

## The twin challenge of agrarian and climate justice: connections and contradictions between climate change mitigation politics, land grabbing and conflict in Myanmar<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

When large-scale land investments and natural resource-oriented climate change mitigation and adaptation politics overlap with and reshape one another, the socio-economic and political intersections that occur can be socially and politically explosive. Where and when this happens, ordinary villagers are being squeezed out between land concessions and climate change mitigation and conservation initiatives, justified partly and facilitated by the narrative that villagers' customary way of life and production systems are either *ecologically destructive* or *economically inefficient*, or both. The intersection occurs in a four-way conflict cocktail: *old* and *new conflicts* in climate change *mitigation initiatives* and *land grabbing*. Tackling and transforming the four-way entanglement of conflicts is difficult, politically, in less-than-democratic settings. In turn, this becomes quite daunting to address when accompanied by multiple social fault-lines of ethnicity, class, gender and generation. Having a fuller understanding of political and policy tensions, and taking a stand that confronts rather than backs away from these tensions, is the only way we can understand and harness political synergies that are required in addressing simultaneously the twin challenge of agrarian justice and climate justice.

**Key words:** climate change mitigation and adaptation, land grabbing, resource conflict, nature conservation, Myanmar

### 1 Framing the nexus between climate change mitigation and adaptation politics and land grabbing<sup>10</sup>

One of the most important development issues that exploded during the past decade is the global land rush. There are competing perspectives on this phenomenon and approaches in studying it (Deininger and Bayerlee 2011, Scoones et al 2013, Edelman et al. 2013, Peluso and Lund 2011, Schoenberger et al 2017). In this paper, we take a political economy perspective on land grabs, and put forward the notion of 'land grabbing as *control grabbing*', following the work-in-progress definition by Borrás et al. (2012: 852). It covers not just land, but a broad array of natural resources including water (Mehta et al. 2012). One of the current research frontiers on this issue is on how corporate land grabs for agribusiness connect with other social processes that attempt to recast access to and use of natural resource (land, water, seas, forest), including extractive industries and climate change mitigation and adaptation politics. The collection on 'green grabbing' by Fairhead, Leach and Scoones (2012) helped to open this contemporary research frontier by bringing together the issue of land grabbing and environmental politics in the broadest sense. A subset within 'green grabbing' is the nexus of land grabs and climate change mitigation and adaptation politics. This has been engaged in the land grabs literature quite thinly, mainly through a focus on REDD+.<sup>11</sup> Despite waning global media

reports on land grabbing, the phenomenon continues to gain ground, and broad public interest remains high (Franco and Borrás forthcoming). While we know that there has been a dramatic increase in public interest on climate change, it is also important to see a specific subset within the climate change issue, namely, climate change mitigation and adaptation discourses and initiatives. Our interest in the latter lies on the fact that a significant portion of mitigation and adaptation politics concerns the (re)production, distribution and consumption of natural resources (land, water, seas, forests, minerals): various forms of carbon sequestration initiatives, renewable energy such as biofuels, hydropower/dams, wind farms, promotion of climate smart agriculture, and so on.

In this paper, and with empirical material from Tanintharyi State in Myanmar, we take the nexus between land grabbing and climate change mitigation and adaptation politics as involving connections and contradictions within and between a continuum along (re)production, distribution and consumption of natural resources. We will argue that the connections and contradictions within and between these two broadly distinct processes occur in stealth, are likely to be entrenched and seemingly intractable. There are various ways in which the links between land grabbing and climate change mitigation and adaptation politics get played out, and the implications and the outcomes of such a nexus manifest in a variety of ways (Hunsberger et al 2017), but remain significantly under-explored in scientific research to date (Franco and Borrás forthcoming). Our aim in this paper is to paint a broad preliminary picture of this issue based on initial empirical research in hopes of inspiring future deeper research.

In this paper, and building on our recent work, we use the term *climate change mitigation and adaptation politics* to mean the social processes that define which social activities get to be officially labeled and considered as climate change mitigation and adaptation, how, why, and with what broader social implications.<sup>12</sup> 'Power', as formulated by Gaventa (2006), is at the heart of this concept. Taking a politics-centric perspective on climate change mitigation and adaptation means an historical and encompassing framework to include ideas and initiatives, projects and policies that purportedly aim to contribute to mitigation and adaptation, whether as officially intended or to legitimize profit-making enterprises. It veers away from a narrow, formalist perspective that limits the definition and scope of mitigation and adaptation to what are officially labeled as such. The 'politics' term allows critical inquiry into actually existing processes beneath or beyond on-paper labels or categories. It allows an observer to politicize and historicize analysis, that is, placing power-laden social processes and historical evolution of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and critically question dominant binaries and terminologies, such as 'vulnerability' and 'oppression' (Ribot 2014). Such a politics-focused concept allows us to see concretely the connections and contradictions within and between land grabs and mitigation and adaptation politics. Climate change mitigation and adaptation politics are in turn embedded in the broader capitalist social relations, in part because it deals with the impact of capitalism on climate, in the capitalocene (Moore 2017), and in part because it deals with the capitalist penetration of the countryside (Lenin [orig. 1905] 2004).

Moreover, and as a logical consequence, the commodification of responses to climate change, e.g. notion of 'payment for environmental services', means the emergence of *climate change mitigation and adaptation entrepreneurs*, which we define as those who materially profit from climate change mitigation and adaptation politics. They include all sorts of carbon and biofuel traders and speculators, land brokers, and all sorts of swindlers, scammers, con artists, and thieves that gain profit through a multitude of ways by invoking climate change politics in every imaginable way possible regardless whether such mitigation and adaptation are real, imagined or speculated. It might be that such mitigation and adaptation 'enterprises' are nothing but what Anna Tsing (2000: 18) calls the 'economy of appearances', i.e. "the self-conscious making of a spectacle [that] is a necessary aid to gathering investment funds [...] It is a regular feature of the search for financial capital."

By using the concepts of climate change mitigation and adaptation *politics* and *entrepreneurs*, we conclude in this study that climate change mitigation and adaptation politics intersect with natural resource grabbing in extensive and complex ways, the impact of such on local communities is profoundly complicated, and governing it in ways that are just for the poor and the oppressed is challenging and difficult. Entrepreneurs in these two social processes operate in parallel, reinforce each other, or a times are one and the same.

The military rulers of Myanmar, seeking to end the country's economic stagnation and global isolation about a decade ago, moved to change strategy. The 2010 elections marked a partial transition towards a quasi-civilian regime and economic liberalization, and the 2016 national elections marked the widening and deepening of economic liberalization, while enabling the military to remain entrenched within the state and in society. Extractivist development, broadly cast, has been the favored engine of economic growth. Domestic companies, established mainly by those close to the military, and foreign investors had long wanted to take control over natural resources (land, water, seas, forest, minerals) and cheap labour. But this meant addressing at least two institutional and political obstacles: absence of enabling laws and collapsing or absence of ceasefire agreements with ethnic armed groups in whose territories most of the natural resources are located. Thus, two key reforms were pursued. First was to try to have effective ceasefire agreements with ethnic armed groups that could facilitate investors' entry into previously inaccessible natural resources and territories. Second was to pass new laws related to investments, mining, and agricultural land that could allow, legalize, or legitimize reallocation of resource access and use (TNI 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, TNI 2014). The 2012 Farmland Law aspires to register or formalize land claims through private property titles. The 2012 Vacant, Fallow, Virgin and Land Management (VFV Law) meant to minimize the inefficient use of scarce land resources by offering these kinds of land to enterprising individuals and corporate investors. There are other new laws that helped shape land politics in the post-2010 period, including the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) law that proved too easy to manipulate in order to legitimize land grabs. Ceasefire agreements with several ethnic armed groups provided the lubricant that facilitates the entry of investors into previously impenetrable territories (Woods 2011). By 2016, there were up to three million acres of farmland allocated to agribusiness concessions alone, excluding the widespread land transactions done in stealth (as will be shown later in this paper), big conservation projects and mining operations (LIOH 2015). But agribusiness and extractive industry investors were not the only beneficiaries of the economic and political liberalization in the post-2010 period. Big conservation organizations have also been empowered and emboldened, and have expanded the territories that they claim and control in Myanmar.

