

KAREN STATE EDUCATION ASSISTANCE GROUP REPORT



DECEMBER 2007

Let us remember the effort and sacrifice made by P'Doh Sein Maung who was killed by Burma Army forces during the distribution of teacher subsidies in December 2007.

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MAP OF KAREN STATE

This map of Karen State was produced by the Karen Human Rights Group. This map uses Burmese names for Karen State districts whereas we use the Karen names in the report. Please note the following differences: Nyaunglebin is Kler Lwe Htoo district. Papun is Mutraw district. Thaton is Doo Tha Htoo district. Only the top of Mergui-Tavoy district (see Tenasserim division) is shown on this map.



KAREN STATE EDUCATION ASSISTANCE GROUP

December 2007 Report

The Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG) is a network of organizations and individuals seeking to provide education assistance to impoverished and displaced schools in Karen State, Burma. In 2006-7, by pooling human, financial and material resources KSEAG members were able to provide basic teacher subsidies and materials to every Karen State school in a systematic and effective manner.

On October 21st 2007, KSEAG members restructured the network to improve planning, distribution, monitoring and reporting (see KSEAG structure below). An executive director was chosen to oversee the day to day implementation of activities and officially report to the Board of Directors which is made up of leaders from the different KSEAG member organizations.

This report is the first official KSEAG report under the new structure. There are 4 main sections in this report:

1. Information concerning Karen State schools;
2. KSEAG Activities undertaken during the current period (July through December 2007 – in future reports will be made quarterly);
3. Lessons learned and issues/problems encountered; and,
4. Planned activities for the next period.

SECTION 1: CURRENT SITUATION OF SCHOOLS IN KAREN STATE

In the documentary film 'Karen Education Surviving', as teachers, having completed a one-month in-service training workshop, began the perilous return trip home to their communities, the narrator comments that, "We are not heading into crisis, we are in it". Unfortunately, what was considered crisis at the time of making the film (in 2003) was only the beginning of intensified Burma Army offensives against Karen State communities.

a. Political Context of Karen State Schools

Since, February 2006, there has been a build-up of Burma Army troops throughout Karen State – most notably in the northern districts of Taungoo, Kler Lwee Htoo and Mutraw. The Burma Army's most recent offensive in northern Karen State has killed over 370 men, women and children and displaced over 30,000 people, most of whom are now in hiding.

The slow but unrelenting attacks and building of new camps seem to be driven by a plan to dominate, chase out or crush any people in these areas. This has been the largest offensive in Karen State since 1997. It began in February 2006, with troops from over fifty battalions attacking through the rainy season, and the construction of 10 new main camps and 42 smaller support camps. The Burma Army is now completing the construction of two new roads that effectively cut the northern Karen State into quarters.

The disruption of food production, burning of homes and the shoot-on-sight orders of the Burma Army have made staying in their homeland untenable for thousands of people. Of the over 30,000 displaced, over 5,000 have already left their homes for the Thai border.

Recent reports from the Free Burma Rangers (6 Dec, 5 Dec and 22 Nov) of attacks on communities throughout Taungoo district, Mone and Kyaw Kyi townships in Kler Lwee Htoo district, Luthaw township in northern Mutraw district and also in Dooplaya district, clearly demonstrate that the Burma Army is fortifying itself throughout Karen State and intensifying its attacks on local communities.

Schools suffer the same fates as their communities. When communities are attacked and forced to flee, schooling is disrupted. However, in all but the most drastic cases, communities reopen their schools as soon as possible, sometimes within hours of being attacked. In such cases, schooling may occur in hiding places in forests (often as these internally displaced communities are on the move to safer areas away from Burma Army). In other cases, communities split up and establish a number of smaller villages, where they open new, smaller schools.



XXX School (5) was destroyed by SPDC on 15 AUG 2007



KTWG Member hides with XXX students after SPDC attack



All school materials were destroyed except for this chalk



within days, the school is being rebuilt

Schooling provides stability and consistency to Karen youth and helps them cope with the tragedies they are enduring. Also, as seen by communities' eagerness to reopen them as quickly as possible after displacement, schools remain a strong symbol of hope for Karen communities enduring atrocities at the hands of the Burma Army.

b. Taungoo District Schools Closed

The Burma Army has focused much of their aggression against the most northern Karen State district of Taungoo. At the beginning of the 2006-7 school year, there were 47 schools operating. By the beginning of this school year (2007-8), only one school, XXX

Primary School, remained open. A school for Taungoo students, XXX Primary School, was established this year in northern Mutraw district by villagers who were forced to flee their home district. Where there were 111 teachers providing education to 1356 students last year in Taungoo, only 5 teachers and 37 students remain.

