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Livingstons Legal raises money for northern Kachin food aid (20 July 2016)

On [27 May 2016](#), the [Myanmar Times published an article](#) on the damage caused to isolated villages and access roads in far northern Kachin State by unusually heavy and early rains. Amongst the villages detailed in the article was Kaunglanhpu township, situated east of Puta-O, near the Chinese border. As detailed in the article, early flash-floods and landslides blocked the main access road from China into Kaunglanhpu, disrupting food supply to the village, with continuing rains exacerbating the issue by preventing crop planting and worsening access.

On reading the article, Livingstons Legal Managing Director, Mark Livingston, contacted his friend, Sin Wa Hkyeng, a young Kachin businessman and community leader. Together, within a week after publication of the article the pair managed to enlist the support of Myanmar Carlsberg and Yangon bars The Fat Ox, Turbo De Bar, Union Bar and The West to run a [drinks promotion as a fundraiser](#). Additional donations were provided by another bar, Seventh Joint.

Further funds were still required following the drinks promotion, and significant support in the form of donations was promptly provided by mining industry clients and friends of Livingstons Legal: exploration company [Access Asia Mining](#) and its Myanmar operating subsidiary, Access Resources Asia; mining investment company Tanamera Resources; and the peak mining industry association in Singapore, the [Singapore Mining Club](#) (which Livingston previously co-founded).

All funds raised were used in the purchase of rice and its delivery to Kaunglanhpu township for distribution as food aid. The execution of the project was organised and managed by Sin Wa Hkyeng in cooperation with local Puta-O-based NGO, Hope. It is currently only possible to travel part-way to Kaunglanhpu from the Myanmar side by vehicle, with the rest of the journey having to be completed on foot. A volunteer team organised by Hope was able to take rice that was purchased in Puta-O by truck as far as Magweza village, approximately 70 miles from Kaunglanhpu. The journey to Magweza took four days and required three river crossings – due to a lack of any bridges – and was further delayed by a landslide that took 24 hours to clear. The trucks were not able to travel any further from Magweza due to the lack of an accessible road. Representatives from several villages in the Kaunglanhpu township area met the Hope volunteers in Magweza, where the rice was distributed and transferred to mules to be carried back to the villages on foot.

Altogether, 100 bags of rice were delivered to villages in the Kaunglanhpu township as a result of the project, with the rice being distributed to 236 households. The village representatives who came to Magweza reported that food shortages have begun to hit the area quite hard, with some people reduced to eating one meal per day of corn powder or taro.

The project organisers understand that, while normal road access remains blocked, mules are now able to make it through past the landslides from the China side and further aid is being organised and delivered by local officials and Chinese donors via that route. However, the food supply situation in the area remains precarious.

The townships in Northern Kachin State are particularly vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters due to their isolation and the lack of much-needed infrastructure. This isolation directly impacts food availability issues by driving up the price of commodities. The rice distributed by the project was purchased in Puta-O in the interests of saving time and reducing transport issues by sourcing rice as close as possible to Kaunglanhpu. But infrastructure and supply issues mean that the prices for rice – and most basic food commodities – are much higher in Puta-O than in other parts of Myanmar, which heightens food security issues for the comparatively poor and undeveloped communities in the area. Access to improved transport infrastructure and more advanced agricultural methods and technologies is sorely needed to improve supply, reduce prices and alleviate the risk of further food shortages in future.

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