Part of the government's effort at linking with the broader world is its receptive attitude towards UN-sponsored climate change mitigation and adaptation politics. Forest conservation and renewable energy became two of the most important sectors that the government committed itself to, both of which directly implicate natural resources. This can be seen in official documents on the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) during the build-up to COP21 (Paris) in 2015 (Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2015), and validated and elaborated in the government's Myanmar Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (MCCSAP) 2016–2030 (MoNREC 2017). Myanmar is a signatory to the Paris Agreement on climate change in April 2016. In 2017, the government pledge can be summarized as follows:

Although the sector supports a large number of the population, annual GHG emissions are about 198 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e from deforestation, and 844,000 tonnes from forest degradation. Forest fires emit about 40 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e a year. But the sector also presents huge potential to sequester carbon through forest enhancement, conservation and sustainable management. There is an urgent need to invest in such programmes as unplanned development will jeopardise Myanmar's current net GHG sink status. Reforesting and restoring 50 per cent of Myanmar's degraded forests using REDD+ could sequester about 1,910 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e (MoNREC 2017: 20).

Moreover, "the country is developing a REDD+ strategy... and a Climate Smart Agriculture Strategy (CSAS). The preparations for new Environmental Policy, Climate Change Policy, Green Growth Strategy and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) are underway" (MoNREC 2017: 38). Concretely, the new "policy aims for 30 per cent of the total land area to be reserved forest; and 5 per cent to be protected area systems" (MoNREC 2017: 22; see also Prescott et al. 2017)). All these policy reframings and commitments have unfolded and will continue to unfold unevenly across time, geographic and institutional spaces within the country.<sup>13</sup>

In this paper, we focus on the Tanintharyi State in southern Myanmar, bordering with Thailand, with significant Karen and Myeik ethnic population. The countryside of Tanintharyi is undergoing a far-reaching socio-economic, political and ecological transformation (Woods 2016). At the core of this social change is the convergence of climate change mitigation and adaptation politics and land grabbing. This transformation is partly premised on the mainstream assumption

that the centuries-old agricultural practice and way of life in this region are *economically inefficient and ecologically destructive*. This is implicit but insinuated in the three pillars of Climate Smart Agriculture to which the government of Myanmar is committed to, namely, 'increased productivity', 'increased resilience' and 'reduced emission' – resoundingly silent on redistribution and equity.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, it is purportedly *inefficient* because land and water as scarce resource, as well as labour, are under-utilized in the context of the extensive way of shifting agriculture where a significant portion of the lands are held fallow for long periods of time, combined with the popular beetle nut cultivation. From a mainstream economics perspective, land, water, forest and labour can be used more efficiently and productively if and when commodified and modernized. Where this happens, land is treated as a commodity like no other because it is also a key to other resources: water, forest, minerals, labour (see also Li 2014). The commodification of land, water, forest, labour is at the heart of this transformation in Tanintharyi. Privatization of the village commons partly through formalization of land access and/or individual private land titling as well as state and corporate land grabbing of villagers' lands for logging and/or agribusiness plantation expansion are central to these processes. On the other hand, the traditional way of production is supposedly *ecologically destructive* in the sense that livelihood activities are intertwined with shifting cultivation that routinely engages in field burning, or regular forest clearing. Whether synthetic chemical-dependent monocultures (after forest clearing) is better for climate change mitigation than the biodiverse shifting agriculture remains an open question (see, e.g. Dressler et al. 2017, Fox et al. 2014, Mertz et al 2017, Scheidel forthcoming). Thus, the long-standing tension between the villagers and the central state on this question has been reignited in the era of climate change when the latter seems to have been emboldened to renew its campaign against the customary way of accessing and using natural resources.

Three cases that we have researched in this region form the empirical basis of our paper. The first case is the MSPP oil palm plantation. A Malaysian company forged alliance with a domestic elite, and secured a concession for nearly 50,000 acres of land in Myeik District. The land is a combination of deep forest areas, villagers' farmland, and village settlements. It is in the territory of the Karen National Union ethnic armed group. The villagers have been resisting the concession. The second case is the Lenya forest and a Korean corporation that managed to carve out 100,000 acres partly from the Lenya forest to open oil palm plantation in northern Kawthaung District. A big conservation organization has been pushing for the declaration of the Lenya forest as a national park. Villagers linked to the forest and its adjacent areas are navigating their actions to protect and/or restore access to resources in between forest conservation and farmland concession. The third is a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Dawei that encompasses a massive geographic area and implicate multiple socioeconomic, ecological and political processes. Villagers in rural and town centers are affected by the project in various ways.

The central state authorized idea of what ought to be a Tanintharyi countryside is something also of a textbook modernization paradigm: sedentary farming using modern, i.e. chemical-based agriculture that in turn uses commercial seeds to produce commodities for commercial trade. Ground rent, interest from credit, profit and wages are thus introduced into agrarian communities where such have not gained ground, at least not completely and evenly, until recently. Food security is redefined away from the long-standing practice based on moral economy where the 'right to subsistence' is a key pillar (Scott 1976), to one that is monetized and commodified, i.e. about the purchasing power of rural households to buy food in the commercial market. This transformation is a classic story of tension and contradiction among and between the central state and social class forces, between town and country, in defining the future of the countryside and on how that future can be constructed now. It is an emblematic case demonstrating the power of commodification of everyday life in transforming social relations around production and social reproduction. Land, as a productive resource and social territory, becomes central to this process. Old tensions and conflicts are stoked, while new ones are provoked.

So, how do climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives come into play? Climate change as an issue has become one of the justifications, directly and indirectly, of the global land rush, but in a way so as to actually worsen climate change. Much of climate change mitigation initiatives are natural resource-oriented: biofuels/flex crops, hydro-power, windmills, carbon-offset projects such as REDD+. Climate change mitigation and adaptation politics, in narrative and practice, have directly and indirectly, explicitly and implicitly triggered widespread recasting of the agrarian

political economy and ecology of the world, with intended and unintended, expected and unexpected outcomes. It has overlapped with and reinforced ongoing global land rush (Hunsberger et al. 2017).

The field research for this paper was carried out individually, by pair, and collectively by the authors together with Dawei Development Association (DDA) (Dawei District) and Southern Youth (Myeik and Kawthaung Districts) during the period 2014-2017. On several occasions, this was done together with the authors of this paper, while in other times the DDA and Southern Youth teams carried out extended focus group discussions (FGDs) in various villages across Tanintharyi. Data analysis was partly done collectively through workshops. This means that the actual breadth and depth of the relevant data we have gathered are far more extensive than what we can mention and explain in this paper. We anonymized the names of villages and villagers to protect the privacy and security of the local villagers.

## 2 Two broad ways in which climate change mitigation and adaptation politics connect with land grabbing

Based on our research in Tanintharyi, there are two broad ways in which climate change mitigation and adaptation politics connect with land grabbing, namely, (i) conservation as land grabs, and (ii) global flex crops complex and land grabs.

### 2.1 Conservation as land grabs

Tanintharyi is a key region in Myanmar for nature conservation. Despite a long period of relentless logging, it continues to host the country's remaining forests. It is therefore not surprising that alongside the logging interest, the region has also attracted the interest of big international conservation organizations, most of which have significant presence there. The government had officially categorized a huge chunk of forest as forest preservation areas directly under the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry or MOECAF. The Ministry is currently planning to double the acreage of this forest category. And if REDD+ is indeed carried out in Tanintharyi, then the total area of MOECAF's preservation forest can expand tremendously.