To make matters worse, at this point, Taungoo district education leaders have not been able to make contact with either of the 2 remaining schools and as such KSEAG has not been able to find a means of providing assistance to them yet.

c. School Statistics for 2007-8

All Karen State Schools

DISTRICTS	SCHOOLS	SF	SM	ST	TF	TM	TT
Taungoo	2	24	13	37	4	1	5
Kler Lwee Htoo	57	990	955	1945	118	42	160
Mutraw	332	7232	7447	14679	677	357	1034
Doo Tha Htoo	132	6032	6115	12147	350	184	534
Pa.an	118	3882	3084	6966	236	78	314
Dooplaya	324	15311	13041	28352	844	238	1082
Mergui-Tavoy	14	580	495	1075	42	5	47
	979	34051	31150	65201	2271	905	3176

S=STUDENT T=TEACHER F=FEMALE M=MALE

d. Areas of Control and School Sizes

In political terms, Karen State is broken up into three areas: KNU¹ controlled areas, mixed controlled areas, and SPDC² (or their allies) controlled areas. In areas of Karen State under full SPDC control, which are usually urban areas such as large towns and cities (i.e. Papun), schools are organized and supported by the SPDC and cannot be accessed directly by KED or other groups organizing from the eastern border. The schools under KED and supported by KSEAG are either in the Karen controlled (such as Mutraw district, Kler Lwee Htoo district, parts of Pa.an district, and in Mergui-Tavoy district) or Mixed controlled areas (such as Doo Tha Htoo, Dooplaya, parts of Pa.an district).



XXX Primary School (338), Mutraw District



XXX Primary School (104), Doo Tha Htoo District

¹ Karen National Union

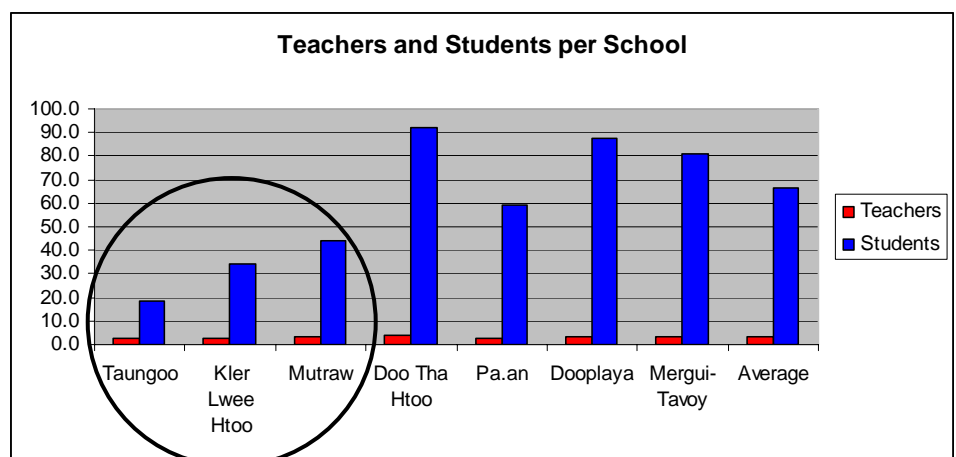
² State Peace and Development Council. In this report, the terms SPDC or Burma Army may both interchangeably to refer to the Burmese military junta. However, in most cases, 'SPDC' will be used to refer to areas of general governance and 'Burma Army' will refer specifically to military activities.

The KNU controlled areas are in the more mountainous eastern areas of Karen State. Mountain communities tend to be smaller and more spread out than those in the flatlands. Given this, it is natural that there are a greater number of smaller schools (less teachers and students per school) in mountainous regions than in the flatlands.

This can be seen in the tables below. The teacher:school and student:school ratios are significantly lower in KNU controlled areas as compared to those in mixed controlled areas. This is not simply as a result of geography but is also due to political reasons. In KNU controlled areas, many communities are forced to flee periodic or seasonal Burma army attacks whereas communities in mixed or SPDC controlled areas, although lacking basic freedoms under the constant watch of the SPDC, tend not be victimized by the same sort of scorched earth policies in KNU controlled areas.

This reality means that many communities in KNU controlled areas are forced to flee their villages. The communities often split up and create new, smaller villages within the vicinity (1-2 hours). This means new, smaller schools. Also, as the threat of Burma Army attacks increase, parents are becoming more reluctant to send their children to schools that are a long walk from their village. Whereas before, children might walk 1-3 hours to school, parents are no longer willing to have their children walk long distances to neighboring community schools. As a result there are smaller schools popping up in communities which used to send their children to neighboring communities for their education.

