

Report-I

Post-Conflict Displacement in Nepal*

Displacement Situations

The decade-long Maoist armed insurgency and the counter-insurgency activities by the state security forces brought serious consequences of life and security of people in the rural areas of Nepal. Due to the fear of crossfire, capture of lands and property, fear of being forcefully recruited by the rebels, ransom and intimidation etc during that period, many of the victim families or individuals were compelled to leave their place of origin. Apart from large number of displacement, the country has witnessed high casualty as well as political instability during the period. A total of 13,347 people were killed¹ and around 200,000 to 400,000 people are estimated to be displaced as a result of the decade long armed conflict between the government and the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)². The post-conflict situation is not normal even after the Maoist combatants and their weapons are in the UN monitored cantonments and the party is already in the in the peace process and led the Government for sometimes after the successful election of Constituent Assembly on April 2008. The Commission for Truth and Reconciliation and Commission for Disappearance Investigation are yet to be formed which can address the incidents of impunity properly. Although the National IDP Policy was approved by the Government in 2007 to address the plight of the IDPs but it has never been a priority on government's agenda. A large number of displaced people are yet to return to their respective places and rebuild their family lives and livelihood.

There is no accurate data available on the displaced population because there is no monitoring and registration of the IDPs by any agency. Also it is believed that a large number of conflict victims migrated to India during this period in search of security and livelihood. The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR), UN Agencies and national and international organizations have estimated that 50,000 to 70,000 people still remain displaced.³ They are scattered around the capital and other cities, living in very unhygienic conditions in the poorest neighbourhoods. The table below shows various IDP figures collected from various sources and documents since 2003:

* Refugee Watch, 36, December 2010

Table 1: IDPs in Nepal

IDP figure	Source	Date	Comment/limitation
70,425	Government of Nepal	Sep-09	Total number of people displaced between 1996-2006
50,000-70,000	IDP Working Group	Jun-09	Number of people who have not yet found durable solutions
35,000-50,000	OCHA	Mar-08	Estimate of agencies working with IDPs
25,000	Government of Nepal	Jan-08	Based only on compensation applications
50,000-70,000	OCHA	Ju-07	Estimate of the IDP Protection Group
38,000	Government of Nepal	Aug-06	Sourced to the NHRC, 2006
212,985-272,600	Caritas	Aug-06	Only covers IDPs living in district headquarters
200,000	UNHCR	May-06	
350,000	Caritas	Feb-06	
At least 100,000	CHR	Jan-06	"Between 100,000 and a few hundred thousands"
400,000	UNFPA	Nov-05	
18,666	Ministry of Home Affairs	Ju-05	Only includes those displaced by Maoists
17,583	SCA & CCWB	Ju-05	Nb. of children migrating to India between July-Oct. 2004
40,000	ILO/CWIN	Jun-05	Children displaced since 1996
300,000-600,000	Minister of Finance	May-05	
50,000	INSEC	Apr-05	Only covers 2001-2004 period
2.4 million	ADB	Sep-04	Cumulative figure since 1996. Includes displacement to India
More than 100,000	Government	Aug-04	
More than 60,000	NMVA	Aug-04	IDPs in Kathmandu displaced by Maoists
350,000-400,000	CSWC	Jan-04	Based on the identification of 160,000 IDP in 5 districts
100,000-150,000	GTZ, INF, SNV & cie	Mar-03	
500,000	EC & RRN	Apr-03	Includes forced migration to India
80,000	UNDP/RUPP	Jan-03	Only covers 2001-2003. Extra migration to urban areas
7,343	Ministry of Home Affairs	Jan-03	Only includes those displaced by Maoists

Source: IDMC⁴

Situation of IDPs

The problem of IDPs has been shadowed or less prioritized due to political instability in the post-conflict transition period. NHRC reports that displaced people living in the cities are hard hit by food scarcity, lack of sufficient place to live in and lack of amenities for a basic living. Due to the illiteracy and skills required for the employment, they still remain unemployed.⁵ Women and girls are especially vulnerable to exploitation and impoverishment. As they come to the cities in search of safety and opportunity, they are facing difficulties to secure jobs. Many of them are forced to work in the restaurants, dance bars, and massage parlors as a result of the post conflict economy.⁶ Similarly, displaced children scattered around the capital and other cities with their parents or relatives are not getting enough food, clothes and bed to sleep and are being deprived of the basic necessities such as education and health.⁷

Maoist cadres' continuous threat against the returnees and the lack of social harmony has made the lives of returnees extremely difficult and vulnerable to stigmatization. Further, recurrent news of capturing of private and public property by armed groups, Maoists and its sister organizations⁸ has created a sense of panic among the displaced people and has jeopardized the possibly of return in the immediate future.