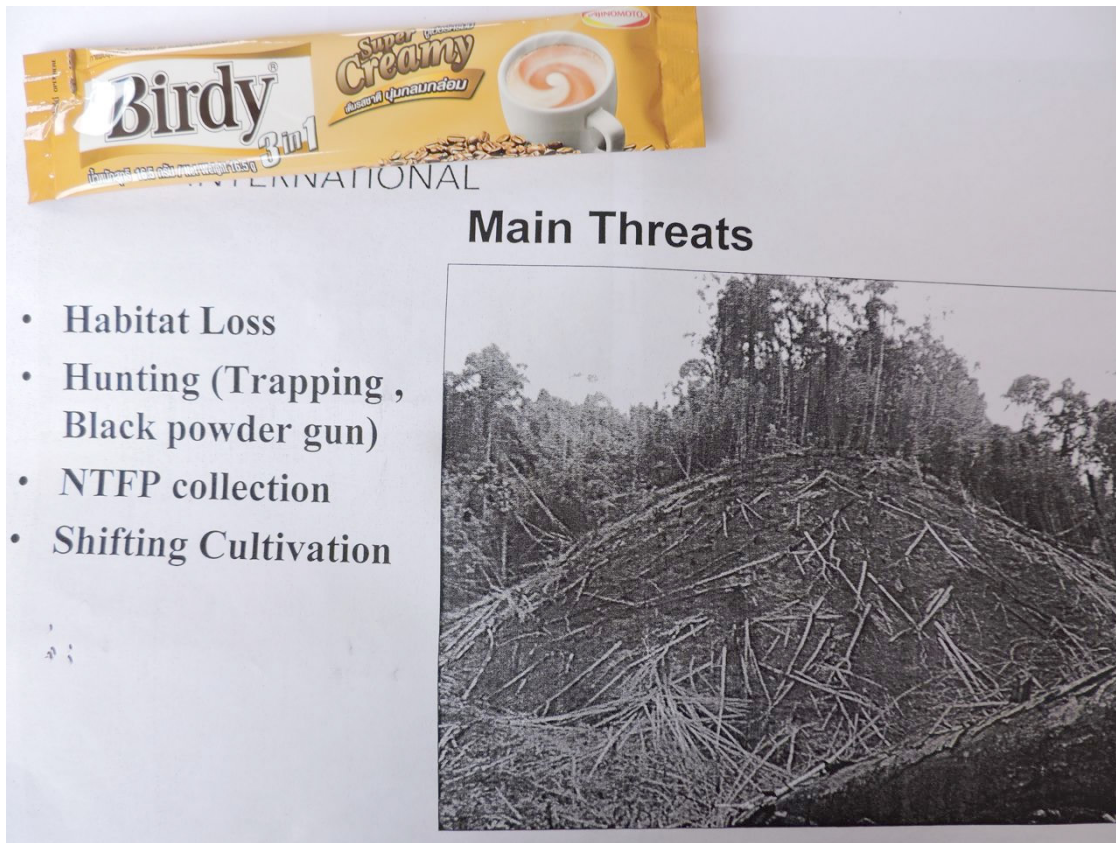
The forests mentioned here are spaces that are generally and historically inhabited and/or worked by local people, largely Karen, but also other ethnic groups such as Myeik. These forests are a collage of thick forests combined with farmers' farms (upland *taungya* and lowland paddy), rather than evenly forested areas. The state's concept of preservation forest essentially renders upland farming (*taungya*), especially shifting cultivation, as something *destructive* of the environment that must be stopped and prohibited. What this partly means is that even when a local community has been maintaining an upland cultivation for generations now in a particular setting, if and when MOECAF declares that space as a preservation forest, it is essentially declaring that the villagers' farms therein as illegal.

The Lenya Forest is a huge natural forest in the northern portion of the Kawthaung District. It has been the site of significant logging in the past that proves to be a continuing past.<sup>15</sup> Big conservation organizations have been working to have this forest declared as a national park. This forest has been host to many villages and villager's farms. If the Lenya Forest is declared a national park, the disenfranchisement and dispossession of local villagers living and earning a living in and around the forest will be a likely scenario. Central to the strategy of big conservation organizations is to depict the villagers and their way of farming as ecologically destructive. When our research team went to one of the villages in the Lenya Forest, the village chairperson told us that a big conservation organization was just in their village a few days before, among other things, showing a slide presentation about the problems in the forest and the drivers of deforestation. Refer to Fig. 1, the photo of a slide presentation by this conservation organization. We covered the name of the organization to keep it anonymous. The slide claims the drivers of deforestation are: (i) Habitat Loss, (ii) Hunting (trapping, black powder gun), (iii) NTFP, and (iv) shifting cultivation. Curiously they never mentioned the serious illegal logging inside the forest, major encroachment by large-scale land concession, and mining concessions – all operating inside the Lenya Forest. In this light, the politically weaker (poor and disorganized) villagers become a convenient excuse for big conservationists to get what they want: the forest. Indeed, a more comprehensive analysis of the drivers of deforestation in Myanmar provides a very different picture as demonstrated by Lim et al. (2017).



Photo. 1:

Photo of a slide by a big conservation organization



Another leading wildlife conservation organization that has massive albeit controversial wildlife conservation in Kachin state in northern Myanmar has been trying to operate a similar project in Tanintharyi region. The Kachin project is controversial partly because the villagers' traditional resource access was clipped, while there seems to be no evidence to show any significant wildlife existing in the expansive 1.75 million-acre reserve. The same organization has since moved into Tanintharyi, and working closely with their traditional partner, MOECAAF, have sought to establish a much bigger reserve, 2.2 million acres, of wildlife corridor along the border with Thailand. Originally, the Karen National Union (KNU), the most important armed ethnic group operating in this region (more about KNU further below), endorsed a related village mapping exercise by this conservation organization in pursuit of its plan for the conservation corridor. Much of the proposed conservation corridor, if not all of it, are under the KNU politico-military control. Later, however, the KNU reportedly cancelled the authorization it gave the conservation group to carry out village mapping after assessing that the 2.2 million acre area as conservation area would adversely affect many Karen villagers and would place the political control of such a territory under the joint power of MOECAAF (meaning, effectively the Burmese army) and the conservation organization, and undermine KNU's authority.<sup>16</sup> If the problem of villagers' dispossession in Kachin will be replicated in this Tanintharyi conservation site (assuming it would go ahead), the scale of villagers' dispossession might even be more far-reaching.

