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For Media release

Bottom-up, Community-driven Development Model Presents a Sustainable Future for Villagers and the Natural Environment in Tanintharyi Region

Rangoon – (24 March, 2016) – In a region bearing the brunt of top-down development and conservation policies and processes, local communities in Kamoethway River Valley, Tanintharyi Region have designed and are implementing their own, sustainable, locally-led development process, one that benefits both the natural environment and the indigenous people who have resided there for generations, Tenasserim River Indigenous People Network (TRIP-NET) outlined in a report launched today.

The report, "We will Manage Our Own Resources," presents how since the opening of the country to investment, the signing of the ceasefire between the central Government and the Karen National Union, and the passing of business-friendly legislation has made many areas of Tanintharyi Region vulnerable to large-scale land grabbing for destructive development projects such as resource extraction, and mono-plantations. Yet at the same time, international conservation organizations-enlisted by foreign investors as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programs- are working with the central government to try and establish large swathes of protected forests. Inadvertently, it has caused loss of control and use of natural resources, including land grab and forced evictions. Local communities have been caught between these two powerful forces, losing access to their livelihoods and local environments.

"Top-down development projects in conflict-affected areas are not only destroying the livelihoods and environment of the local communities, but new threats from ostensibly "conservation" efforts are also undermining the resilience and agency of the very people who rely on the local environment," Frankie Abreu Coordinator of TRIP-NET said at the launch today.

In the face of these pressures, however, local communities in the Kamoethway River Valley have been pursuing their own grassroots alternative – a bottom-up, participatory model that conserves the local environment and biodiversity, keeps the use and management of natural resources in local hands and preserve indigenous culture.

Led by networks of local organizations, including the Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature (RKIPN), Community Sustainable Livelihood and Development (CSLD), and TRIP-NET, the 11 villages of Kamoethway have representation and participate in the achievements that have thus far been accomplished. The report presents the details of these successes, including fish

conservation zones, community-driven forest conservation, and a local water supply system.

"What the achievement of these projects has shown, is that the local communities can both very capably take the lead on conservation of the local environment as well as implement projects based on the needs and contexts of the development priorities that they themselves decide," said Saw Kho, Chairman of RKIPN.

The villagers in Kamoethway and local networks have laid the foundation to pursue an alternative model that conserves nature and indigenous peoples' livelihoods together, and where local people are the true owners and managers of their land and resources. Moving forward, the report states how these networks aim to engage key decision-makers, academics, conservationists, and activists working in Tanintharyi Region, inviting them to learn from the Kamoethway community and work together as equal partners towards a just and sustainable future.

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Note for editors:

The report was released at the MiCasa Hotel in Rangoon, Burma on 24 March, 2016.

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