DISTRICTS	Teachers per School	Students per School
Taungoo	2.5	8.5
Kler Lwee Htoo	2.8	34.1
Mutraw	3.1	44.2
Doo Tha Htoo	4.0	92.0
Pa.an	2.7	59.0
Dooplaya	3.3	87.5
Mergui-Tavoy	3.4	80.9

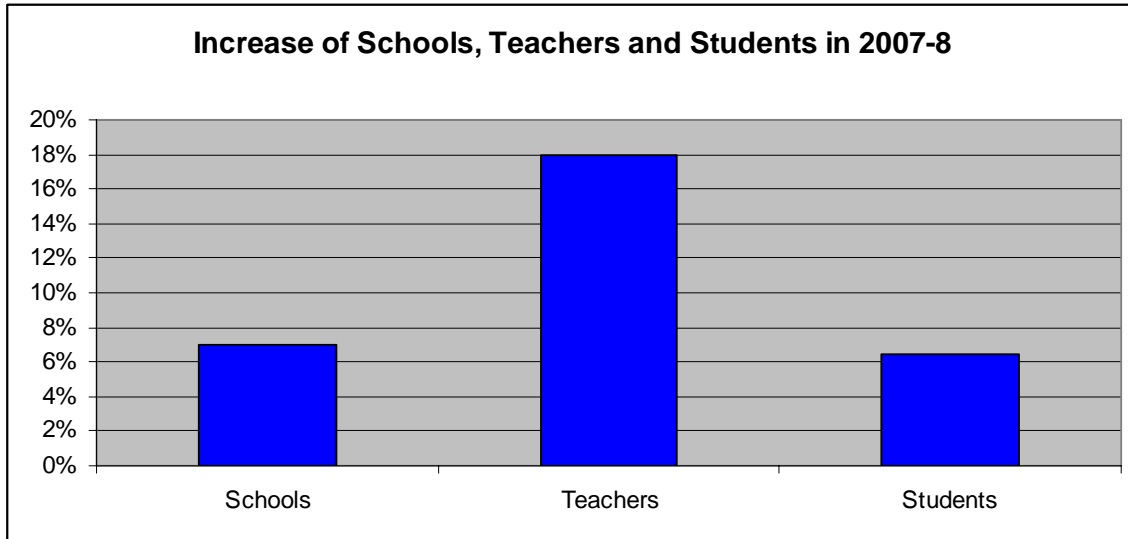


In the tables above, it can be seen that student:school ratios in KNU controlled areas (districts circled in black) are approximately half of those in mixed controlled areas. For example, a comparison of the two most populace districts, Mutraw and Dooplaya, show that although they have almost the same number of total schools and teachers, Dooplaya has almost twice the amount of students.

e. Given the war and displacement how can there be more schools each year?

Since KTWG began the Karen Education Assistance Program (previously known by some as the Kawthoolei Education Fund or the Education Fund for Karen State) in 2002, we have seen a steady increase in school numbers. In 2007-8 school year, there is an increase of 7% in the number of schools (64 schools) as compared to the year before. There was a

6% increase in the number of students (3968 students) and an 18% increase in the number of teachers (482 teachers).



These increases may seem implausible, especially the disproportionate increase of teachers, and perhaps downright bizarre given the increased fighting and displacement over the past couple of years. Yet, the increases can be explained for five general reasons, which are explained further below:

1. the promise of education assistance leading local schools to contact KED;
2. the fragmentation of larger schools and/or emergence of smaller local schools as a result of Burma Army attacks or the threat of;
3. the ability to be a teacher and still provide for dependants as result of teacher subsidy provisions;
4. the increased access to schooling for poorer students because of outside education assistance; and finally,
5. the increased value held for schooling by the community as a result of education assistance and training programs.

e.1. Education Assistance and Submission of School Statistics

The increase in school numbers over the past five years is not simply the result of new schools opening, but is also due to the increasing number of schools sending their school statistics to the district education leaders. Although KED has policies and regulations concerning what constitutes a school, the responsibility for organizing and supporting schools, especially at the primary level, lies with the local community. Prior to 2002, KED were not as actively involved in supporting and administrating local primary schools. This meant that many schools and especially the more remote ones, had little reason to communicate their school statistics to their district or township leaders. For the same reasons, it might not have been the priority of KED at the district or township education level to seek out these schools.

In 2002, KTWG began providing education assistance through KED. This meant that those schools whose statistics had been received or collected, were eligible to receive basic support. The availability of assistance has likely encouraged a number of existing schools to submit their school statistics, and thus be counted. The formation of KSEAG and resultant ability to make basic provisions to all schools has reinforced the benefit of submitting school statistics to KED. It should also be noted, that in-service and pre-service

teacher education programs available to Karen State schools have also raised the profile of KED and other KSEAG members.



XXX School (65), Kler Lwee Htoo district



XXX School (200), Mutraw district

e.2. More Schools, Increased Need for Teachers as a Result of Burma Army Activities

As mentioned above, there has been an increase in the number of smaller community schools due to Burma Army activities. This has created the need for a greater number of teachers.

For example, if a school of 40 students and 2 teachers is forced to split into three new schools then you will need a minimum of 3 teachers (one per new school) for the same number of students. In fact, it is likely, two teachers will be needed for each new school to teach the different standards (grades) as in the original school. In this case, the teacher numbers would double where student size remains the same.