## 2.2 Global flex crops complex and land grabs

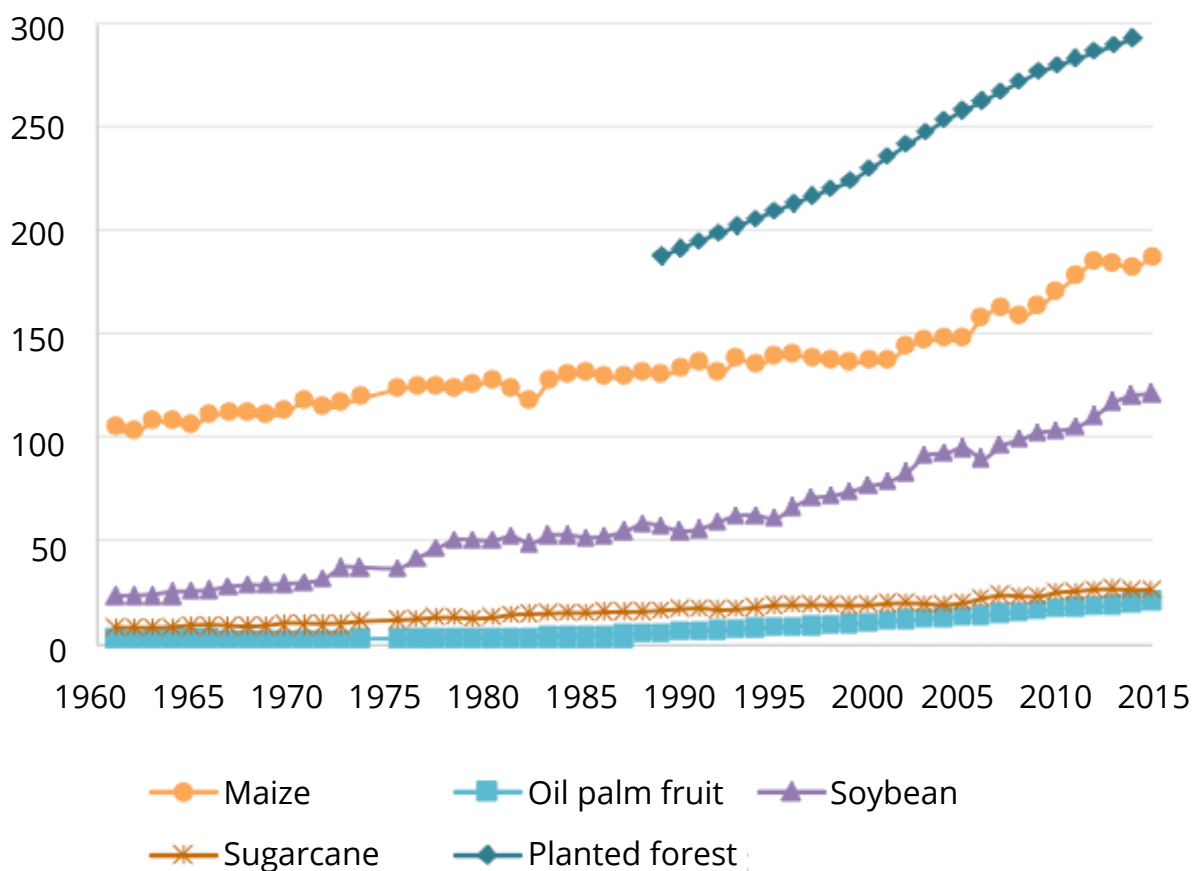
Whereas big conservation organizations and MOECAAF preface their grabbing of villagers' land by reframing the customary way of production as *ecologically destructive* -- and thus framing their own brand of 'conservation' as something beneficial and necessary, big land concessions reframe villagers' customary ways of production as *economically inefficient* and therefore wasteful of a scarce resource: land. Particularly vulnerable to this kind of demonizing discourse is *taungya*, especially shifting cultivation. By contrast, and the flipside of this narrative, there is the commercial production of boom crops (rubber, oil palm), especially 'flex crops', which is persistently portrayed as the most efficient way to utilize land resources.

It is important to briefly clarify about the concept of flex crops and how it relates to biofuels, the latter a key climate change mitigation strategy. Following Borras et al. (2016: 93), flex crops and commodities are those that

have multiple uses (food, feed, fuel, fibre, industrial material, etc.) that can be flexibly interchanged while some consequent supply gaps can be filled by other flex crops. Flexibility arises from multiple relationships among various crops, components and uses. Specific forms of flexible-ness and multiple-ness can become more profitable through several means – e.g. changes in market prices (of crop materials, substitutes or their ultimate products), policy frameworks (e.g. direct/indirect subsidy favouring specific uses or state procurement of commodities produced from specified components) and technoscientific advance facilitating conversion of non-edible feedstock (e.g. ... biorefineries). The latter's economic viability depends on low-cost feedstock, which can be cheapened by several means, e.g. mining nature, super-exploitative labour, more intense market competition and land grabs. Current examples include soya [...], sugarcane [...], oil palm [...] and corn [...].

The multiple-ness and flexible-ness of uses at a commercial scale can be real, anticipated or imagined but with the same overall impact: the dramatic net increase in the global production of these crops and commodities (see Fig. 1). Producing these crops and commodities is usually done through large-scale, industrial monocultures, even when at times it incorporates individual smallholders through a variety of contract growing schemes. What the notion of flex crops partly helps to reveal and emphasize is the underlying 'interconnectedness' in terms of different sectoral 'value chains' that become entangled to form a 'value web, and truly cross-border, international interconnectedness (see also Virchow et al 2014). A sugarcane plantation in Cambodia that is producing only sweeteners is just as embedded in the

Figure 1:  
Selected flex crops, area harvested in hectares, 1961-2015



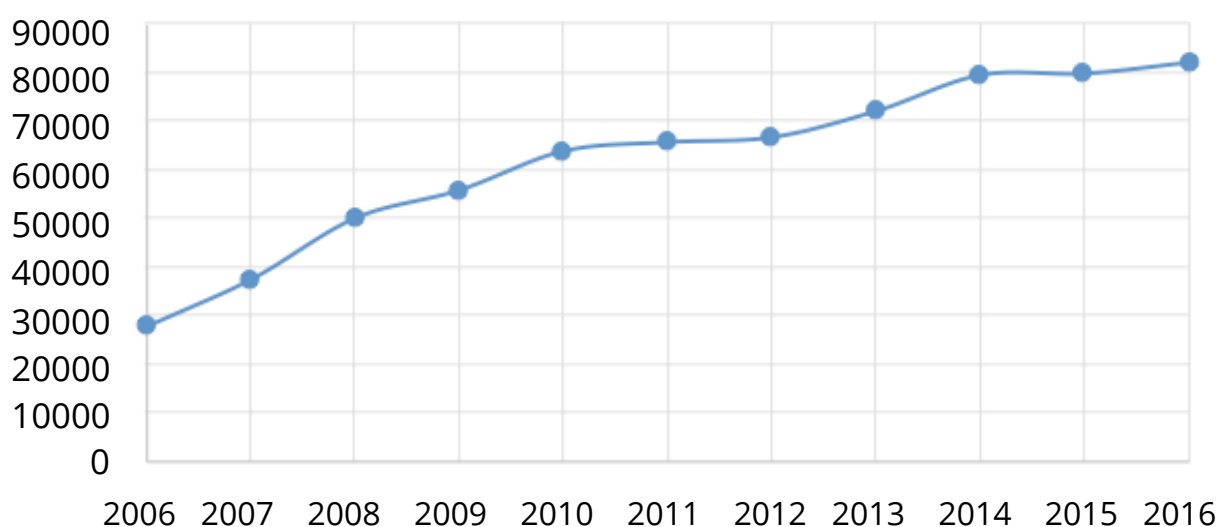
Note: Global harvest area of maize, oil palm fruit, soybean, sugarcane and area of planted forest (1 million ha)

Data Source: FAOSTAT, <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data> accessed on 16th December 2017.

global ‘flex sugarcane complex’ as the sweeter-ethanol oriented production system in Brazil. This means that a particular company operating a sugarcane plantation and mill does not have to produce multiple products of sweeteners, ethanol and others to be considered part of the ‘flex sugarcane complex’; the company is subsumed, *objectively*, within the global complex of flex sugarcane. The flex crops global expansion has depended on recasting global land control. Thus, expansion of sugarcane plantations worldwide, including Cambodia (McKay et al 2016), Philippines (Rutten et al 2017) and Myanmar, or, the expansion of corn production that links what has happened in the US corn belt (Gillon 2016) and how it has triggered spillover effects in distant places such as in contemporary Northern Shan State in Myanmar (Woods 2015), *are direct outcomes and results of the political dynamics of climate change mitigation*. When the European Union converted part of its rapeseed production to biodiesel feedstock in response to its biofuel mandatory blending policy, it had to replace its original use with alternative vegetable oil: palm oil. When soya and sugarcane production expanded in Brazil, they took over lands previously devoted to cattle ranching, while the latter moved to engage in new forest clearing further into the Amazon. These are all what the complicated debates around ‘indirect land use change’ (ILUC) are about. The term ‘indirect land use change’ is actually not quite precise because the social processes that connect climate change politics and land grabs are quite explicit, concrete and direct, but instead of through single straightlines (as in ‘value chain’), such connections occur in web-like routes (as in ‘value web’, or chain of chains). These web-like routes also allow for what Hunsberger and Alonso-Fradejas (2016) observe as ‘discursive flexibility’ in matters related to climate change politics and land grabs.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of Tanintharyi, flex crops means oil palm – and for reasons explained above, it is a part of the oil palm boom happening across Southeast Asia and the global flex palm oil complex that has seen dramatic expansion during the past two decades (Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2016). For this reason too, Tanintharyi’s oil palm belt is linked to the global biofuel complex that has witnessed steady increases in production worldwide (see Fig 2). It might be that the connection between climate change mitigation and adaptation politics and farmland investments in oil palm in Tanintharyi may not be that direct, explicit, or immediately obvious, but it does not make the connection less real; it only makes it even more problematic and dangerous because it becomes less legible and thus less governable. This is one reason why the issue of indirect land use change (ILUC) is one of the most hotly contested concepts between the European Union bureaucrats and civil society activists.

