



Annual Report 2015



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Tejiendo Lazos Entre Fronteras
Weaving Bonds Across Borders



Our Mission

Weaving Bonds Across Borders is a women-led network that is building the power and leadership of youth from grassroots communities to work together for peace, women's rights and environmental justice.

We promote leadership from and exchange between the grassroots and global South through training, peacebuilding, and support for youth and community led actions.

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BURMA



**An Introduction By Nang Shining,
Co-Founder and Burma
Coordinator**



In Burma's conflict zones, communities have been deeply affected by years of military dictatorship and armed conflict.

In my community of Mong Pan in Shan State, there is a lack of trust among youth and division in the community due to years of conflict and civil war.

At the same time, our community is opening up to outside investment and development. There is a need for our community to be united in order to be able to advocate for their rights as large scale development starts to move in.

The Need in Mong Pan

The local people in Mong Pan, Burma have been living under the oppression of military government for several decades, where they have no freedom of expression, no right to assemble, no freedom to celebrate their cultural events.

Despite the current political changes in Burma, no community development project has reached Mong Pan yet. The township is located in a remote area and used to be a conflict zone.

Growing up in a war zone, people tend to be more tense, sensitive and there is a lack of trust and unity between groups in the community. People living in Mong Pan have suffered from physical and psychological violence, so trauma is rooted underneath of their heart.

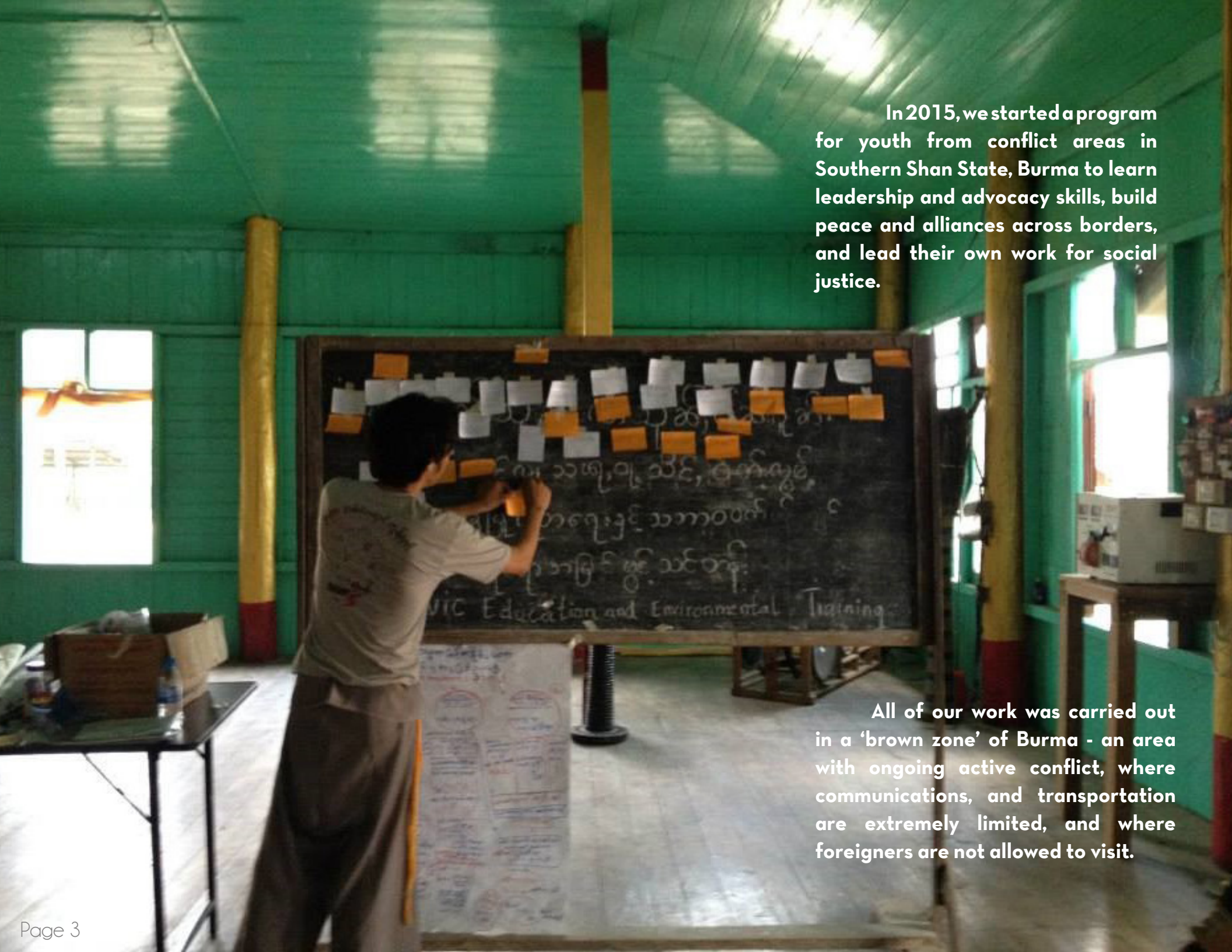
At the same time, Mong Pan is facing many challenges including opening up to outside investment, ongoing deforestation by both legal and illegal logging, and most worryingly of all, the proposed Mong Ton Dam project on the Salween river nearby our home, which would be the tallest dam in Southeast Asia if built. By some estimates, hundreds of thousands of villagers have already been

