

The collective voices of local people from The Dawei Special Economic zone

About Dawei Project Watch

Dawei Project Watch (DPW) is a group of social activists and human rights workers working and travelling in the various areas of southern Burma. They are young ethnic Karen, Mon and Tavoyan activists involved in community development, civic education, and human rights documentation for their own people.

They are currently preparing to monitor the imminent and massive Dawei deep-water port industrial project to protect their people, help them seek justice, and challenge the project.

The chief aim of DWP is:

- To regularly monitor the development of Dawei SEZ and seek justice for the local people.

The objectives of DWP are:

1. To raise awareness of the Dawei deep-sea port project
2. To collect feedback from local villagers on the impact of this mega-development project



Project Background

On May 19, 2008, government ministers from the then-active Burmese military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and the Thai government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop and implement a plan for the Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The MoU was a bi-literal agreement granting Thai companies monopolistic rights in the construction of the Dawei SEZ project. Later, Burma's (Myanmar) new government led by Gen. Thein Sein also proposed the Thilawa Special Economic Zone near Rangoon (Yangon) and the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, establishing a long-term plan for economic progress under his administration.

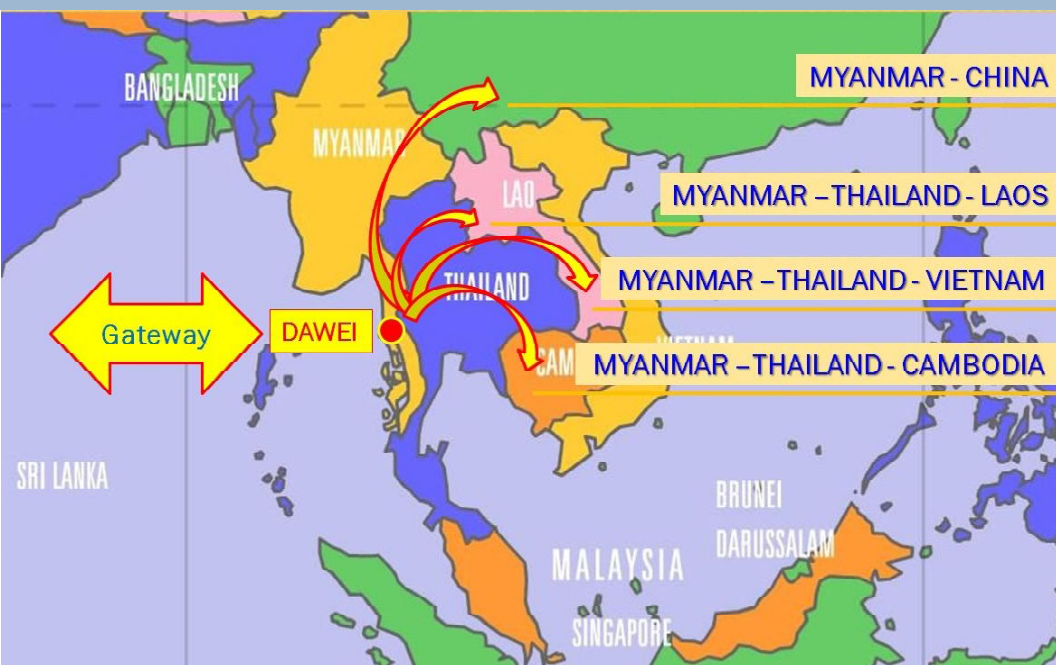
The villagers living in areas designated for dawei deep seaport development are closely linked to their lands and agricultural livelihoods; they have no other working skills. None of them know if they are to be relocated, or whether the government will provide them with new land. The villagers are not sure how much compensation they will get if they are forced to move.

The entire economic zone is about 250 square meters (or 97 square miles), equating to villagers from 21 communities losing the majority of their property. 30,000 people will be directly affected, or about 5,500 families. The Dawei SEZ authorities and the ITD Company will confiscate around 8, 000 acres of paddy cultivated lands, 10, 000 acres of rubber plantations, 12, 000 to 14,000 acres of cashew-nut plantations, and over 150, 000 acres of orchid plantations.

Villagers' rights left out of decision-making

- The local villagers were told by authorities and company personnel that they are to be relocated when the project begins in Yebyu Township, but they have very little knowledge of how the project will actually affect their lives.
- No one has provided the villagers with details about relocation, compensation, or what to expect for their futures.
- The villagers did not get information about the plan from the primary contractor, the Italian-Thai Development Public Company Limited (ITD). ITD never conducted information dissemination sessions about the development.
- The majority of villagers did not know about the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), leaving them unable to identify whether outside groups were following international standards.

DAWEI SEA PORT PROJECT



Villagers' Right to Know Overlooked

- Local people did not know that the special economic zone was to be constructed directly on top of their villages because the plan was developed without their knowledge by ITD and the military regime in early 2008.
- Villagers were still uninformed about the project when it was unveiled by the stakeholders, and later received information on CDs and leaflets only from human rights advocates, environmental groups, and from village leaders who travelled to cities to attend awareness-raising meetings.
- The government authorities, ITD company personnel, and associated Burmese companies never conducted consultations with the villagers, who were left to research information for themselves.
- Villagers have been told that their houses will be removed and that they will receive compensation from ITD, but have not been given specifics.



Resistance, Fears, and Concerns

- On January 8th, 2011, local authorities from former regime State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military government started making lists of local owners of houses, plantations, and paddy fields that lie within the Tavoy deep-sea port construction plans.
- The areas visited by local authorities extended to villages northwest of the primary construction site that have been designated for the project's Upstream and Downstream Petrochemical Complex.
- These surveys and visits have caused local communities to fear imminent land confiscation coupled with absent or nominal compensation.
- Villagers do not know what compensation they will receive, so are unable to prepare for the move or decide where to go.
- There are security concerns about young women becoming victims of rape by laborers or other company men.
- Visiting populations may compromise local culture, language, and customs.
- Food supply and other local resources may be depleted when faced with increased demand from visiting workers and businesspeople.



- The local communities are familiar with such threats, as previously undertaken “development” projects initiated similar loss of land to railroad construction from 1995 to 1998 and the Yadana and Yetagun gas pipelines from 1999 to 2003.

Recommendations:

DPW would like to recommend the following initiatives for stakeholders:

To the Italian-Thai Development Company (ITD) and Other Investors

- Clearly describe the full intent and plan of the Dawei Special Economic Zone to the local Mon, Karen and Tavoyan villagers who will be directly affected by the project, and disseminate only true and accurate information to them.
- Listen to, understand, and respond to the concerns of local people from affected villages, communities, and families.
- Conduct an official Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before the project begins.
- Disseminate SIA and EIA information to other stakeholders, academics, social organizations and environmentalists and take their feedback into account.

To International Financial Institutions (IFIs) including the World Bank, the Asia Development Bank, and the International Monetary Fund

- Discourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Burma (Myanmar) as long as there are no well-founded laws or regulations on corporate social responsibility or social and environmental impacts from development.
- Do not give financial assistance to companies that are involved in the development of the Dawei deep-sea port project and industry complexes as long as the country does not fulfill the World Bank’s guidelines on FDI.

To President U Thein Sein’s Government and Burma’s (Myanmar) National Parliaments

- Regulate laws and guidelines to manage FDIs, which can have negative social and environmental impacts on the people of Burma.
- Postpone and review the Dawei SEZ project to ensure that local heritage sites and the livelihoods of local people are not destroyed.
- Introduce and encourage the participation of local people in the Dawei SEZ decision-making process, as all investment and development is allocated to the Tavoy District.