Figure 2.  
World biofuel production (Thousand tonnes oil equivalent)



Data source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy June 2017, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review-2017/bp-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2017-full-report.pdf> accessed on 16th December 2017



The physical terrain of Myeik and Kawthaung districts of Tanintharyi has been dramatically altered with the massive introduction of palm oil. Palm oil has been agronomically growing well in most places south of the Myeik township and all the way to Kawthaung township in the south, from the coast to the highlands bordering Thailand. The actual area of oil palm concessions is much bigger than the area actually planted to oil palm. This means that many concessions have not pursued what they promised to do, or not yet, as of this writing. Yet, the cleared and partially planted area is already quite a dramatic agroecological – and socio-economic – transformation of this southernmost tip of Myanmar. Most of the investors are well-connected elites from Myanmar ('cronies' as they are popularly called), some are in partnership with Thai, Malaysian or Chinese investors.

There are two main types of lands that are seized for oil palm concessions. On the one hand, forest areas were given to concessions, and the latter moved in, taking the timber and then clearing the forest and planting oil palm. On the other hand, lands awarded to oil palm concession are villagers' *taungya* – many of which were involuntarily abandoned a few years back as villagers fled militarization of their villages. Every village tends to have its own community forest. These community forests are the first ones to be cleared too, with the companies carting away the timber before burning what remains in the field and bulldozing everything. Often however, the two – forest and villagers' *taungya* -- are intertwined agroecologically. Where it is so, a concession destroys two important aspects of the Myanmar countryside: forest and villagers' farms.

### 3 Six ways in which intersections between climate change mitigation politics and land grabs manifest

A grave scenario is when the intersections between land-based climate change mitigation politics, conservation, land concessions and mega projects result not only in stoking the fire of old conflicts and fanning new ones, but also in reinforcing political processes that undermine both climate and agrarian justice goals. Before one can tackle questions on how to address simultaneously the twin challenge of agrarian and climate justice, it is necessary to first specify the lines of pre-existing and possible socio-political tensions and the ways in which these lines of tension manifest in contemporary Tanintharyi.

#### (i) When agricultural land concessions and investments undermine climate change mitigation initiatives via forest clearing

Forest clearing has become a typical scene in southern Myeik and Kawthaung districts. In Myeik district, near the border with Thailand, by late 2015, oil palm plantations along the highway continued to expand deeper into the forest via the standard method: gather the timber, burn everything else, bulldoze the entire terrain, plant oil palm. The case of the Malaysian-owned Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation or MSPP in Myeik district is iconic. The company, with reported ties to powerful cronies, managed to get a land concession for 42,000 acres. The area sits atop a thickly forested mountain area belonging to several villages (e.g. village-owned lands including communal forests and patches of villagers' *taungya*). The massive clearing of the thick forest in this area was just beginning in late 2015. In an interview, the village administrator in one of the affected villages said:

In 2012, at first we thought it was a logging company because they were first cutting down big trees and taking timber, then burned the rest of the forest before. We asked the company what they were doing, and were told that they bought the entire area from Nay Pyi Taw. We complained to KNU. The local KNU said they would report to higher KNU. Villagers waited for two years, no response from KNU. In 2014 they complained to the government, demanding that company withdraw from their land and stop bulldozing their farms and clearing the forest. By September 2015, 32 villagers already lost their farmland. No compensation. Most of those who lost land went deeper into nearby remaining forest to do clearing for new farm. It is quite far though.<sup>18</sup>

A farmer from another village explained his predicament, as follows:

My land is where the MSPP company signboard currently stands. I lost all my farmland: 28 acres of cashew and beetle nut and other plants. I now work for other villagers to earn a living. I also went deeper into the nearby forest and started to clear land for a new farm. I managed to clear about two to three acres by now. But it is very far from my village. It is three hours walk, one-way. It is real forest. It was not only me who is making new forest clearing. About 30 others who also lost land also started new clearing in the forest. We burn everything because we cannot get the timber. There is no way to take them out and sell. So we burn them all, we burn the forest, although we took some timber for our housing need.<sup>19</sup>

### ***(ii) When logging concessions use the land concession license as a cloak to carry out and cover its operations***

Logging is an inherent accompanying process in the establishment of agricultural land concessions in Myanmar. Land concession owners who are keen on establishing oil palm plantation or rubber need to clear the forest first. The first step is to gather the precious timber. Only after the timber were taken that they engaged in burning everything else and bulldozing the terrain. This means, all land concessions engage in logging and forest clearing.

However, it is widely believed that many companies that were awarded oil palm concessions were not interested in pursuing an oil palm plantation, but were mainly interested in: (i) logging for timber trade, (ii) using the concession license to secure bank loans, and (iii) using the concession license to import heavy equipment tax free and resell them in the domestic market for profit – at least this is what close observers thought.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, for the logging interest groups, the only way they can legally clear-cut forests and gather timber is if they have an agricultural land concession license. Along the provincial road, one can notice indeed that oil palm trees are planted four rows on each side of the road, untended land and trees, and beyond those thin lines are clearly logged forest that remain unplanted. The thin lines of palm trees appear to be just for a show, a cover up – as some close observers surmised.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, there is no way for our team to be able to firmly validate this information and observation, although nearly everyone we talked to in Tanintharyi and Yangon believe that many of these land concessions are just a cover by the loggers. This seems to be a straightforward case where land concessions undermine climate change mitigation by directly facilitating logging and allowing itself to be used to cover it up.

Sometimes villagers were not sure whether a movement of heavy equipment or road construction is meant for logging only – or logging first and oil palm or rubber plantation soon afterwards. For example, in a village in Lenya Forest, when one company (MAC) started to clear the forest, the villagers thought it was a logging company. But after disposing of the timber, the company proceeded to burn, bulldoze, and then plant oil palm.<sup>22</sup>

### ***(iii) When mining concessions undermine climate change mitigation and adaptation by destroying natural forest, farms and river system***

The spike in demand for various subsoil minerals, coal and construction materials (stone, sand) has led to the revival, expansion and modernization of old mines, some of which date back to colonial times, while also prompting the opening of new ones, both in the categories of commercial-industrial and small-scale artisanal mining across Myanmar. Mining requires a particular kind of land and water control. The proliferation of mines across the country in recent years has been dramatic. If we plot them on a map, we will see that they are scattered all over, whether inside or outside natural forests, but many are in fact located inside natural forests and/or are connected to key river systems. Our research team has been investigating two such cases in Tanintharyi, both in Dawei district. The first one is a stone quarry and the other one is a lead mine.