XXX School (189), Mutraw district

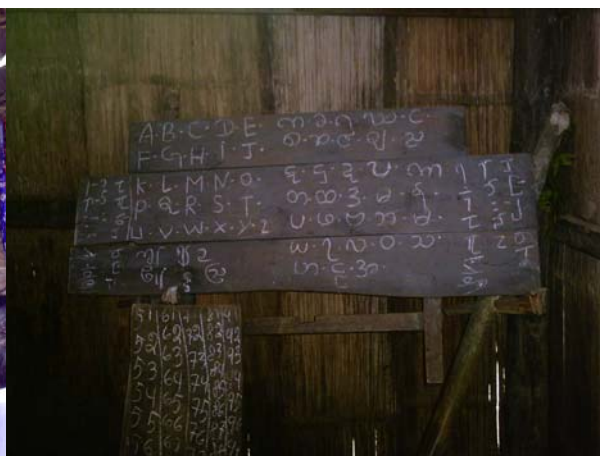
e.3. Subsidies enable teachers to remain in the classrooms

The number one reason given by Karen State teachers for leaving their positions is that they are unable to support their (and their dependants) basic living requirements. As communities are impoverished by war and displacement, they are unable to provide basic monetary and food stipends promised to their teachers. As such, teachers are forced to give their time to food production instead of to the classroom.

In a survey performed in March-April 2006 with 207 Karen State teachers, it was found that even the small annual subsidy of 1300 Baht (\$40 USD) provided by KSEAG to all Karen State teachers last year was enough to encourage many of these teachers to return to their classrooms the following year (2007-8). Although, further study must be done, it is likely that the availability of teacher subsidies from KSEAG has reduced the attrition rate of Karen State teachers.



Moh Loh Taw School (219), Dooplaya district



Ya Ploh Der School (71), Mutraw district

Furthermore, the availability of outside support for teacher subsidies might encourage local communities or school committees to employ more teachers in schools. For example, a primary school (Kindergarten to Standard 3) might need 2 teachers. However, the burden of supporting two teachers was too much for parents and the community. As such, only one person was asked to teach. However, as KSEAG teacher subsidies became available, the burden was partly lifted from the community, and they were able to have two teachers as required for their school.

e.4. School Material Provisions and Increased Number of Students

Often parents cannot send their children to school because of school fees and the costs of school materials. If these barriers were removed then more students would be able to attend schools.

Given the limited amount of support provided through KSEAG for student learning materials to date, it is unlikely that this has had any major impact on increasing student's access to school. In 2006-7, all schools were provided learning materials amounting to 3 notebooks, 2 pens and a pencil for every student. That being said, in interviews undertaken in November 2007 with parents from Bu Tho and Dweh Loh townships in Mutraw district, a number of parents claimed they were able to send their younger children to school this year because they did not have to purchase learning materials themselves. Naw XXX from XXX village said, "The support meant that I could send my three youngest to school. Only the eldest I kept back to help with the farming".



XXX School (328) with their school materials

XXX School (225) student receive textbooks

While KSEAG teaching and learning material support to date has been minimal, and has likely only had a limited impact on student attendance rates, it can be expected that if school material assistance increases in the future, the barriers limiting poorer students access to schooling will be decreased.

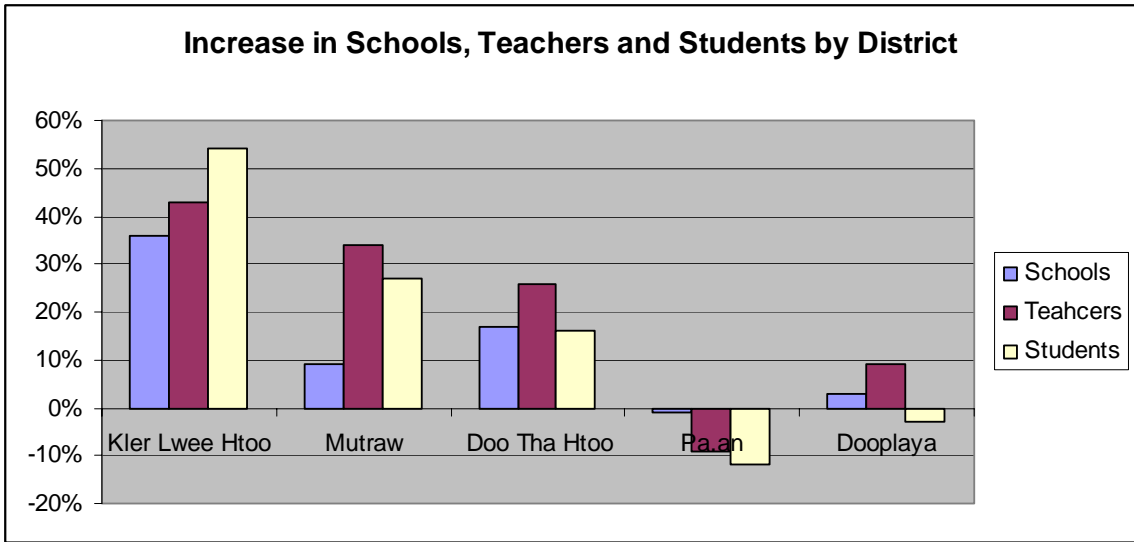
e.5. Education Programs Increase Perceived Value of Schools

The Karen community has for decades highly valued the role of schooling as a means towards peace, prosperity and development. That being said, after the fall of Manerplaw there was a notable absence of any education programs in Karen State. Then in 2001, with the introduction of comprehensive teacher training and later education assistance programs³, greater emphasis was placed on Karen State education. Such programs raise the profile and importance of schooling while promoting the value of basic education for children amongst the community.

e.6. So, in conclusion ...

