

SUPPORT

Stationery project Ler Per Her area

January 2018



Overview

Background: The Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF) supports 14 schools within the Ler Per Her area, located on the Thai-Burma border and within rural regions of Karen State, Burma. These schools are largely depend on external aid.

Project: Nine out of the 14 schools, that BCMF supports on a regular basis, received stationery items on the 24th of November 2017.

Aim: Promote a better learning environment for students, and allow teachers to improve their teaching methods.

Beneficiaries: In total, the stationery project benefited 41 teachers and 642 students within the Ler Per Her area in Karen State, Burma.

Schools that received BCMF aid:

Mae Kae Khee (t = 4; s = 46)
 Klay Poe Klo (t = 5; s = 75)
 Paw Tha May (t = 8; s = 103)
 Kar Hta (t = 3; s = 74)
 Lay Kyu Kyu (t = 3; s = 66)
 Loh Lah Lay (t = 2; s = 46)
 Mae La Ah Khee (t = 7; s = 93)
 Mae La Ah Hta (t = 4; s = 59)
 Pwoh Pgaw Lay (t = 5; s = 80)

* t = teachers; s = students



Introduction

Due to decades of conflicts between the Burman-led central government and armed Karen groups, the Karen curriculum developed by the Karen Educational Department (KED) lacks adequate resources to teach Karen students to their fullest potential and is not recognised by the government.^{1,2} A specific region that is in need of external aid, is the Ler Per Her area (see *map on the left*), a region that consists of the Ler Per Her internal displacement camp, and other refugee camps and small villages along the Thai-Burma border. The Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF) supports 14 schools in this region regularly. Nine of these schools needed stationery items immediately. Therefore, BCMF started the Stationery Project, and with the help of various donors, BCMF has been able to deliver much needed school supplies.

The Delivery

The day before the delivery, all BCMF staff members and volunteers helped to move the school supplies into the van. Around 7am, the van and truck took off from Mae Sot, and drove to their first destination. After a two-hour drive, the BCMF team arrived in Nobo, near the Thai-Burma border, where they delivered the first set of school supplies. With only one day to make all the deliveries, various other villages sent students to Nobo to collect the donations. In some cases, this meant that the students had to walk for one to two hours carrying heavy loads of notebooks, pens, pencils, and chalk.

During their time at Nobo, the BCMF team interviewed teachers and students to learn more about the difficulties they face in their daily lives. Eh Dah, one of teachers, said:

"It's hard to live from my salary, as I only receive 4000 Baht per year from the Karen Education Department. This amount is not enough to feed my family and to cover daily living expenses. However, I love my people, and I am willing to sacrifice my life to help others."

The non-profit organisation KED aims to improve the education for children in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border and within Karen State, Burma. KED and BCMF work closely together, where KED identifies schools and helps refer patients within Karen State and along the Thai-Burma border that need support from BCMF.



Like Eh Dah, the salaries of other teachers hired by the KED has been decreased. Due to a lack of funds and an increase in the number of new teachers, the KED was forced to cut the teachers salaries from 7000 Baht (~216 USD) to 4000 Baht (~123 USD) per year. Despite the poor salary, teachers are willing to continue their work, as they recognise the importance of local schools teaching children in their native language.





After the first stop in Nobo, the students, teachers and the BCMF team moved on to the next location. Walking down a slippery mud path, the BCMF staff carry heavy packages to reach long-tail boats. As BCMF was delivering school supplies to a total of nine villages, the BCMF interns separated the stationery by using different coloured bags. That way, the teachers and students from different villages knew which supplies were for their schools, and made the delivery more efficient. At the edge of the river, various boats were waiting, where some ferried people and supplies across the river, while other boats sailed to different villages along the river. After the BCMF staff crossed the river, the journey continued by truck, travelling across rutted roads and rivers up to four feet deep. One and a half hours later, the BCMF team arrived at Pwo Pgaw Lay, the last village.

The village consists of an estimated twenty wooden huts on stilts with leaf-woven roofs. Farm animals live under the huts, and there is no electricity other than what is provided by a few solar panels. The school contains one room that is approximately 80m², furnished with rough benches, and uses wooden boards as blackboards. Furthermore, there are no walls dividing classes, leaving students from pre-school up to grade five sitting together.

The BCMF team was able to interview some of the teachers and students. The teachers relayed that there is a need for female health education alongside the provision of reusable pads. Many of the girls are forced to travel to Thailand to buy disposable pads. In addition, they lack adequate information regarding menstrual health, as this subject does not receive enough attention. Therefore, a workshop on the latter topic is essential to improve women's health, and could potentially help 15 young women in Pwo Pgaw Lay.



**Hours traveled
one-way:**



2 hours



10 minutes



1.5 hours

Interviews

The BCMF team came met five students (14 to 16 years old) from the Paw Tha May School and interviewed them.

"We are really happy that we received the school supplies from BCMF. If we have to buy school items ourselves, our families have to sell their chickens and pigs to obtain the money for it. Also, it takes us 30 minutes by car or a two-hour walk to get to the stores. However, we will do it because school is very important to us. If we don't finish school, we cannot find a good job, and then we have to work really hard on the farm. Our parents had to drop out of school early due to the oppression of the Burmese army. Now, we can continue school, and hopefully become doctors and teachers."

In the last village, the BCMF team interviewed Poeshit, a teacher from Pwo Pgaw Lay:

"When I was in kindergarten, the Burmese came to Pwo Pgaw Lay, and burned my school down. A few years later, when I was seven years old, I moved to Maela Poe Hta refugee camp, and attended school there till the Burmese army destroyed the school again. The same happened when I moved at age 12 to the Ler Per Her internal displacement camp. I was in grade seven, 16 years old, when the Burmese army demolished my school. In the end, I finished from high school in the Maela refugee camp, and later studied sociology there as well. I decided to come back to my old village, and teach the students in Pwo Pgaw Lay. I love my job, but it's a hard life. The school received help from KED, but since more schools opened in recent years, KED has to divide their funding between more teachers. I'm very happy that we received the supplies from BCMF, and would like thank you very much. Without external aid, the school will cease to exist as the school doesn't have enough school supplies and cannot pay the teachers' salaries."

Conclusion

These days, more Karen children are able to attend school compared to ten years ago. However, the Karen education system still lacks sufficient funding. In addition, various schools in the Ler Per Her region are located in remote areas, and most families cannot afford stationery items, which challenges schools and students to acquire proper school items, such as notebooks and pencils. Due to donations from multiple parties, BCMF is able to support these schools and students. Nevertheless, there is a constant need for stationery, and donors are essential to keep these projects running.

References

1. Lall M, South A. Comparing models of non-state ethnic education in Myanmar: the Mon and Karen national education regimes. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 2014;44(2):298-321.
2. Tanaka A. Assessment of the psychosocial development of children attending nursery schools in Karen refugee camps in Thailand. *International Journal of Early Childhood* 2013;45(3):279-305.



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Burma Children
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