In one of the villages that will be destroyed by Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ), the villagers have been persistent in resisting expulsion from their village and their farm.<sup>23</sup> But so far the discussion with the company has remained restricted to the agenda of a possible compensation for impending destruction of their very old village and for their expulsion from their farms. Meanwhile, the company moved to quarry the village mountain for stone to be used in the

ongoing construction of the initial sections of the SEZ. Villagers protested, claiming that the mountain, which is also their village community forest, was actually a combined forest and *taungya* with beetle nut and chest nut trees. The government came in, ostensibly to mediate. It was resolved that those who have *taungya* in the mountain community forest will be compensated. The government measured the forestland. After segregating individual claims, MOECAF claimed the remaining acres. Thus, quarrying started. Soon after, when the rainy season came, flooding and the tailing of the quarry destroyed much of the villagers' paddy fields. The company constructed a dike to stop flooding and the rush of tailing. But the dike also prevented the regular flow of water that irrigated the villagers' fields. In late 2015, the villagers, company and government were locked in a struggle over the compensation of the damaged fields. Yet, the stone quarry and the destruction of the village mountain community forest continued. What other sorts of unforeseen disaster it will bring to the village, no one can really tell – and the villagers were anxious.

Meanwhile, the lead mine in Myang Pyo village in Dawei district was an old mine, dating back to colonial times. In the 1990s it got revived and modernized.<sup>24</sup> During this period in the 1990s, the then German mine manager allowed villagers to do panning in the river of the village, and sold what they have to the company. The ownership changed hands in 1999. The current owner is a Thai company. They stopped the practice of allowing panning by the river, claiming that everything in it is theirs too. They also modernized even more and expanded the operation of the mine. Within just a few years, the tailing of the mine multiplied in quantity and started to cover and destroy the river, and soon afterwards the farms around the river. Trees are dying. The entire village is slowly but steadily getting covered by the mine tailing. The entire water system of the village – wells – got contaminated, and a water quality check from Yangon found it unfit for drinking. The company redirected whatever remains of the river. The contaminated river is a tributary that flows into the large Tanintharyi River. The area is now completely desolate. The depressing scene is so dramatic in the rainy season when you drive for hours in lush terrain, and then suddenly you get into this place that looks like an expansive desert, surrounded with dying trees, and oily black and rust coloured water. The villagers complained and protested, together with allied NGOs, all the way to the Thai human right commission, as well as to the KNU, but the company seems to be well connected and refused to address the basic humanitarian complaints of the villagers. Their logic is that they own the entire village, and thus for them the villagers have no legitimate standing and claim in whatever way.<sup>25</sup>

#### *(iv) When the same act for conservation legitimizes land concessions and illegalizes villagers' farms*

Researchers, policy experts and activists working in thematic silos risk missing critical interconnections between the different areas of concern that actually in turn define each of the implicated areas and political processes. For example, some will work only on conservation, while others only on land concessions. One challenge is how to detect critical interconnections, which are not always obvious. There are important assumptions and starting points in this discussion in the context of Myanmar. For one, shifting cultivation has always been the chief target of state planners as something to be stopped based on assumptions that it is both destructive and inefficient, as mentioned earlier.<sup>26</sup> It is a practice absolutely not to be tolerated inside large conservation areas, including also in planned REDD+ areas. But ironically the forest clear-cutting and bulldozing by companies for large-scale plantations are never seen in the same way, never seen as destructive. Conservation, land concessions and villagers' *taungya* often overlap in their geographies and institutional contexts.

In Lenya Forest, the big conservation organization we cited above outlined four drivers of deforestation, and all these have something to do with ordinary villagers. Interestingly, it did not list loggers operating in Lenya Forest as well as land and mining concessions, including the large 100,000 acre MAC company land concession, that encroach in and around the forest territory. This big conservation organization is starting to redraw the map of the forest in its advocacy to have it officially declared as a national park. While there is still no official version available of this map, it will not be a surprise if the final map of the proposed national park will carve out the 100,000 acre land concession by MAC company. This essentially means that the very act of mapping the boundaries of the national park will be legitimizing the boundary of the land concessions, and playing blind to the fact that it encroached into the forest earlier. Meanwhile, declaring the forest area as national park will automatically render many of the villagers' livelihood activities

inside the forest as something illegal, a prelude to their elimination, including activities such as gathering of non-timber forest product that is so central to rural villagers' livelihoods. This shows the critical position that conservation initiatives – and thus climate change mitigation undertaking more generally – play in terms of facilitating or obstructing poor people's democratic access to resources.

Moreover, there is an island off Myeik that is home to some indigenous peoples whose *taungya* farms have always been part of the forest.<sup>27</sup> Their beetle nut and chestnut trees are embedded in the forest area, which covers nearly the entire island. Meanwhile, there is a significant chunk of land concession for rubber that managed to encroach into the forested area of the island. Recently the government has moved to declare most of the island as forest preservation area. Redrawing the map, its plan is to exclude the rubber land concession area. If and when the plan pushes through, the same declaration of a preservation forest will have a flip-side: it will push the villagers' farmland onto very shaky institutional ground, and could actually mean the beginning of the end of their *taungya* – or at the very least their livelihood activities entwined with the forest will be significantly curtailed. Like the Lenya Forest case, it is the conservation organization that decisively redefines the boundary of land uses: legitimizing prior land concessions, and again, and in this case implicitly facilitating illegalization of villagers' *taungya* and NTFP-related livelihoods – again, building on the claim that villagers customary way of farming and livelihoods are inefficient and destructive.

### **(v) When villagers who lost farmland go deeper into the forest and do new forest clearing to start a new farmland**

In Myanmar, especially in upland ethnic societies, people and forest have intertwined histories. Forest has always been a refuge to people fleeing the central state and its coercive apparatus. Forest provided safe shelter, and a space where people could cultivate crops that demand less maintenance, e.g. sweet potato, yam (or 'escape crops' in James Scott's term) and cultivate *taungya* more generally (Scott 2009). This relationship between ethnic minorities and the forest intensified and was quite pervasive especially since the 1980s. The state/military systematically engaged in forcing villagers to abandon their villages and/or *taungya* in order to deny the ethnic armed groups of their mass support, and in order to get access to free labour via conscription to work on military road construction and military farms. Many were coerced to submit to the military and resettle in roadside military established and controlled villages. But others managed to flee, either to the border area in Thailand, or deeper into the forest starting new forest clearing, establishing new *taungya* – only to be harassed by the military again much later, and the process goes on, and on (Malseed 2008, 2009).

It is now quite common to find a currently existing village that has a very short history, or at least the history of the current village occupants. By implication, it is the same about *taungya* plots. In this context of high degree of fluidity we see the contemporary wave of displacement from their farmland. When companies who got agricultural concessions or organizations who are working with MOECAF on conservation move in and seize villagers' land, villagers have two main options: to go to Thailand and work as migrant worker, or to go deeper into the forest start a new clearing and build a new *taungya*. In one interview with a villager who did the second option, he said:

The company seized our land by the roadside. There is nothing we can do. Many in my village went to Thailand and became migrant workers. Others, like me, decided to go deeper and further into the forest. Real forest, with really big trees. We could not get and sell the timber. So we just burned the entire forest. Everything. Then we planted beetle nut and chest nut trees, mango trees, and rice and corn.<sup>28</sup>

This story is repeated all throughout our research across the three districts of Tanintharyi region. In this context, confining oneself to a single-issue and single-sector approach will necessarily lead any actor to deeply flawed analyses and equally important deeply flawed political (including policy) responses. If we just look into land concessions, we will see how they burned the forest and bulldozed the land to plant oil palm, but we will not see how it directly caused further forest damage by causing the displaced villagers to go deeper into the forest, make new clearing, burn the forest. If we just focus on the villagers burning forest to start fresh *taungya*, we will not see the trigger that was the bigger forest destruction itself, that is, land concessions. When we finally see them as inherently interlinked processes, then we will begin to see the fuller picture of a bigger damage to existing forest.

