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New Shweli dams in Burma war zone to displace thousands

Burma's military-backed government is proceeding with two mega dams on Burma's Shweli River, a major tributary of the Irrawaddy, which will forcibly displace 3,000 people and directly impact over 15,000, according to a new report released today by local researchers.

The report, *Shweli Under Siege*, details how farmlands have been confiscated, roads built, and surveying conducted under military escort in preparation for construction of two hydropower dams in northern Shan State, which will export electricity to China.

The area has recently seen escalated conflict between Burma's Army and ethnic resistance forces and soldiers have been deployed to secure the dam sites. A battle broke out near the upper dam site in June this year, forcing workers to temporarily leave.

The new dams are part of a series blocking the Shweli River. The construction of Dam 1, which was completed in 2008, involved forced labor and dramatic militarization for local Ta'ang villagers, who received no electricity. Dams 2 and 3 will flood over 30,000 acres of tea plantations, rice farms, and forests. Five villages have already been ordered to move for Dam 3.

Despite government promises to assess impacts of dams on the Irrawaddy River after rising public concern, there has been a media blackout about the Shweli dams.

"Burma's new regime is two faced - they pretend to protect the Irrawaddy while selling off its tributaries to China" said Mai Aung Ko from the Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYO).

China's hydropower giant Huaneng Group has signed a Build-Operate-Transfer agreement for Shweli Dam 2 while Swiss Colenco Power Engineering is involved in Shweli Dam 3. The companies have not consulted affected peoples. Abuse of rights in ethnic areas has fueled the civil war in Burma.

"Foreign dam builders should wake up to the war raging around them and pull out their investments right now" said Mai Aung Ko from TSYO.

The TSYO is calling on Burma's military government to cancel planned dams on the Shweli, implement a nationwide ceasefire, withdraw troops, and enter into genuine dialogue to meaningfully address the root causes of the ongoing civil war.

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Please see www.palaungland.org for *Shweli Under Siege* and *Under the Boot*, a report on Shweli Dam 1.