This section has attempted in a limited way to shed some light on and open discussion about the increased numbers of schools, teachers and students that we are seeing every year in Karen State. The table below shows the changes in school numbers from district to district over the past year. Taungoo district has been left out as almost all of its schools have been closed due to Burma Army attacks. Mergui-Tavoy has also been left out since its figures (i.e. a 261% increase in number of students) are affected mostly by the relatively small number of schools in the district and the addition of new schools this year (from 7 schools last year to 14 schools this year).

³ KTWG's Mobile Teacher Training project began in 2001 in the four northern districts. In 2002, the first steps of the Karen Education Assistance Program were taken. Since then both programs have been expanded. Also, KED has begun a number of teacher training programs in the form of summer vacation workshops local subject methodology teacher trainers.



Kler Lwee Htoo and Mutraw districts have seen the most drastic increases in school numbers this year. This year, Kler Lwee Htoo has 36% more schools, 43% more teachers and 54% more students. The Kler Lwee Htoo district education leader, in discussions on December 7th and 8th, said that this increase was primarily due to Burma Army attacks and presence in his district – resulting in the fragmentation of larger schools into smaller ones. While this in part explains the increase in the number of schools and teachers it does not fully explain the increase in the number of students. This issue needs to be clarified further in meetings with the district education leader.

In Mutraw, leaders expressed concern at the increasing numbers of small schools emerging throughout the district. The reasons are likely twofold: 1. Luthaw township has come under heavy attacks over the past year which has led to the fragmentation of larger schools; and, 2. increased numbers of remote schools are sending their school statistics to education leaders. We also see a disproportionate increase in the number of teachers (34%) and students (27%) as compared to schools (9%). It is possible that this is a result of increased numbers of middle and high schools in the district which would have more teachers and students per school.

We see a fairly proportionate increase in Doo Tha Htoo district (17% for teachers, 26% for schools and 16% for students). Such an increase may seem to contradict early statements about the relative stability of schools (and statistics) in mixed or SPDC controlled areas. The reason in this case is clear. As education assistance became available for all, Kyet Htoo township schools (who had previously not contacted district leaders) submitted their school information to the district leaders. Much of the increase in school numbers came from the addition of the 14 schools, 46 teachers and 743 students from Kyet Htoo township.

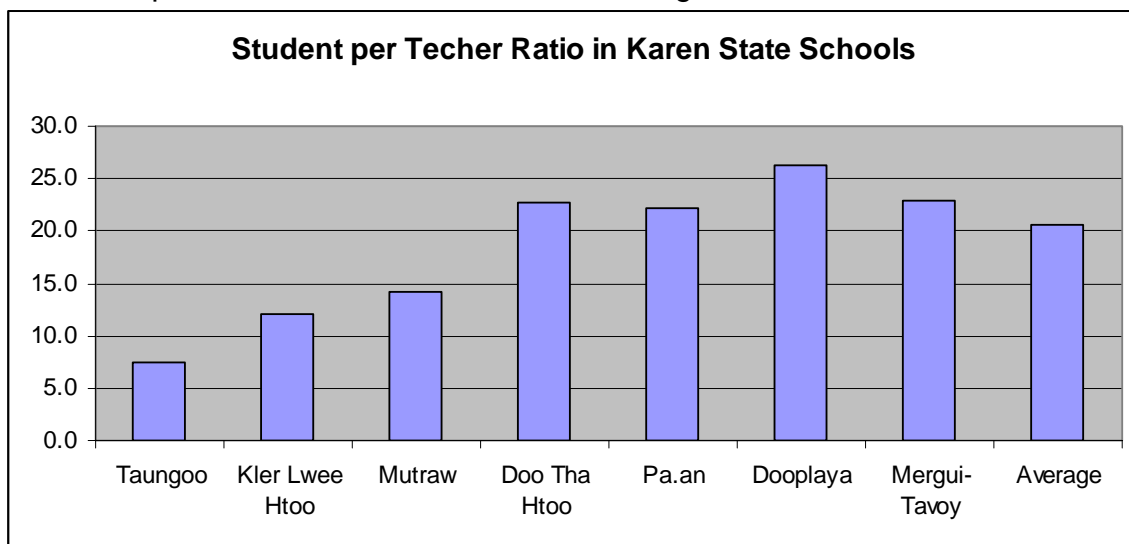
In Pa.an and Dooplaya districts we see a fairly stable situation. The decrease in numbers in Pa.an district was the result of fighting and displacement in the area. To date those schools have not yet been able to reopen.

