering, have caused villagers to flee. Hundreds are sheltering in Namkham town.

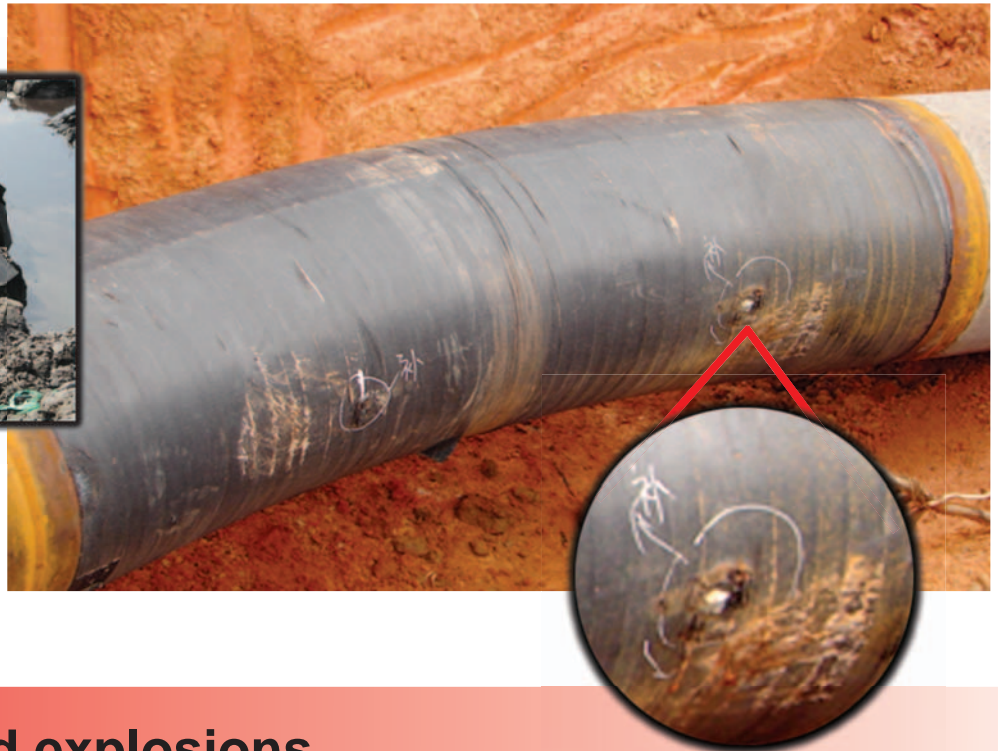
Villagers fear abuses such as sexual violence, from the increased military security to guard the pipeline once the oil and gas start flowing: "We women worry about our daughters if more soldiers come to guard the pipeline; we worry they will be raped," said a woman from Hsipaw.

Poor construction

“They fixed holes in the pipelines with rubber patches, like fixing a tyre puncture.”

Villagers in several locations have seen holes in the pipelines before they were laid, and Chinese workers

using rubber patches to seal the holes, as if mending tyre punctures. Holes have also been discovered after pipes have been laid, causing them to be dug up again and fixed in the same way. In some places leaks have been caused by improper welding of the pipeline links.



Fears of leaks and explosions

There has been no information provided to villagers about the safety risks of billions of cubic feet of gas and oil being pumped so close to their homes, particularly in defective pipelines. The pipelines have been buried at different depths, in some places only a few feet below the ground. They run close to many villages, and even cut directly through some.

Farmers commonly burn off stubble after harvest, but are now fearful of doing this near the pipeline.



Explosion of the gas pipeline from Kanbawk to Hpa-an in southern Burma, February 2006

The Shwe pipelines bring us no benefit whatsoever. They have damaged our lands, waterways and livelihoods, and will cause us to live in constant fear of poisonous leaks and explosions. The Burmese government had no right to sell our ancestral lands to China for this project. We, the Northern Shan Farmers' Committee, therefore make the following calls:

- The pipelines must not be allowed through our farmlands.
- The pipelines must be taken out and our lands restored to their original condition.

The Northern Shan Farmers Committee was set up in June 2012 to protect farmers' livelihoods and promote sustainable agriculture. It has over 10,000 members from seven Shan townships: Namkham, Namtu, Hsipaw, Lashio, Kyaukme, Nongkhio and Pyin Oo Lwin.