displaced in Shan State to make way for this dam. There is a great need for us to be united in order to be able to advocate for our rights and preserve our culture and environment as large scale development starts to move in.

In order to address these urgent problems, since 2015 Weaving Bonds Across Borders is working with youth leaders from Mong Pan to promote healing, empowerment, and effective leadership to address the urgent issues facing our community. Using a unique approach that combines peace-building, leadership development and advocacy, we work to empower local youth from grassroots communities in Shan State to be leaders for change in our community.

We believe that our work can be a model of hope and resilience for other communities experiencing similar challenges across Burma. and around the world.

*Sincerely,
Nang Shining*

A person is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored t-shirt and a grey sarong, writing on a large chalkboard. The chalkboard is covered with handwritten text in Burmese and English, and numerous small white and orange sticky notes are attached to it. The room has green walls and yellow pillars. There are windows on the left and right sides of the room, and a table with various items on the left. The ceiling is made of wooden planks.

In 2015, we started a program for youth from conflict areas in Southern Shan State, Burma to learn leadership and advocacy skills, build peace and alliances across borders, and lead their own work for social justice.

All of our work was carried out in a 'brown zone' of Burma - an area with ongoing active conflict, where communications, and transportation are extremely limited, and where foreigners are not allowed to visit.

Training and Leadership Development

We created a leadership program for grassroots youth from Burma to learn about leadership skills, peacebuilding and the environment.

Working with youth from remote areas of Southern Shan State where there are no other social services or activism groups, we brought together youth from communities across Southern Shan State, specifically Mong Pan, Mong Ton, Mong Sat, and Kunhing (1000 islands) to attend a leadership program to learn the basics of human rights, environmental protection, peacebuilding, and youth leadership skills. For most of the youth, it was the first time they had ever travelled outside of their community.



Youth practicing public speaking skills



Our community center in Mong Pan

We started the first community center and library in Mong Pan, Shan State.

The center and library was established to encourage youth and community members to engage in the community, to learn skills such as English language, filmmaking, and computer skills, and for youth interns from the community to live and learn together. With donations from Earthrights International, Magical Light Foundation Paung Ku Organization and many other partners, we have more than 500 books and 40 DVDs available at the center.

We promoted youth leadership and empowerment through our internship program.

Seven youth leaders from Mong Pan and surrounding areas built their self-confidence and teamwork skills, learned English conversation, computer skills, and environmental and human rights issues. They also learned research planning, training preparation and organizing, accounting and administration at the Community Center.



Youth debate the proposed dam near their hometown

We organized workshops on hydropower and dam impacts, civic education, Buddhist environmentalism, data and mapping skills, and indigenous and human rights with over 150 grassroots participants from Southern Shan State.

Peacebuilding and Alliance Building

We brought together youth and communities across ethnic groups in Shan State, Burma to promote grassroots solidarity and alliance building across ethnicities and borders.

We worked with youth, communities and resource persons from Shan, Danu, Intha, Pa-O and Burman communities, to build understanding and bridge alliances across borders which have been damaged by Burma's civil war and military dictatorship. Together with Green Rights Organization, we organized for youth from Mong Pan to learn and exchange with local villagers from a Danu ethnic area of Shan State where there are more than 50 mining companies operating, causing serious environmental and social impacts to the local villagers.



Inter-ethnic and faith gathering for peace



Visiting local community with Chinese and Burmese environmentalists

We promoted upstream and downstream collaboration on the Salween dams by bringing together Chinese and Burmese environmentalists.