The fact is that there are many different reasons to explain the increase in school numbers over the past years. Much of what is given above is speculative as we have yet to do any comprehensive research on the impact that KSEAG support is having on schools and communities throughout Karen State.

However, the issue of increasing school numbers needs to be addressed as it directly affects KSEAG's ability to meet the needs of schools (an issue of funding and resources); township and district education leaders ability to administer schools in their areas; and, most importantly, the quality of education being provided to Karen State children (an issue of qualified, trained teachers). A balance must be sought between: 1. increased numbers of schools and teachers which provide greater and safer access for children to schooling in their communities; and, 2. the quality of education being provided to those students by ensuring that there are sufficient trained teachers and educational resources available

f. Number of Teachers per Student

Generally, it is seen as preferable to have a low student:teacher ratio (more teachers per student) so teachers can provide more time and support for individual students. The table below compares the student:teacher ratio amongst the districts of Karen State.



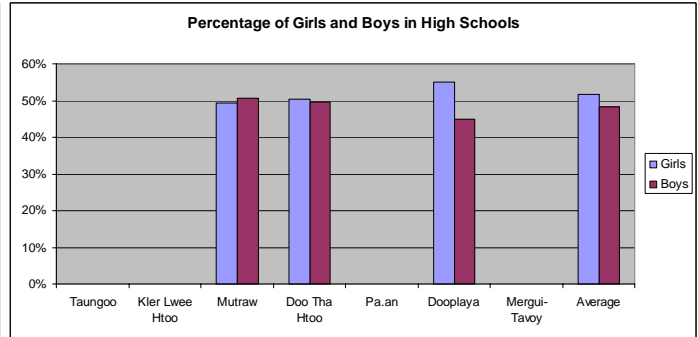
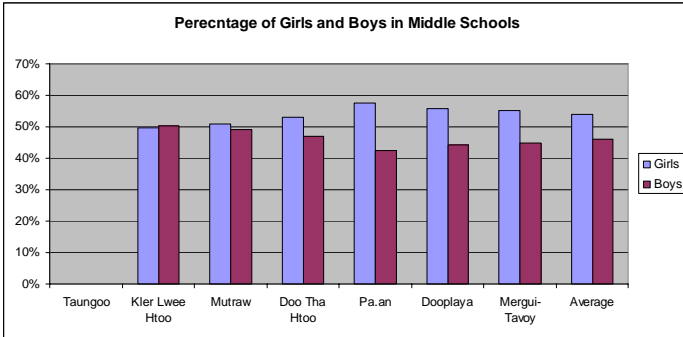
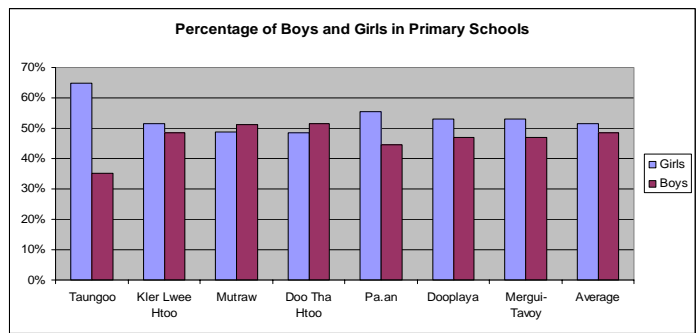
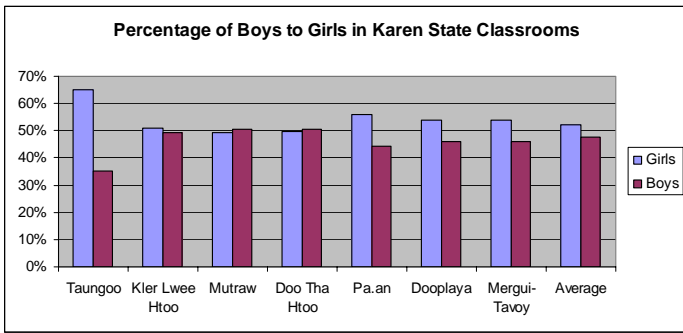
The figures may be misleading as those districts with the lowest student:teacher ratios are also, due to the political situation as discussed in the previous section, most likely to have less experienced and trained teachers. Excluding the two schools in Taungoo district, we see the student:teacher ratio varies between 12 students per teacher in Kler Lwee Htoo district to 26 students per teacher in Dooplaya district.

In this year's school statistic collection we gathered information about teacher academic background experience. Unfortunately, that information has yet to be compiled. It will be interesting in the upcoming months to identify teacher qualifications across Karen State districts.

g. Gender Balance in Karen State Schools

g.1. Gender Balance Amongst Karen State Students

The gender make-up of Karen State students, from primary through to high school, is fairly balanced. Of all Karen State students, 52 % are female and 48% are male. These figures are true for both primary and high school levels. Figures diverge a little at the middle school level where 54% of students are female and 46% are male.