## **(vi) When MOECAAF is keen on maintaining the size of its forest preservation or even expanding it, but that it already lost a lot of forestlands to concessions**

The expansion of land concessions was at the expense of forested lands. MOECAAF's domain therefore has been reduced with the dramatic expansion of agricultural land concessions. Yet, with the significantly increased importance of engaging with climate change mitigation initiatives such as conservation initiatives, the Myanmar government, and MOECAAF in particular, saw multiple benefits in engaging with conservation discourses. MOECAAF is currently committed dramatically increase the presentation forest in the country, much of this is to take place in Tanintharyi.<sup>29</sup>

But how can they do this when they just lost a significant quantity of forested lands to agricultural land concessions? The expedient way is to take over villagers' lands and village community forests – as what some experiences tend to suggest. They can move in to new territories by declaring this a new preservation forest, such as what they are intending to do in Kyaka Su island off Myeik, or enforce quite forcefully the rule against 'destructive' villagers' livelihood activities (shifting cultivation, NTFP collection) in order to activate official but dormant conservation sites. Whatever the actual strategy will be, it is the villagers that are likely to pay the price of the expansion of MOECAAF's spatial scope and political authority, big conservation organizations' turf, and land concession's area. And to think that MOECAAF is ultimately going to preside over the land-based climate change mitigation and adaptation plans for the country makes one wonder how the twin challenge of climate justice and agrarian justice can be addressed, and addressed well.

## **Concluding discussion: historicizing and politicizing analysis of land-based conflicts**

Land-based conflicts are deeply rooted in history and are inherently political. This is so true in Myanmar today. It is quite dangerous to approach the issue of land rights in strictly depoliticized technical issue of economic (allocative/distributive/technical) efficiency, taken in the *here and now*, in a snapshot, a single slice of time and place. Mainstream approaches tend to give too much premium to the assumed magical effect of an individual private property land title to resolve conflict. Approaching land issues from this perspective is like throwing gasoline into the flame, at least in the current situation of Myanmar. If the challenge is how to decisively resolve conflict, there are two interlinked challenges: on the one hand is an *historical perspective* on and attempt at resolving land conflict, and on the other is a *political perspective* on land conflicts that asks the basic question of land politics: who ought to have what rights to get which land, how, for how long and what purposes?

As mentioned above, the history of land control in Myanmar, especially in ethnic upland communities is a history of complex dynamics of land control that is constantly changing hands with great fluidity, which became even more pervasive, dynamic and intense in the 1980s onwards with the role played by the militarization of ethnic communities, as briefly discussed above. The result is that the history of a particular village and/or *taungya* is usually a history of waves of occupants, each one with different story why they ended up in that particular space in particular moment in time. Many of those who moved on who are not the current occupants still think of these spaces as theirs. Most of the estimated 1.1 million internally displaced peoples (IDPs) scattered inside the country and others taking refuge in Thailand have some kind of idea of *'their original village'* and *'their original taungya'* that probably were occupied not once but several times by subsequent waves of land hungry villagers from nearby places. Some of those are the current occupants, although in areas of large-scale land concessions all these waves of village occupants were expelled from 'their land' anyway. These waves of occupants have a class dimension. It is usual in the stories related by those interviewed for this study that the known occupants of 'their' village and *taungya* almost always come from another ethnic group, e.g Myeik villagers coming in after Karen villagers fled. Better off, wealthier villagers or even those coming from nearby towns tend to corner larger chunks of land, or would go for logging of the abandoned village community forest. Thus, a social justice-oriented resolution of land conflicts requires careful historicization of the waves of displacement and occupation often of the same space across time.



Specifying the axis of conflict will be critical for being able to untangle and transform conflict in a social justice direction. We examine the political dynamics within and between the state, domestic and international corporate sector, and communities of poor people – and how these dynamics were triggered by and are fanning flames of old and new conflicts (see also Woods 2016). Building on Borrás, Franco and Wang (2013) there are four broad political axes of land conflict in contemporary Myanmar, namely, poor versus the state, poor versus companies, poor versus big conservation groups, and poor versus poor.

*Poor/State.* Conflict between poor people and the state is probably the longest running single axis of political and land conflict in Myanmar (see Scott 2009; Malseed, 2008, 2009). Key here is the fact that the state formally owns lands in Myanmar, at least that is what the Constitution says. The state behaves accordingly – reclassifying land use, reallocating land control almost whimsically, with little or no consultation or advance notice. This is done in at least two ways. First, the state military has been a critical actor in deciding ‘land politics’ – who gets which land, how, how much, and for what purposes. Many of the reasons for this are directly linked to military logic: emptying the upland communities of villagers in the hope of undermining the mass base of ethnic armed groups. In other cases, the military has sought land for its own agricultural ventures. Still in other cases, the military directly reallocates land control like a broker after emptying these of villagers. When ceasefire agreements were signed with several important ethnic armed groups, including the KNU, it facilitated the entry of capital into spaces that were previously impenetrable because these were under the ethnic armed group’s sphere of influence (Woods 2011). Large-scale state projects also bring poor people and the state into direct collision, a good example being road construction. Additionally, a simple administrative function can trigger far-reaching recasting of land control on the ground. When the government enacted the Vacant Land Law in 2012, it triggered the widespread grabbing of land from the villagers on the flimsy claim that the lands are vacant and empty. Many of these spaces are actually village lands and farmlands of people who fled militarization and have not (yet) been able to return. A simple administrative act of reclassifying land use, e.g., from agricultural land to forest preservation, renders villagers’ ongoing claims to their lands weak by legal fiat, if not makes them illegal. In all these, conflict between poor people and the state continues; a continuing past.

*Poor/Company.* The poor versus corporate sector axis of conflict has deepened as a result of agribusiness (oil palm, rubber) starting to gain ground since some 20 years ago. But in the past ten years, and especially in the post-2010 election era, at least in Tanintharyi, this type of conflict between poor people and companies has become even more pervasive. Many stories we gathered from the field show how emboldened private companies have become since the ceasefire agreement with KNU in Tanintharyi and the aggressive promotion by the government of large-scale agribusiness. Whether this is the MAC company in Lenya Forest in Kawthaung, or MSPP in Myeik, or the PPT company in Myeik district close to the Thai border, or what seems to be a small time company seizing villagers’ land in Tanintharyi township, the company’s line is the same: “we already bought this land from Nay Pyi Taw” (the capital).

*Poor/Big Conservation Groups.* In places where upland communities and rural villagers’ livelihoods are intertwined, carrying out big conservation initiatives that assume that poor people and their way of life are destructive to nature almost always leads to a campaign to purge the forest of people or at least significantly curtail livelihoods activities in and around the forest. When nature/forest is needed but the people are not, to paraphrase Tania Li (2011), dispossession is likely to accompany conservation initiatives. Where and when this happens, conflict is likely to erupt between poor people and entities that carry out conservation, state and non-state. The way the conservation organization in the Lenya Forest is framing the narrative of forest destruction can be interpreted as a prelude to justifying a purge of villagers and their livelihood activities inside the forest if and when it is formally declared a national park. This is the same case as in the proposed 2.2 million acre wildlife reserve in Dawei district. The tension it creates between the villagers and their ally NGOs and including KNU on the one hand, and big conservation organizations and MOECF on the other hand is already palpable.

*Poor/Poor.* Poor versus poor conflict is probably far more common in contemporary Myanmar than is being reported and acknowledged by the media, government and NGOs. This conflict is extremely complicated because of its overlapping class, ethnic, gender and generational dimensions. The most common stream of conflict is what we mentioned

earlier: the military forces villagers out of their village and/or taungya, with some fleeing to Thailand, others moving deeper into the forest, and some ending up in IDP camps or resettled in militarized hamlets on the roadside. Often, their villages and/or taungya are taken over by other villagers from nearby communities. In many instances, some relatively wealthier elites from nearby places move in to seize and log the abandoned village community forest. There are also many cases where after the military emptied the land with villagers, the land is then brokered to agribusiness companies or individual entrepreneurs engaged in oil palm, rubber, or in logging and mining. Meanwhile, those who earlier fled but were not captured in the roadside military hamlets and did not flee to Thailand, may have found abandoned *taungya* and took them over, or just start a new taungya by making new clearing in the forest. In some instances, the roadside villages were the original settlement of those who fled the military. This general pattern of villagers on the move and land control that is quite fluid appears to be pervasive and common (TNI 2017).