We hosted Chinese environmentalists and professors Dr Yu and Mr Ling in Shan State to teach research methods and the use of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (EIA and SIA) as an advocacy tool on development projects. 53 people from 10 different ethnic and racial groups joined this collaboration held in Shan State, Burma

We promoted inter-faith peacebuilding and community-led relief for war-affected communities.

We organized an inter-faith session, focusing on efforts to promote dialogue and peace between Buddhists, Muslims and Christians. We provided emergency humanitarian assistance to thousands of conflict-affected families in Shan State in November during a military offensive when many people were displaced by conflict. We raised funds and a convoy of our youth travelled to deliver food, medicine and clothes to displaced persons camps, as well as messages of support from around the world.



Youth team delivering aid to IDPs in Shan State

Youth-Led Action and Activism Support

We organized and supported a youth-led campaign against the Mong Ton Dam in Shan State, which would be the tallest dam in Southeast Asia if built.

The Mong Ton dam is proposed to be built just 33 km from our center. Participants learned about the negative impacts that the dam will have, and how they can effectively organize and advocate for their rights against the dam project. Youth joined public hearings on the dam to express their opinions, spoke with the media to share their concerns about the dam, and learned graphic design skills so they could print and distribute over 700 pamphlets with information about the potential dam impacts to communities upstream and downstream of the proposed dam project.



Youth protesting the Mong Ton dam at an environmental impact assessment meeting



Shooting film for the community youth documentary about the Salween dams.

We organized a Community Youth Film-Making Project to amplify youth voices on the Salween dams project.

In response to our youth's interest, we invited film-makers to teach documentary film-making and story-telling skills for social change. Using the skills learned, youth are now creating a documentary about the lives of local people on the Salween river, and their voices and concerns about the proposed Mong Ton dam project.

Youth Voices

"The great change in me is that I feel I am more confident and understand about other people more than before."

"Now we learned not to be shy and to be brave to speak in public."

"I gained more knowledge from Weaving Bonds. I also learned what is social movement".

"We understand each other better. We want to help our community."

"From now on I will not look down on myself. I will not feel shy and upset for being from a remote area."

"I want to be an environmentalist because I want to conserve the forest and stop the companies from exploiting our natural resources. I want to see the Thanlwin river flowing freely in nature."



Youth united to stop the Salween dams project



REGIONAL

An Introduction

By Kathy, Regional Coordinator
and

Hannah, Co-Founder and
International Program Coordinator



Our regional work in Southeast Asia is truly unique, as we bring together young women from ethnic minority, indigenous and grassroots communities in Southeast Asia to learn, exchange and grow together.

Too often, leadership and exchange programs only bring those who have the best English skills, network or connections. We deliberately choose instead to focus on investing in the leadership and empowerment of youth from directly affected and grassroots communities.. This involves more challenges, including security and communication

issues, but we truly believe it is worthwhile: as young women ourselves, we understand the importance of giving the opportunity to young women , youth and those from minority and grassroots communities to be leaders.

The Need for Our Work

Across the Mekong region of Southeast Asia, conflicts over resources, including water, land and boundaries are a threat to peace in the region. Furthermore, those who are most directly impacted, such as women and youth from conflict affected and indigenous communities, are rarely part of the decision making processes.

In response to these challenges, our work supports grassroots leadership and cross border and regional solidarity, particularly of youth and young women from marginalized groups, including ethnic minority and indigenous communities.

Our Future Community Leaders Program works with young women and youth from Myanmar/ Burma, Thailand, China and the Mekong region to promote young women's leadership on gender, peace and environment issues through workshops and training.

After our workshops, we continue to work

closely with our youth and young women in their affected communities and conflict zones to give additional support by helping them to implement small-scale projects including conducting workshops, meetings, and research to improve their community situations.

In addition, our regional program is collecting young women's life stories to advocate for women's rights on natural resource management and to promote gender equality between men and women to have equal rights for decision-making and participation.



Young women united across borders

Through our work, we are creating new ideas and visions of leadership, ones that are centered around women's leadership styles, minority and indigenous youth power, and shared collective leadership.

*Sincerely,
Hannah & Kathy*

In 2015, we started a leadership program to empower youth from the Mekong region to be leaders for peace, gender and environmental justice in their communities. Our program is unique in that we bring together youth from indigenous, minority and remote grassroots communities for cross-border solidarity and exchange.



