



Umpiem Mai refugee camp: Before and immediately after the February fire.

Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) works in nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border, including Umpiem Mai camp in Tak province. TBBC pursues change leading to durable solutions while ensuring a protective environment for displaced people of Burma. Our work is centred on the provision of food, shelter, and capacity-building support for the camp residents. TBBC also endeavours to increase self-reliance and reduce aid dependency by promoting and supporting livelihoods opportunities.

The purpose of this edition of TBBC's E-letter is to provide an update on the fire in Umpiem Mai refugee camp on the Thailand-Burma border and the subsequent emergency response.

UPDATE: FIRE IN UMPIEM MAI CAMP

On February 23rd a fire broke out in Umpiem Mai - the second largest camp on the border - that is home to over 17,600 refugees and displaced persons from Burma. TBBC staff were at the camp office for a meeting, when they heard people calling for help to extinguish a fire. Flames and heavy smoke were visible within minutes, and the blaze rapidly spread across scores of houses. With little chance of the fire being extinguished easily, the Thai government Camp Commander was contacted to request fire trucks from local government authorities.

Refugees throughout Umpiem Mai worked to halt the fire by removing roofing and dismantling houses in accordance to fire-breaking practices. The flames began to slowly extinguish a little over an hour later. The trucks arrived from various municipalities, but as all are stationed about a 1.5 hour drive away, the fire had already terminated upon arrival.

The blaze tore through five sections of the camp destroying approximately 422 households and damaging 351 others. Thousands of people have been affected, and an estimated 2,800 people have lost everything, including their monthly food rations received only the day before the disaster. 20 people sustained minor injuries in their efforts to stop the fire, but thankfully, no deaths or major injuries were incurred. However, significant work is required to help refugees rebuild their lives in the wake of the fire's devastation.



The fire blazing in Umpiem Mai camp on February 23rd.



HOW TBBC IS HELPING: WORKING WITH THE UMPIEM MAI COMMUNITY

TBBC immediately responded to the emergency by providing food, blankets, mats, mosquito nets and cooking pots to camp residents. People who have lost their homes were also being given emergency shelters to use until their houses are reconstructed. Refugee camp committees, TBBC, UNHCR, and other NGOs working on the border are closely collaborating to coordinate the humanitarian response, to ensure all refugees' basic needs are met. With the support of our donors and partners, TBBC will continue to work closely with the camp committees and residents to reconstruct all of the 422 bamboo houses destroyed in the fire and repair the other 351 shelters sustaining damages.

TBBC also worked together with the refugee camp committees and warehouse staff to distribute food rations to the affected families living in temporary sites and in relatives' homes. Community kitchens were set up in each temporary site and TBBC food rations – part of our regular work in the camps - were distributed along with extra food donated by other groups. Non-food items will continue to be distributed as needed to those households that have lost their possessions.



Reconstruction in Umpiem Mai – the thatch shown here is used for roofing.

Shelter materials are arriving at the camps to rebuild the lost and damaged homes, including bamboo, eucalyptus and thatch. Each family will be responsible for reconstructing their own houses with simple tools provided, and staff and skilled carpenters will further aid the efforts of those unable to rebuild themselves. TBBC is also coordinating with other NGOs and Camp Leaders to support construction work for the most vulnerable and needy. It is expected that each house will take less than 1 week to build, and the full reconstruction effort should be completed by June. Currently, most of the families affected have moved back to the original site of the fire and remain living in emergency shelters. All families have assisted in cleaning the debris and re-stabilizing the soil.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

TBBC's supporters, consortium members and donors responded to the fire immediately and with tremendous generosity. As a result, TBBC anticipates that all costs of the fire will be covered. If you've already made a donation, thank you so much. Our next e-letter will include an update on further progress in the reconstruction efforts in Umpiem Mai. As rising food prices have significantly increased TBBC's costs and forced cuts to our programme in recent years, your commitment to TBBC's work is extremely valued and essential.

But if you haven't already, you can still support refugees and displaced people of Burma by [making a donation](#) to TBBC. Through your donation, TBBC will be able to continue its work to provide food rations, shelter materials and build capacities of camp management to support over 137,000 Burmese refugees in nine camps, including Umpiem Mai. In this exciting time of political change in Burma, your support and solidarity with refugees and displaced people is more important than ever.

TBBC PROGRAMME REPORT

TBBC's latest programme report for the period from July-December 2011 is now available! The report provides extensive information on TBBC's activities during 2011, as well as the context on the border and inside Burma. You can download this [here](#) on the TBBC website.



To see TBBC's recent resources, such as our IDP report in Burmese or a map showing the refugees' previous residence, please refer to our website: www.tbtc.org.

Please make a donation today by visiting the TBBC website [here](#). Thank you for your generosity and commitment to refugees and displaced people from Burma.



Nursery School Lunch in Tham Hin camp, supported by TBBC.