

The Voice of Women in Thilawa Special Economic Zone

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## **The Voice of Women in Thilawa Special Economic Zone**

### **Introduction**

The Thilawa Women's Group was formed based on the need of women and youths in Thilawa, where women's rights are underrepresented and they have little active participation in the field of social development. Although the women in Thilawa have directly been suffering from the impacts of the investment project, their voices are not being considered in discussions, forums or in the decision making process. The Thilawa Women's Group aims to expose the ongoing human rights abuses, to resolve the current impacts of the projects on women, to prevent future harmful impacts of the projects on women and to ensure women are able to collaborate and contribute to overcoming the problems faced in this community. The Thilawa Women's Group has regularly held meetings, exchanges, helped build the local capacity building, engaged with community organizing and documented the ongoing situation as it affects women and the wider community.

### **Rational Background**

Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is located in Thanlyin- Kyauk Tan township, 23 kilometers south of Yangon. The project is a joint venture (JV) project between Japan and Myanmar governments, with 51% of shares owned by Myanmar, while Japan holds the rest of the shares. The project is divided into two zones, Zone A and Zone B. Zone A covers 400 hectares of land, while the Zone B covers 2000 hectares of land. In Zone A, the factories are already running. In Zone B, 260 hectares of land is already being used by the project since 2016. In the early months of 2013, the communities from 8 villages, spread over 2400 hectares of land, received a notice letter asking them to move to the relocation area within 14 days, with the letter stating they could be detained in jail for a month if not. Therefore, the communities had no choice but to move to the current relocation area in both 2013 and 2016. Around 150 families from both Zone A and Zone B have already relocated. The communities, from Zone A, in the relocation area have been facing many challenges and difficulties as they were not given the opportunity to participate in the discussions, arranging the resettlement work plan, planning of the area designated for relocation, or in the general decision making processes as conducted by the SEZ management committee. The community didn't have access to information and preparation for relocation because the government failed to follow the best practices outlined for the resettlement plan.

### **The current situation of relocated families:**

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Over 6 years after relocating, the project affected people (PAPs) have been facing lots of problems because their livelihood is based on natural resources and many agricultural activities. The land has been urbanized, without access to traditional agricultural based livelihoods. PAPs have now had to get mortgages on their houses and around 50% of relocated families have lost their houses and properties due to a lack of consistent income, no access to livelihood opportunities, the loss of small scale agriculture due to smaller houses and yards with inadequate space to farm, and other issues related to having no regular stable employment. A direct consequence of these issues is that the family cannot afford for their children to go to the school and received educational opportunities.

### **The current situation of un-relocated families:**

The main livelihoods of the community members in Thilawa are agricultural, such as paddy farming, flower farming, betel nut leaf farming, farming of seasonal vegetables, and small scale livestock farming as baffle, goats, chickens, ducks, and pigs. The rest of their livelihoods are related to running grocery shops, selling farmed goods and vegetables, and for some working in restaurants and as textile workers.

According to the previous experience from the relocated people, the community members who haven't relocated yet are concerned about the potential negative impacts such as a loss of their livelihoods, a worsening situation with relation to living style or standards, and a loss of income due to a lack of natural resources. The lack of access to adequate information on the project, lack of public participation in decision making, a lack of consideration of women and youth and their children' education are all contributing to the current and potential harmful impacts on the Thilawa community caused by the project.

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“My house has a big garden, where I can grow seasonal fruits and vegetables for my family. The vegetables needn’t be bought from the market and the vegetables from my garden can be sold outside. I can peacefully meditate in my quiet yard.

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“I can catch the shrimp and fish in the river anytime. I cook it for my family and also sell it to the villagers or the neighbors”,

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**There are enough spaces for small scale livestock farming in our area, but not in the relocation area.**

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The vegetables (to be boiled or raw) needn't to be bought with cash. We can find and collect these vegetables such as mushrooms, bamboo and etc., in the jungle around our villages.

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**There are pretty enough spaces to grow the bamboo trees in our land so that we can collect and cook bamboo shoots anytime. We can also sell one bamboo tree with one thousand kyats for construction of houses and other buildings, and the price depends on type of bamboo. It costs high price if the quality of bamboo is good.**



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The bamboo for building houses and French, and the wood for cooking needn't to be bought from the market and those can be collected easily around our area.

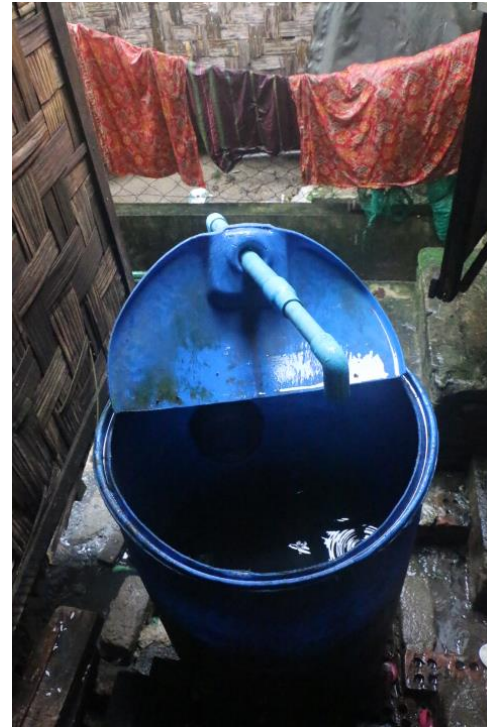
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**I don't entirely want to move from this area. We have regular income because it is easy to earn our livelihood such as agriculture and livestock farming in our area.**

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**“The house in the resettlement area is 25 x 50 square feet. There is not enough space for agriculture in the resettlement area and the neighbors complained about the smell of my farming when I did livestock farming because the houses are very close to each.”**

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**“When I visit other villages where the people are not forced to move to the relocation area, it makes me feel sad as I recall my originally former home with big garden, where I used to live and farm. There are differences between living in the original area and relocation area. It’s even difficult to dry our laundry clothes.”**

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**“It’s not easy to do agriculture and farming around our area because the factories are becoming to get very closed to the villages. The amount of production of paddy farming is now going down because it messed up and block the irrigation system for the farms due to the huge project buildings.”**

### Recommendations

## **The Voice of Women in Thilawa Special Economic Zone**

### **To the Myanmar Government and JICA**

- Based on the principles of meaningful engagement and dialogue, listen to the voices of the Project Affected People to build a resettlement work plan.
- Provide effective/appropriate vocational trainings and create job opportunities that are in place before the implementation of the resettlement plan.
- There should be a specific plan for Project Affected People to access job opportunities before or during or after resettlement, with priority being given to ensuring women undertake employment.
- When offering remedies for the harm caused, such as compensation, all Project Affected People s must be treated in a fair and appropriate manner, with remedies provided without bias or favoritism.

### **To Companies currently investing and planning to invest in Thilawa SEZ**

- Not to neglect the impacts of the projects on the local residents.
- To engage with the local residents and add specific sections and opportunities for women in the discussion; in order to accurately access information fromby all aspects of the local community, and to share the right information to the local residents.
- Review the lessons learned from the previous resettlement situation so as not to repeat the same mistakes made in Thilawa SEZ.
- Create a mechanism for problem solving in Thilawa SEZ that is accessible, fair and benefits all aspects of the community.
- For those who are planning to invest in Thilawa SEZ, consider resolving the negative impacts and problems local residents already affected by the projects are facing, prior to making investments