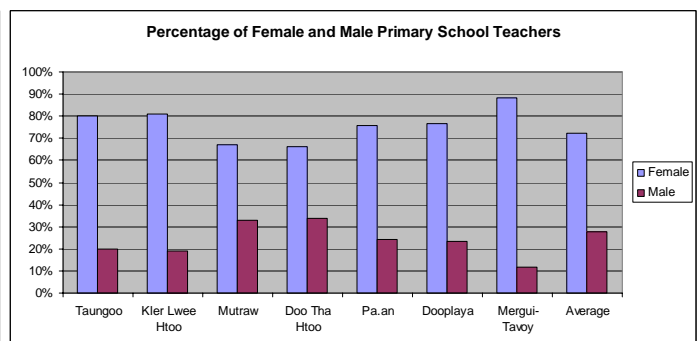
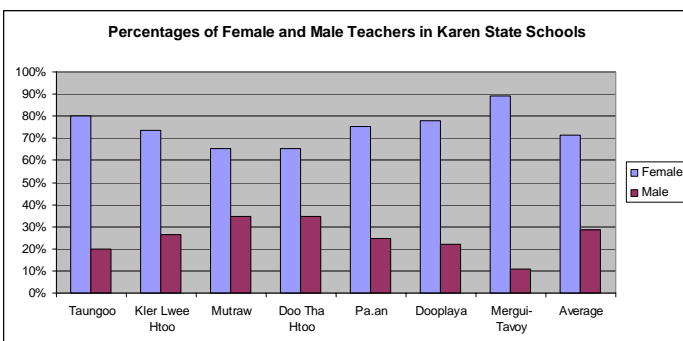


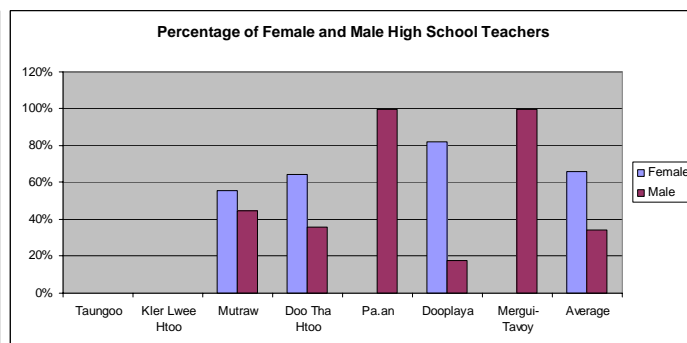
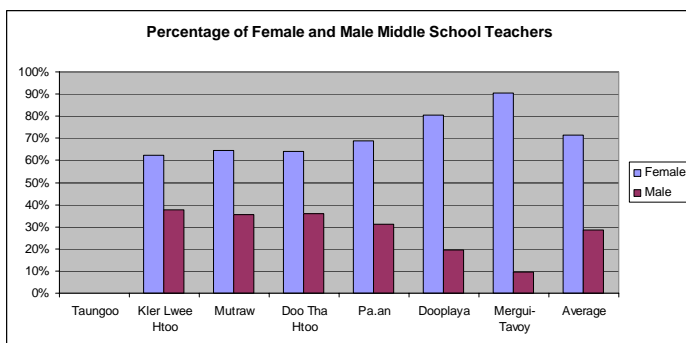
g.2. Gender Balance Amongst Karen State Teachers



XXX School Teachers (109) and XXX School Teachers (93)

The gender make-up of Karen State teachers, as might be expected from trends around the world is not balanced between the sexes. Of Karen State teachers, 72% are female and 28% are male. This figure is the same for primary schools and changes only slightly at the middle school level where 71% of teachers are female and 29% are male. In High Schools, there tends to be a higher percentage of male teachers (34%). What these figures fail to identify is the power relations between female and male teachers. Future investigations might seek to identify the percentage of female teachers and male teachers who are headmistresses/masters of their schools.





h. School Levels

Karen schools are divided into primary, middle and high school levels. Primary school ranges from Kindergarten B to standard 5. Middle school ranges from Kindergarten B to standard 8. High School ranges from Kindergarten B to standard 10. These divisions might cause confusion to some outsiders who would think of school levels being limited to specific standards or grades (i.e. Primary KG-5, Middle 6-8, and High School 9-10 or beyond). Given this, when looking at the table below, be reminded that in middle and high schools you have primary level teachers and students – which might even make up the majority of the population at that school. For example, while there are 61 teachers and 643 students in the 8 middle schools of Kler Lwee Htoo, only a minority of these teachers and students would be teaching/studying at a standard 6-8 level. While collecting school statistics this year, we requested that schools breakdown teachers and students by standard. Unfortunately, not enough schools completed this task to make the data accurate.

