

SHAN STATE FOOD SECURITY PROJECT



Implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

MYA/96/007

The Shan Plateau in eastern Myanmar is an extensive, mountainous upland ranging from 1000 to 2300 m in height. The area is undulating; areas that have been stripped of their natural forest are subject to severe erosion. The area covers the watersheds of four of Myanmar's most important reservoirs: Kinda, Inle, Paung Laung and Zawgyi. Erosion from the uplands threatens to clog these reservoirs with silt, endangering much of the country's hydropower production and irrigation water supplies for the lowlands.

The main staple crop is rice, but many other crops are also grown, including wheat, maize, chili, cotton, potatoes, groundnuts, sesame, pulses, tea, tobacco and cabbages. The rainy season lasts from mid-April to mid-November.

Farmers in Shan State face numerous problems. The soils are generally infertile, and crop and livestock yields are low. The area's isolation and lack of infrastructure make it difficult for farmers to sell any surplus produce at a profit. Landholdings are small, and population growth forces farmers to overexploit the natural resources: cutting more trees for fuelwood and clearing land on steep slopes for cultivation. This environmental degradation further reduces yields, reinforcing a vicious cycle of poverty.

The HDIE Shan State Food Security Project

Environmentally Sustainable Food Security and Micro-Income Opportunities in Critical Watersheds of Southern Shan State is one of 10 projects under the United Nations Development Programme's multisectoral Human Development Initiative Extension (HDIE) programme in Myanmar. The project focuses on five townships in the southeastern part of Shan State: Kalaw, Nyaungshwe, Pindaya, Pinlaung and Ywangan. These townships together cover 2.3 million acres (nearly 1 million hectares) and have a population of nearly 500,000 people.

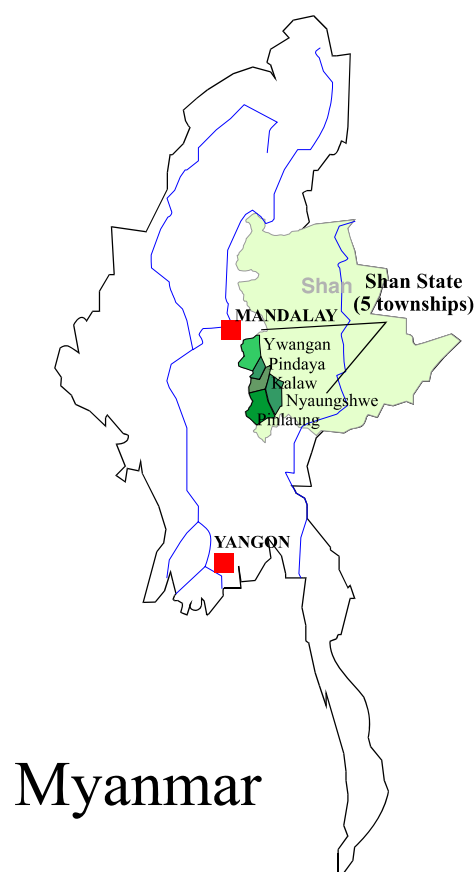
In the southern part of the project area lies Inle Lake, one of Myanmar's most important tourist attractions and a major vegetable-growing area. Like other lakes in the area, Inle is threatened by siltation and by high rates of pesticide use on the surrounding land.

The Food Security project collaborates closely with staff of HDIE projects working in the same five townships; these projects cover the complementary areas of education, health, water and sanitation, credit and administrative support. It also shares information and approaches with the two other Food Security projects under HDIE, working in the Dry Zone of Central Myanmar and the Ayeyarwady Delta.

Participatory, sustainable approach

The project aims to improve the welfare of small-scale farmers and landless people in the five townships through environmental conservation and by helping them grow more food and earn money from agriculture, aquaculture, livestock and forestry. Because the deteriorating environment is central to poverty in Shan State, the project emphasizes the development of land uses that are both profitable and can be sustained in the long term. It aims to benefit some 18,000 families farming 40,000 acres (16,000 hectares) in the five townships.

The project relies on a participatory approach that involves local people in selecting, planning, implementing and



evaluating activities. Within each village, project staff and villagers together plan how best to conserve the village's natural resources. The villagers are encouraged to form groups, which then decide on activities that will bring in income and help conserve the environment. Group members complete a simple proposal form outlining the activities they have chosen, and a staff member helps them work out what inputs and other assistance they will need. The project can provide inputs such as seedlings, cement or fertilizer, and if necessary, can train villagers how to implement new technologies. In selecting activities to support, the project management considers factors such as the technical feasibility of the activity and its likelihood of success. It gives priority to small-scale farmers, the landless and women. The activities are implemented by individual villagers, under the supervision of other group members and the project staff.

To provide the beneficiaries with some working capital, the project provides small loans that they can invest in their chosen activities. The borrowers must repay the loan with interest; but instead of returning it to the project, they pay it to a village management committee. The committee deposits the money in a local bank and can lend it out to other beneficiaries, building up an ever-increasing "revolving fund" to support future investments.

Project activities

Activities supported by the project fall into four main categories:

- Forestry.
- Agriculture.
- Livestock and fisheries.
- General.

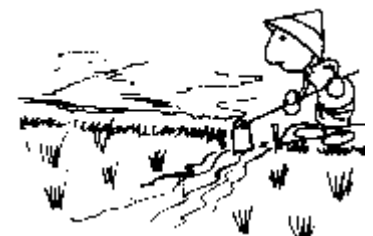
Forestry

Forestry activities attempt to slow down and reverse deforestation, which has resulted in many other environmental problems. The project supports villagers' proposals to develop village tree-nurseries (growing a range of multipurpose and fruit-tree species), establish community woodlots to supply fuelwood and building poles, and plant fruit trees. Several small businesses produce and distribute fuel-efficient stoves, which cut down cooking time and use about half of the fuelwood required by the three-stone open hearths traditionally used in the area.



Agriculture

Agricultural activities include support for the cultivation of various crops, including aster, ginger, groundnut, maize, potato, rice, soybean and wheat. The project also supports initiatives to build shelters for farmyard manure (the nitrogen in the manure dissipates easily if it is exposed to the sun and rain), plant windbreaks, and grow green manure crops. It conserves soil and water by promoting the construction of contour bunds (ridges that run across the slope, slowing runoff and allowing water to seep into the soil rather than flow over the surface).



Livestock and fisheries

Pig raising (both breeding piglets and fattening weaner pigs for sale) is a popular activity among farmers. The project also supports farmers who wish to raise poultry or water buffaloes, or who choose to dig ponds and raise fish.



General

The project also supports other soil-and-water conservation measures, such as check dams and diversion ditches. It helps renovate ponds that have become silted up. Many farmer groups ask for help in erecting their own building in which to meet. Other activities include constructing rice-mill buildings and holding participatory learning exercises. Several villages have sponsored competitions in which children write essays or draw posters illustrating their environment and how it can be conserved and improved.