The clear class dimension in this phenomenon is that: when villagers were forced to abandon their village and/or *taungya*, companies or individual elites through contacts with the government or the military took over the land; and when some not very rich but relatively better off locals from nearby town move in to log the abandoned village community forest. The ethnic tension in this process is quite palpable. In a village in Tanintharyi township, when the Karen villagers fled because of militarization, Myeik people from relatively distant village within the same township came in and took over the village and farmland. Recently however, a company took over the farmland. The villagers started to mobilize to oppose land grabbing by the company. But there was a big surprise when:

we were having a confrontation with the company when several people we do not know picketed the company office, shouting, "stay away from our land!" – referring exactly to our land. The company told them the same thing they told us, that the land is within the company's concession area. This group of people, mostly young people later came to our village, and told us that the village and the farmland are their parents' and grandparents' land. They wanted the land back. Indeed, this current village of ours was originally the village of Karen and some migrant Thai, and the farm area we cleared were theirs too. But because of military operations, the original villagers fled to the border area, many into Thailand. This was in the 1990s. But I asked them: can you tell us where exactly was your parents' farm? They could not point it to me. This young people have not farmed and will not farm. They just wanted to get some money. They asked us that we have to pay for their parents' farmlands for 200,000 Kyats per acre. So that's the problem now, in addition to the company having grabbed our farmland.<sup>30</sup>

In Lenya Forest there was an original village that was not the current roadside village. The original one was far, on the other side of a river, with 300 households. In 1983 there was a military operation against KNU. Villagers fled. In 1986, there was another military intervention, more villagers fled. In 2000, the military forced the remaining villagers to be in a hamlet by the roadside, the current village now. In the original village they had farmland, with mangosteen, durian, beetle nut, cashew nut trees, rotational crops and rice. After they fled/forced to the roadside hamlet, they were allowed to visit their farmland by the military but on the condition that they could not stay overnight and had to be back within the same day. It was difficult because it was far. They could not take care of their farm. Wild animals, e.g. elephants, destroyed many of their farms. Two hours of hike one way, or 30 minutes by motorbike. Meanwhile, some of those forcibly resettled in the roadside village were able to open new farmland in nearby areas. But it turned out that the current roadside village was the original village by another set of villagers who, earlier, also fled the military. They were also forced to abandon their farmland. They, the original villagers of the roadside settlement who were scattered in many other villages, are now claiming their village, homelots and farmlands. Some of them were asking for compensation of 300,000 Kyats for each homelot. The current roadside village<sup>31</sup>rs replied that:

But we are also poor people. We have no money to pay. We cannot pay. We also did not want to come here. The military forced us to come here. If the original villagers would insist, then we will leave but what we want is our original village on the other side of the river, our homelots and farmlands there. The problem is that the company already took those lands. What shall we do?<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, the interconnections between climate change mitigation and adaptation politics and land grabbing stoked old resource conflicts and provoked new ones. Only politicized and historicized approaches that are cognizant of the influence of class, ethnicity, gender and generational politics in generating and addressing conflicts will be able to resolve these in ways that advance the twin challenge of agrarian justice and climate justice.<sup>33</sup> It is complicated and difficult, but not impossible.

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## Endnotes

- 1 This is part of a broader research project, called 'Mosaic: Climate change mitigation policies, land grabbing and conflict in fragile states: understanding intersections, exploring transformations in Myanmar and Cambodia,' funded by the Dutch National Science Foundation, NWO, through the CoCooN - Conflict and Cooperation in the Management of Climate Change - Integrated Project. The research consortium's grassroots partners in Myanmar that have contributed significantly to the framing of this paper are Paung Ku, Land Core Group (LCG), Dawei Development Association, Southern Youth, Metta Development Foundation, and Transnational Institute (TNI) Burma program. The empirical research for this paper draws from the accumulated and aggregated research initiatives by each of the mentioned consortium members, and on the more concentrated field work by the Tanintharyi Mosaic action research teams, as well as on Borrás' and Franco's separate individual field work, especially in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017.
- 2 International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague.
- 3 Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam.
- 4 Southern Youth, Myeik, Myanmar.
- 5 Dawei Development Association (DDA), Myanmar.
- 6 Paung Ku and Dawei Development Association (DDA), Myanmar – when this research was done. Today, he is with another NGO working on extractive industries, MATA.
- 7 International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague
- 8 Department of Human Geography, Lund University
- 9 International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague
- 10 The conceptual framework and broad argument in this paper are the same as in Borrás, Franco et al. (2018), but the empirical materials are different; the former is from our research in Northern Shan State, while this current paper draws on our research in Tanintharyi region, both in Myanmar. Some differences from the two sets of research materials have led us to significant differences in emphasis in the two papers. We also decided to explore a different emphasis in our concluding discussion in this current paper. Finally, the first section in the current paper is more or less similar to the combined first and second sections of the Northern Shan State (NSS) paper.
- 11 REDD+ is the UNFCCC's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.
- 12 See in particular Borrás and Franco (forthcoming), and Franco and Borrás (forthcoming).
- 13 See Prescott et al (2017) for a broad canvas of possible issues implicated in such policy reframing.
- 14 See Borrás and Franco (forthcoming) for a critique of Climate Smart Agriculture.
- 15 See Springate-Baginski et al (2014) for a useful perspective on the politics of timber extraction in Myanmar.
- 16 Interview with the big conservation organization main program staff in charge of the project, September 2015, Dawei. Interviews with several KNU allies and supporters working on land issue in Dawei District, September 2015, Dawei.
- 17 This entire paragraph draws from Borrás and Franco (forthcoming).
- 18 Interview with the village administrator of one of the affected villages, 12 September 2015.
- 19 Interview with a villager, MSPP affected village, 12 September 2015.
- 20 Interview with Myo Oo, regional officer of ECODEV Myeik District, 11 September 2015, Myeik.
- 21 Same interview with Myo Oo.
- 22 FGD with villagers in a village inside the Lenya Forest, 17 September 2015.
- 23 FGDs with village leaders, 9 September 2015 – one in the affected village and another in the official company relocation site.
- 24 FGD with village leaders, Myang Pyo village, Dawei District, 10 September 2015.
- 25 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with villagers, Myang Pyo Village, 10 September 2015. Interview with probono lawyer Ma Tin Tin Thet, Dawei, 8 September 2015.
- 26 The body of work of James Scott on upland Myanmar provides a relevant and excellent political background for this long-running issue between the villagers and the central state. See particular Scott (2009).
- 27 The research team was in the Kyaka Su preservation island on 15 September 2015, and also had discussion while in the island with a team of researchers from the Myeik office of ECODEV.
- 28 Interview with a villager, in a village near the border with Thailand's Prachuap Khiri Khan province, 14 September 2015.
- 29 Based on a Powerpoint presentation by MOECAP on its 5-year plan, 2016-2021.
- 30 Interview with a villager, 14 September 2015, in a village in Tanintharyi township.
- 31 Interview with a villager at a Lenya Forest village, 17 September 2015.
- 32 See Franco (2008) where she argues, using empirical evidence in the Philippines that community-based, non-state conflict resolutions may, under certain conditions, work in settling fairly conflicts among villagers of relatively equal socioeconomic and political class, but not between actors of different class status, i.e. poor versus well to do. These kinds of approaches also remind us of broader, system-wide reforms (Borrás and Franco forthcoming) and the relevant governance instruments (Franco et al. 2017).