

Longer term solutions needed for the refugees

As the Burmese regime militarises and exploits the natural resources of the border areas of eastern Burma, the human rights of ethnic groups continue to be abused and new refugees continue to flee to Thailand.

It is estimated that there are now more than 40,000 unregistered people living in the camps. The lack of an effective refugee status determination process makes it difficult for TBBC to know exactly how many people there are and who should be eligible for assistance. At the moment TBBC has to set its own “feeding figure” on the best available information. Hopefully a new pilot “pre-screening” process launched by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) in four camps in March will solve this problem. All unregistered people are being interviewed and the plan is to “screen out” those “without a manifestly just claim to asylum”. If the pilot is successful and is extended to all of the camps, it will be easier for TBBC to target assistance only to recognised refugees.

Since the results will not be known for some months, TBBC is meanwhile trying to improve the accuracy of its feeding figures by physically verifying the actual number of all camp residents, both registered and unregistered. Currently TBBC is only feeding around half of the unregistered people so the likely result of these exercises might be higher feeding figures during the year.

Resettlement is currently the only durable solution available for the refugees. The fact that this strategy has not significantly reduced population numbers (due both to the many new-born and the steady influx of new arrivals) makes the search for new strategies even more urgent.

TBBC is involved in meetings with Donors, UN and other stakeholders to find ways of working with the RTG to help the refugees become more self-reliant. It is hoped there will be a major Workshop in the middle of the year to agree new strategies. Refugees will need more freedom to move outside the camps to become really self-reliant, but until this is possible TBBC is exploring ways of expanding livelihood opportunities within the camps.

One of these initiatives is described in this e-Letter. More information about the current refugee situation and TBBC's current programme activities can be found in TBBC's latest [Six Month Report](#). (PDF, 6,6Mb)



Internal displacement in Eastern Burma

Shan State - SPDC pressure on the United Wa State Army (UWSA) to surrender their arms or become a local militia continues to escalate, with reports of armed skirmishes in Hopang township (near the Chinese border) and the deployment of heavy artillery into Mong Hsat and Mon Ton townships (near the Thailand Border) during February.

Karenni State - The Karenni Information Centre reported in February that a villager was killed when caught in cross fire of armed conflict between Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and SPDC troops on 30 January.

Karen State - Attacks against civilians continue, with CIDKP reporting that SPDC launched 40 mortar shells into civilian hiding sites around the Hsaw War Der area in Thandaung Township over 2 days starting on March 21.

Pegu Division - CIDKP report that military patrols by the SPDC in Keh Der and Kwee Lah village tracts in Kyaugkyi Township between February 10 and 15 caused 750 people to flee into hiding in the forests.

For more information about Internal Displacement in Eastern Burma, visit the [IDP pages](#) on our web site.

Refugee camp population

(TBBC's feeding figures) As of 31 March, 2009

The total feeding population in March for the 9 refugee camps in Thailand was **135,093**. For more detailed information, please visit TBBC's updated [web site](#)

Resettlement Statistics are available as of 28 February 2009. Source: IOM

Since 1st January 2009, a total of **2,726** individuals left for resettlement to the following countries: USA (1,927); Australia (524); Norway (181); Sweden (56); Finland (18); Canada (14); New Zealand (3).

Vacancies with TBBC:

English teacher - Part time in Mae Hong Son and Mae Sariang, Thailand. [Read more](#)

1 Consultancy - Data Management Review, Analysis and Recommendation. [Read more](#)

2 Food Security Officers – Generalist; one in Mae Sot and one in Sangkaburi. [Read more](#)

Sharing experiences in cultivation techniques

As a way to strengthen refugees' self reliance, TBBC supports small scale agriculture in eight refugee camps.

The "Community Agriculture Nutrition project" - CAN, was inspired by a man called David Saw Wah, now resettled in Australia. David's vision was based on a profound understanding of the context in which refugees in Thailand live: a restricted environment with limited options for sustainable food procurement and livelihoods. He developed his vision of a community-based agriculture project focused on appropriate technology to grow nutritious foods in small spaces using local materials. Eight years later David's vision still lives on, and his ideas are documented in [the CAN handbook](#).

Up till now, the project has largely been limited to demonstration gardens in each camp. However, a new initiative within the project aiming at expanding CAN to household level is mobilising individuals and households to lead by example, demonstrating techniques to grow kitchen gardens and use the limited space.

Last year, 500 refugees were trained in small scale agriculture, and over 6000 households border wide received seeds to grow vegetables near their homes.

"I look forward to sharing my experiences"

Before attending CAN training, 22 year old Saw Tha Kai spent much of his time restlessly wandering the streets of Mae La camp. But to the happiness of his family, Tha Kai has spent the last few months growing vegetables in his family's kitchen garden. Tha Kai's family recently enjoyed the garden's first harvest, providing three weeks of continuous supply of green leafy vegetables and a surplus of beans that were sold in his parents shop in the camp. Tha Kai's interest and enthusiasm for agriculture has been recognised by CAN trainers, and now he is a valued member of the CAN Mae La training team. "I feel very happy that something has happened to give my life a direction. I am looking forward to sharing my experience and encouraging other youth in Mae La community to do the same" says Tha Kai.



Saw Htookoc participated in a CAN training. Today, he and his wife Naw Paw Thate grow vegetables on garden beds constructed of bamboo near their house.



Resources and related links

TBBC:

[Programme Report July - December 2008](#) (PDF: 6,6 Mb)

Irinnews:

[Beyond the delta, aid projects miss out](#)

United Nations:

[Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana](#)

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre:

[Myanmar: Conflicts and human rights violations continue to cause displacement](#)

WFP/ Bangladesh visit to learn about camp based management

In February, representatives from the Government of Bangladesh, World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR/ Bangladesh visited two refugee camps as part of an exchange visit between WFP Bangladesh and TBBC.

The visitors were in particular interested to see how the camp management model in Thailand camps could be replicated in Bangladeshi camps. Discussions were held with both camp committees and refugee committees about the camp management system and tools that could help them in establishment of a similar model in Bangladesh.

Annual Nutrition Survey

Nutrition surveys of refugee children from six months to five years of age are conducted annually in all camps under TBBC's supervision to measure nutritional status of the population and contribute to the picture of general welfare within the camps.

Survey results from 2008 for children under five years indicated a border-wide reduction in global acute (wasting) malnutrition rates from 2007 to 2.7%, which is an acceptable level according to World Health Organization (WHO) classification. The survey also showed a small increase from 2007 in border-wide global chronic (stunting) malnutrition rates to 36.2%, which is classified as high according to WHO standards. There were no significant differences between the occurrences of acute or chronic malnutrition between boys and girls.

To help combat chronic malnutrition, TBBC provides fortified blended flour (AsiaMIX) which contains added vitamins and minerals as an appropriate weaning food for children. TBBC also collaborates with health agencies and community based organizations to promote nutrition activities.

TBBC is the principal supplier of food, shelter and non-food items to the refugees from Burma.

To make a contribution, visit TBBC's [donation page](#)