Training and Leadership Development

We promoted grassroots exchange and leadership through our first regional youth leadership workshop, which brought together young women from minority, indigenous and grassroots communities from Thailand, China and Burma.

Young women activists learned about Peacebuilding, Leadership Skills for Youth, Gender and Feminism, Water Governance, Dams and Environment, Security for Women and Human Rights Defenders, and Project Planning.



Our leadership program in action



Youth learning English skills and debating gender issues

We provided English language support to women human rights activists from marginalized communities.

A long over-looked but incredibly necessary activity, we found that English language level is one of the greatest barriers for participation of minority, indigenous and grassroots women in international advocacy. Six young women joined this program and built their skills and confidence in English in order to be able to share their stories and advocate for their communities on an international platform.

We promoted young women, especially indigenous and global South women, to be leaders, teachers and resource persons in our programs.

To promote local and youth voices, all of our regional workshops were led by young women from the global South, including young indigenous women as resource persons teaching about leadership skills, gender justice, feminism and peacebuilding. We also brought our participants to learn and exchange with other indigenous and grassroots communities in Thailand.



Women's Leadership workshop led by Da, a young Karen woman from Mekong Youth Assembly

Peacebuilding and Alliance Building

Youth learned inner peacebuilding and communication skills, including meditation and mindfulness.

We believe that in order to holistically support youth as leaders, we need to support their emotional and spiritual growth. and to address the trauma they have experienced from conflict and marginalization. Using a secular approach, we integrated sessions on mindfulness, yoga, and self-reflection throughout our activities.



Group mindfulness exercise



Learning from P'Maliwan, a grassroots women leader for coal affected communities in Thailand



Exchanging with Karen indigenous community

We supported peace and alliance building between indigenous and marginalized communities.

Youth from minority, indigenous and grassroots communities that have had conflicts with each other in the past built their understanding across borders through our peacebuilding workshop, and also had an opportunity to exchange and learn with other marginalized communities in Thailand. .

Youth built solidarity and friendship through our cross-border internship program.

Our first two interns, Pu Sor from Thailand and Hom Kham from Myanmar, both come from the Salween river in their countries. During their internship, they studied gender, research skills and story-telling and planned a women's leadership program on the Salween together.



Our network of committed youth

We built a network of grassroots youth committed for change across the Mekong region.

Through our alumni and networking program, we built connections and a network with dozens of youth and grassroots organizations working for change in Myanmar, China and Thailand and planned future joint activities together for 2016.

Youth-Led Action and Activism Support

Youth led activities in their communities to promote women's leadership, gender equality and environmental justice in the Mekong region.

We supported 11 youth to lead 5 projects in Thailand, China and Myanmar, including a women's leadership project, research on dams and mining, and a solidarity and exchange tour between dam-affected peoples.



Pu Sor leading a community mapping activity to help women in her community take leadership on their natural resources

Pu Sor from Thailand led a women's empowerment project in her indigenous Karen community in Mae Hong Son, Thailand, working with women and children to create a community map of the natural resources and history of the village, as a tool to empower women and protect them from mining and investment projects

Chinese and Tibetan youth conducted community based research on water pollution and advocated to the local government on the issue, as well as dams and mining issues. They also conducted workshops on gender, water governance and environmental protection with Tibetan youth.



Tibetan youth study environmental protection

A multi-ethnic team of youth from Burma led an exchange trip between dam affected communities at the Pang Loun dam in Burma and potentially affected communities on the Salween river. They learned about the devastating impacts of the Pang Loun dam including forced resettlement, trauma and suicide among resettled communities, and built their network and solidarity between the two communities.

Youth Voices

"I never think I will have a great opportunity to learn with other friends from different countries. I can't express I am very happy. And I want to thank to you all."

"This program let me realize the importance of environmental protection, and inspired me to have a plan for this work in my hometown."

"I think the important idea is I learned that women leadership, environment protecting is so important for us in China."

"Now I am more confident and know how to be a leader, we have network with different country. I am strong, confident, active, and know other's culture."

"Before I would like to do something for my community but I could not start by my own. I believe in myself to start now."



Burmese youth team leading dam-affected community exchange.

YOUTH VOICES

A Young Woman Leader for Women and Indigenous Rights: Pu Sor's Story



My name is Pu Sor and I come from Baan Thiaper village in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand.

As a young woman I was discouraged by many people around me, including my family. I wanted to get an education and a career, but this was very difficult for me because of gender and also because I am Karen and was discriminated against on ethnic grounds.

