Decentralized, small-scale options (micro hydro, home-scale solar electric systems, and wind and biomass systems) based on local renewable sources offer an important near-term, and possibly long-term, potential particularly in rural areas far away from centralized supply networks.

- World Commission on Dams, 2000

The supposed purpose of the Tasang Dam is to provide energy for Thailand. However, the Thai government has consistently overestimated the country's energy needs which has led to an energy glut. Energy from the Tasang Dam, like that from the Yadana and Yetagun pipeline projects, is completely unnecessary. The Tasang Dam should be scrapped on the basis of this factor alone.

The era of large dams is ending. Thai energy planners have bought into the myth that “bigger is better,” but large-scale projects’ lack of flexibility to meet shifting demand far outweighs advantages of centralizing production costs. Alteratives—such as demand-side management (DSM), small-scale power generation such as a reciprocating engine, renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, biomass, and fuel cells—are available and affordable and should be considered much more seriously by Thai energy planners.

resisting the dam

We oppose the privatization of rivers and water resources. We also oppose the control of rivers and water resources by illegitimate and repressive governments, as in Burma. Access to water is a basic human right. Rivers must be in the hands of the people, not the private sector or military regimes.

- Pak Mun Declaration, signed by RWESA members and allies, 2000

The obstacles faced by those resisting the Tasang Dam are considerable: an entrenched military regime bent on crushing minority groups’ desires for autonomy, an authoritarian system of governance that renders dissent a death-wish, lack of transparency regarding the funding of the project, and self-interested “constructive engagement” policies pursued by governments and companies. Nonetheless, indigenous community groups and international organizations have succeeded in mobilizing a powerful challenge to the Tasang Dam. This challenge is also an appeal to the consciences of governments, financial institutions, citizens in Thailand, the United States, Japan, and Europe, to avoid complicity in the human rights crimes of the Burmese military, avoid association with the Tasang Dam, and help prevent this tragedy before it escalates.

The people of Shan State must take great risks to oppose this threat to their lives and their environment. We must support them.

For more information on the World Commission on Dams, see www.wcd2000.org

Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization
The recently formed Sapawa is the first Shan organization dedicated solely to the preservation of the environment in Shan State. Contact: sh_sapawa@hotmail.com

Salween Watch
Founded in 1998, Salween Watch is a coalition of local groups from Burma concerned about the fate of the Salween River. Contact: salweenwatch@hotmail.com

Rivers Watch East and Southeast Asia (RWESA) has been working to publicize the damaging effects of large dams in the region. Contact: contact@hk-sanxia.org

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Tasang Dam
The proposed Tasang Dam in Shan State would be the tallest dam in Southeast Asia. Given the Burmese regime's predilection for violence and disregard for human rights and environmental standards, the Tasang Dam, if built, would provoke forced labor, forced relocations, environmental destruction, and suppression of dissent. To date, public participation has been absent surrounding the project, and forced labor and portaging have already been linked to the project and its security. The Tasang Dam project would be not only destructive but entirely unnecessary, a boondoggle that would benefit the Burmese generals and a few private companies while doing nothing to provide for the needs and aspirations of the people of Burma or Thailand.

An inspiring resistance to the Tasang Dam in Burma is active, if underground, despite the notorious repression of the Burmese military regime. It is not too late to stop the Tasang Dam. It is not too late to save the Salween.

Far from the public spotlight in northeast Burma lies Shan State, home to indigenous groups, diverse forests and animals, and Southeast Asia's longest undammed river, the Salween.

In this remote zone of civil war and conflict over resources, the Burmese military and an energy company from Thailand are developing the Tasang Dam, slated to be the tallest dam in Southeast Asia. Given the Burmese regime's predilection for violence and disregard for human rights and environmental standards, the Tasang Dam, if built, would provoke forced labor, forced relocations, environmental destruction, and suppression of dissent. To date, public participation has been absent surrounding the project, and forced labor and portaging have already been linked to the project and its security. The Tasang Dam project would be not only destructive but entirely unnecessary, a boondoggle that would benefit the Burmese generals and a few private companies while doing nothing to provide for the needs and aspirations of the people of Burma or Thailand.

An inspiring resistance to the Tasang Dam in Burma is active, if underground, despite the notorious repression of the Burmese military regime. It is not too late to stop the Tasang Dam. It is not too late to save the Salween.
five fatal flaws of the tasang dam

**Forced Labor and Violence**

In Burma, increased military presence in an area means enormous hardship for the local population. At Tasang, the military presence has already grown as the companies have conducted surveys, leading to forced labor and portering by villagers. The Burmese military regime is notorious for its use of violence and forced labor for development projects. The military troops providing security for the infamous Yadana and Yetagun pipeline projects inflicted forced labor, violence, rape, forced relocations, and extrajudicial killings on the local population. Other major dam projects in Burma, such as those in Pegu Division, Rakhine State, and Shan State, have involved thousands of forced laborers.

The Tasang Dam project is following this same pattern of abuse. In fact, forced labor in Burma is so widespread, brutal, and systematic that the International Labour Organization has called on its constituent countries, governments, workers, and employers to review any projects that could contribute to the practice. In light of the ILO decision, the Thai government and GMS Power should halt the Tasang Dam project, recognizing it as a venture that will lead to more forced labor.

**Environmental and Cultural Destruction**

The Salween River is the longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia, running through China, Burma, and along the Thai-Burma border before it crosses the Andaman Sea. The planned location of the dam is in Shan State in Burma at Tasang. The dam would flood areas along the Salween River as well as tributaries.

Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Power Co. Ltd. of Thailand is studying the potential for the project with its Burmese partner, Myanmar Economic Corporation. Most of the power generated by the dam is probably exported to Thailand. It is still unknown who will finance the project, but outside donor assistance will be necessary.

**Financing Brutality**

What [investment] did was give the military authorities and those connected with them a chance to consolidate their economic position in the same way in which they had consolidated their power base. Money flowing into Burma through foreign investment does not reach the ordinary citizen; instead, it helps the military regime keep its grip on power and reduces its incentive to negotiate a peaceful transition to democracy. The Burmese military regime has no incentive to make meaningful environmental regulations, and it is not bound by any legal restrictions.

The beauty of the free-flowing Salween River will be lost if the Tasang Dam is built.

The Tasang Dam is in the late stages of pre-construction planning. The next stages include the Detailed Design (D/D), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and a financial plan. The timeline for the dam's development is subject to negotiations among the companies, government, and local communities. The electricity generated by the dam will be sold to Thailand, where it will be used to power industries and domestic homes.

"I helped construct a building near the dam site for the soldiers . . . . I received no payment for my work, and I did not want to do the work. But I knew that if I refused, I would also lose my job and perhaps be arrested." - Shan village, 2001

Photo courtesy of ERI.