BREAKDOWN OF SCHOOLS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS BASED SCHOOL TYPE

DISTRICTS	PRIMARY			MIDDLE			HIGH		
	SCH	TEA	STU	SCH	TEA	STU	SCH	TEA	STU
Taungoo	2	5	37	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kler Lwee Htoo	49	99	1302	8	61	643	0	0	0
Mutraw	292	675	9453	35	269	3410	5	90	1816
Doo Tha Htoo	117	361	8238	13	117	2545	2	56	1364
Pa.an	111	285	6330	7	29	636	0	0	0
Dooplaya	279	714	18442	41	306	8242	4	62	1668
Mergui-Tavoy	11	26	621	3	21	454	0	0	0
TOTAL	861	2165	44423	107	803	15930	11	208	4848



Children Crossing River on Way to Primary School in Dooplaya District

SECTION 2: KSEAG ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN THIS PERIOD (JUL-DEC 2007)

From the opening of schools in June, district and township leaders are responsible for collecting statistics of all schools in their areas. KSEAG monitors are responsible for monitoring that school materials have arrived at local schools and are being used appropriately. By September 15th, all school statistics should arrive so that they can be input into the mapping database. These statistics are used to decide what levels of education assistance are provided to each district. In November, teacher subsidies are distributed. These are the basic planned activities for this period. Below is a more detailed breakdown of actual activities.

Some sections have been removed on this version.

a. KSEAG Structure and Membership

b. School Statistic Collection

c. Monitoring of School Material Use

d. Mapping and Database

e. Fundraising and Breakdown of Donor Support

f. Teacher Subsidy Distribution

After collecting all school statistics, township and district leaders identified which schools received outside support equal to or above the levels of support being provided by KSEAG. These schools did not receive support from KSEAG. The remaining schools, over 93% of all Karen State schools, were designated to receive KSEAG support.

Schools Supported by KSEAG

DISTRICTS	SCHOOLS	SF	SM	ST	TF	TM	TT
Taungoo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kler Lwee Htoo	51	821	792	1613	99	36	135
Mutraw	291	5180	5207	10387	510	261	771
Doo Tha Htoo	131	6026	6099	12125	348	184	532
Pa.an	110	3625	2826	6451	214	65	279
Dooplaya	316	15092	12861	27953	831	230	1061
Mergui-Tavoy	14	580	495	1075	42	5	47
	913	31324	28280	59604	2044	781	2825

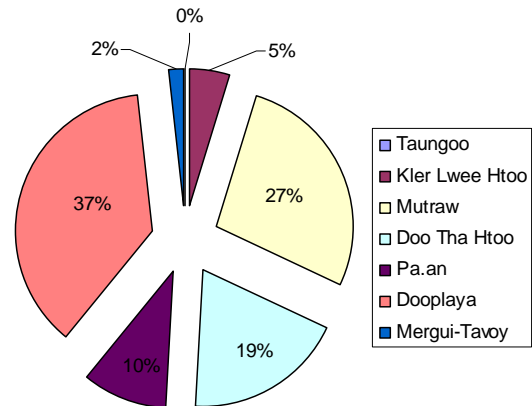
Schools Receiving Support Outside KSEAG

DISTRICTS	SCHOOLS	SF	SM	ST	TF	TM	TT
Taungoo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kler Lwee Htoo	6	169	163	332	19	6	25
Mutraw	41	2052	2240	4292	167	96	263
Doo Tha Htoo	1	6	16	22	2	0	2
Pa.an	8	257	258	515	22	13	35
Dooplaya	8	219	180	399	13	8	21
Mergui-Tavoy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	64	2703	2857	5560	223	123	346

Of the 979 Karen State schools, KSEAG provided teacher subsidies to 913 schools in November and December this year. 64 of the remaining schools did not receive KSEAG support as they received support from outside of KSEAG this year. The remaining 2 schools, from Taungoo district, have not yet contacted their district education leaders and as such have not received KSEAG support. We cannot confirm their status or their assistance needs at this time.

As school statistics from some districts were late coming, we had to estimate the total number of Karen State teachers. We estimated that there would be 2700 teachers this year and as such with the funds available to KSEAG we decided to provide 1500 Baht per teacher. As it turned out, we underestimated the number of teachers. There are 2825 teachers requiring KSEAG funding this year. Money was borrowed from other KTWG projects to cover the additional costs and will be paid back as soon as additional funds from KSEAG come in.

DISTRICTS	Teachers	Support Provided
Taungoo	0	0
Kler Lwee Htoo	135	THB 202,500
Mutraw	771	THB 1,156,500
Doo Tha Htoo	532	THB 798,000
Pa.an	279	THB 418,500
Dooplaya	1061	THB 1,591,500
Mergui-Tavoy	47	THB 70,500
TOTAL	2825	THB 4,237,500



The total cost of teacher subsidies for 2825 teachers was 4,237,500 Baht. There were also additional costs primarily around travel, transportation, and distribution of materials which added up to 147,343 Baht. Therefore the total costs for this period **4,384,843 Thai Baht.**

SECTION 3 AND 4 NOT AVAILABLE ON THIS VERSION