In my community, girls and women have less opportunities to get educated and participate in the decision making process. When I was a child, I have heard people in



Pu Sor's village, Baan Thiaper

the community or our parents always say that we as women are not leaders. Also, we have always emphasized that women should get married and have children and take care of their families.

The roles of men and women in my Karen community are clearly divided – women should be the main parent, take care of their family, make textiles, clean the house and cook, while men work outside the home, for example farming and gardening. Even so, women often work outside the home too! Karen women are expected to be patient and gentle with their family and undertake all they can for their family home.

By contrast, men are not pressured to marry, stay at home or take care of their parents. A woman who wants to leave to go work in the city faces difficult questions from her family

and if she does leave she is expected to send all of her money to her family and to return as quickly as possible to marry.

Now, I am the only female university graduate from my community and I feel so sad for my sisters and other young women who cannot get an education. Luckily, I got support for my tuition fees since I was in high school until university from Sangsan Anakod Yawachon which is working based in Maehongson and Tak province.

These are the reasons why I really want to do something for my community in terms of women's leadership; I want to change this situation, but I didn't know where to start or what kind of things I should do. This question stayed in my mind until I met Weaving Bonds staff and participated in their workshop last year in 2015. In the workshop, I gained a lot of valuable knowledge from different teachers



Leading a community mapping exercise with women

and local community leaders. This workshop has encouraged and supported me to go further and make my dream more possible.

After attending the Weaving Bonds workshop, I became confident enough to get involved in women's leadership issues and start to make change in my community

Pu Sor's Story, Updated



After joining last year's Weaving Bonds workshop, Pu Sor spent three months as an intern in Chiang Mai, building her skills and knowledge and supporting a research project on gender issues in Thailand.

She also received a small grant from Weaving Bonds to organize a project in her hometown in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand along the Salween River on the Thai-Myanmar border.

During her project, she worked with women and children from her community to learn the community's history and produce a community map in order to build local women's confidence and understanding of their local history and wisdom on natural resources management.

Now, Pu Sor is pursuing her dream by leading a women's empowerment program for Karen women in Sop Moei, Mae Hong Son with the organization Development Center for Children and Community Network (DCCN)..



Pu Sor presenting about her work to a group of journalists, NGO workers and community members in Thailand



Pusor (top, second from left), together with the women and children from her community

YOUTH VOICES

Saving Her Village on the Salween: Hom Kham's Story



My name is Hom Kham. I come from Southern Shan State, Mong Pan, Myanmar. I am 22 years old. My hometown is very small but it is very beautiful. The Salween River is near my hometown and we also have a small stream that is connected to flow to the Salween River. In China they call it the Nu River, in Burmese it is the Thanlwin River and in our Shan language it is the Nam Khone and we are the indigenous ethnic group that stays around there.

I was born in this village and it is my ambition to spend the rest of my life here – I want to make sure this is possible not only for me, but for my whole community.



The view of Mong Pan, Hom Kham's hometown

My hometown, Mong Pan is surrounded by green mountains and covered in dense forests. There are a lot of natural resources, including our river which flows into the Salween River, one of the most important rivers for our community.

We have many different ethnic groups which include Pa-O, Lisu, Shan and Karen, but the majority of the people are Shan. Mong Pan is rich in culture, literature and traditional festivals. There is an ancient lake and pagodas and monasteries, including one famous monastery where a respected monk is celebrated every year. Nearby is a beautiful waterfall, from which people have electricity since 2008. The area is surrounded by green rice fields and teak forests.

The people in the area are known for their kindness; everyone knows each other and welcomes new visitors to the area.

We have no industry, so we rely on farming to earn money and develop our village. We grow mostly rice and garlic, both of which require enough water to succeed. Aside from that, we collect firewood from the forest and grow green vegetables to eat; the forest and water are central to life for our minority ethnic groups.

But we also have many problems in our area. Our community lives under military government and military groups encircle the town; in our case, the military's population is more than the local people. Tourists cannot come here because it is a conflict area. Sometimes the military or government department blocks the water flow to the fields, meaning we can't catch fish or make money. Last year and this year, there has not been enough water and we have a lot of problems to do agriculture. Another reason for the lack of water is we lost a lot of thick forests because of logging.



Water is life for the people of Mong Pan

If we don't have enough water, the crops can't produce at high levels and the end result is that we lose income, education and health.

Furthermore, a long time ago, the government has already built one small hydropower on one important stream in our hometown at the top of the township, meaning it is difficult to get enough water to the agricultural areas. In the future, things may get even worse.

