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Pa-O Farmers' Land Struggle and Livelihood Strategies in Hsi Hseng Township, Southern Shan State, Myanmar

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Abstract

In Myanmar, the 2021 coup and nationwide armed conflict escalation have an indiscriminate adverse impact on people. It has worsened food insecurity, economic instability, humanitarian crisis, and human security. The communities that have been experiencing land confiscation and armed conflicts become more vulnerable while resettlement is still difficult. The Pa- O farmers in Hsi Hseng township, southern Shan State, Myanmar, are experiencing military land confiscation and armed conflict disruption. This

research aims to investigate Pa-O farmer's land struggles and livelihood strategies adaptation in their social and political dynamic. Therefore, it examined how farmers negotiate their livelihood strategies and capital access and navigate their resources amidst political unrest. Htee Man, Kaung Mu Bwar, and Mya Kan Thar villages in Hsi Hseng township are the research target areas. The in-depth interview and focus group discussion were used to explore the livelihood adaptation of Pa-O farmers. The research found that the shrink space for land movement and threats to local land activists have weakened the land-related movement, but farmers remain committed to their struggle to regain their lands. The local farmers negotiate their livelihood through agricultural diversification, increased migration, and changing their livelihood. Agricultural diversification could be short-term; most farmers reduce the CP maize production and prioritizing food crop cultivation for their food security. Decades of engagement with CP production have caused land degradation and lost local seeds, which have an adverse impact on their livelihood adaptation. Increased human rights violations, insecurities, forced recruitment, and scarce job opportunities have increased the outmigration. The paper shows that the farmers' consideration of agricultural production has changed to improve their food security; however, limited access to capital and information, inflation, and insecurities have restricted their options for livelihood adaptation strategies.