The Salween River is about 33km from Mong Pan and this is where the government has proposed to build the Mong Ton dam (also known as Ta Sang dam). It would be one of the biggest dams in Southeast Asia if built.

The environmental impact of building such a dam would be huge – big areas of forest would have to be flooded, destroying trees, natural resources and wildlife. On top of this, many people living in the flooded areas would lose their land and be forced to move, not to mention the people living downstream who might no longer be able to grow their crops and would also have to relocate.

From what has happened in Mong Pan, with our small hydropower, we can imagine the impacts of this huge dam on our entire region. All of our townships and Salween countries

should cooperate together to help protect our international river.



During her internship with Weaving Bonds, leading an activity with Salween youth

In conclusion, I am so lucky and proud that I am one lady who has a chance to stay in a small town with a happy family and our lovely ethnic groups and spend my life to help others as much as I can. In the future, I would like to meet many friends in other countries who live around the Salween River and we can work together. I believe that if we try our best, we could change our environment positively and people also will know women's vital role in their community.

Hom Kham's Story, Updated:



Protesting the Salween dams

After joining our regional workshop and internship program, Hom Kham is now working for Weaving Bonds and our sister organization, the Mong Pan Youth Association in Shan State, Burma. She is currently making a documentary about the lives of local communities on the Salween River and will have a chance to present at the Greater Mekong Forum at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand in Nov 2016. After that, she will be working as a research assistant, along the Salween river basin in Shan State.



Hom Kham shooting video for the documentary

2015 Financial Report

2015 Revenue

Amount in USD

Individual and Community Donations 1,568

Foundation Grants 72,090

Total Revenue **73,658**

2015 Expenditure

Amount in USD

Program Expenses Myanmar 25,448

Program Expenses Regional 16,272

Total Program Expenses **41,720**

Staffing Cost 18,969

Overhead and Emergency Fund 414

Total Expenditure **61,103**

Balance on Hand (Dec 31st, 2015) 12,555





THANK YOU

Our deepest thanks go to the following individuals and organizations who have supported our work with financial support, advice, hard work and/or partnership in 2015:

Organizations and Foundations

Asia Indigenous People's Pact
American Friends Service Committee
Center for ASEAN Studies
EarthRights International
Green Rights Organization
iMekong
International Accountability Project
International Rivers
Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
Legal Advocacy Center for Indigenous Communities
Lisle Foundation
Magical Light Foundation
Mekong Energy and Ecology Network
Mekong School and Alumni Network
Mekong Youth Assembly
Mong Pan Youth Association
Open Society Foundations
Oxfam Australia
Paung Ku
Research Center for Delta Youth
Southeast Asia Border Research Society
Water, Land and Ecosystems
We Women Foundation

Individual Donors

Ben Dean
Charles Powell
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Jeanice Chieng
Jessica Work
Kimberly Roberts
Leslie Donovan
Maureen Harris
Mong Pan Community
Nikolai Sindorf
Sharon Lungo
Vanessa Lamb

Staff

Duangkamon Donchaum
Hannah
Hseng Leun
Kathy
Seng Pin
Shining

Interns

Hom Kham
Nang Kwan Khio
Nang Morn
Nang Mwe Leng
Pu Sor
Sai Bee Wan
Nang Tin Saw
Nang Seng Kham

Nang Mwe Lao
Nang Sam Pao Jom
Nang Mwe Noom Phoung
Nang Hom Leng
Nang Morn Seng Lao
Nang Mwe Khur
Nang Sandar Lang
Nang Kwan Cho

Volunteers

Erin Callahan
Leilana Quigner
Mackenzie Greene-Powell

Board

Zuo Tao
Yu Yin
Tom Weerachat
Paula Ramirez
Mueda Nawanat
Mackenzie Greene-Powell

Friends and Network

To those of you who have supported our work with contributions of your efforts, including our trainers, resource persons, advisors and network: there are too many of you to count, but we deeply appreciate your heartfelt contributions of your time and energy.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support and commitment to work together for a better world.

To support our work or become a monthly donor, please contact us or visit www.weavingbonds.org



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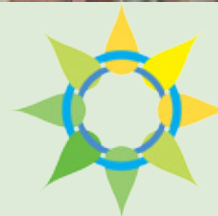
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Our Locations

Mong Pan, Myanmar/Burma

Chiang Mai, Thailand

Albuquerque, New Mexico



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Tejiendo Lazos Entre Fronteras
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