Apart from conflict induced displacement, Nepal has been facing large displacement due to natural disasters. In 2008, more than 70,000

people were displaced by flooding in the Koshi River, the biggest river in east Nepal, as it breached its eastern embankment. Another 80000 were displaced in western Nepal due to torrential rain in the region. Recently, 47 people have been killed in landslides and over a 1000 families have been displaced due to a combination of landslides and heavy rainfall that has rendered large areas uninhabitable and uncultivable in the far western districts of Achham, Bajhang, Kanchanpur and Kailali.⁹ The displacements due to conflict or natural disaster are increasing every year which demands serious attention from national and international humanitarian actors.

Rehabilitation Process

Nepal still faces a serious challenge of rehabilitating and reintegrating the remaining IDPs in the post conflict transition period. Majority of IDPs are yet to be registered with the government agencies. The return oriented support packages are creating confusion among the victims. Most of the IDPs do not want to return due to lack of land to till, personal and economic security and livelihood opportunities. As Maoists have not returned their seized land and have prohibited selling and buying of it, the victims are facing more difficulties to settle back in their respective villages. Since they find comparatively better economic opportunities in the cities than in the villages, they want to settle in the current location. The National IDP Policy 2007 states that every displaced person has the right to resettle anywhere within the country, they have right to claim for any support provided by government. However, many genuine IDPs have not received such packages.

Although the government established several compensation and resettlement funds and programmes for displaced people, they were intended for a relatively short period of time. Some of them are Victims of Conflict Fund, 2001, Immediate Relief Package Programme, 2002, IDP Rehabilitation Programme 2003, Immediate Compensation and Relief to the Victims 2004, Task Force to prepare the Relief Package including Work Plan for IDPs 2004, 15-Point Relief Package for the Victims of Maoist, 2004, Assistance Programme 2005, National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons 2006, Comprehensive Peace Agreement 2006, IDPs Policy 2007, Economic Assistance 2007.¹⁰ Apart from this, many international organizations like Action Aid Nepal Caritas Nepal, International Red Cross and Red Crescents (ICRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Medicine Sans Frontiers (MSF) France, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Plan International Nepal, Save The Children US, Terre Des Hommes (TDH), United Nations (OCHA, OHCHR, UNDP – RUPP (Rural Urban Partnership Programme), UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP¹¹ supported affected communities in different districts at various levels.

There has been doubt regarding the process of collection of data and identifying the condition of IDPs. The present government suspects not

only the data collected by previous government which is 52,613 (before this new data was presented, the ministry data showed only 36,000 IDPs) but also the distribution of the first installment of Rs 250 million for the IDPs. The present Government claims that fake documents were presented for qualifying as IDPs which drastically increased the number of IDPs. The then government had decided to provide Rs 500 to each IDP as transport fares to return to their homes. The government had also decided to provide each IDP Rs 60 per day for up to 120 days as allowance. Similarly Rs 2,400 had been allocated for the education of each displaced children and Rs 7,500 for renovation of each damaged house. Likewise, Rs 20,000 per family was released for the construction of totally damaged house. An additional interest-free loan of Rs 20,000 had been arranged for each IDP family for farming purposes.¹² Since, there are many claims for the irregularities of the IDP relief distribution at different levels; it requires assessment of disbursement of past funds as well as monitoring of the proper distribution of support package to the real IDPs with strict monitoring mechanism which involves civil society and UN agencies other than the government representatives.

New Displacement

In the recent years there has been increasing ethnic tension in the southern Plain areas of Nepal which is further complicated by the presence of more than 100 criminal armed groups in the region. Due to threats, violent attacks, ransom, extortion and abduction by these formed armed groups, forced displacement is taking place in the region. Terai, plain lands situated in the south of Nepal, is home to the hill-originated Pahadi and Madhesi (people of plain land) people. They have been living together for decades, but violence between the two ethnic groups has been growing over the last three years. Madhesi activists claim that they have been neglected and excluded from most of the country's developmental and political processes due to discrimination from Pahadi dominated political leadership. Several incidents of displacement and communal violence have taken place in the last three years. Around 6,000-8,000 individuals have been displaced due to communal violence on 16-21 September 2007 in Kapilbastu. Similarly, 150 people were displaced from the Sunsari district due to threats, violent attacks and theft by members of the Madhei Mukti Tigers (an armed group). Media reports suggest that about 3000 individuals were displaced under similar circumstances in the neighbouring Siraha districts in 2007. Saptari has been the hot bed of conflict and displacement, but there is no estimate on the total number of people displaced from the district

The Government of Nepal has estimated that there are 109 armed groups in the various region of Nepal and most of them are operating their

activities in Terai in the name of liberating Madhesh¹³. A total of 383 persons have been killed in 334 incidents in 20 districts¹⁴.

It is widely believed that most of the armed groups are continuing their criminal activities under the guise of politics. There is no any reliable data regarding the displacement in Terai as the IDPs are not disclosing their status because of the fear of personal security or being stigmatized. People are moving as discretely as possible and wish to remain anonymous due to fear of abduction or killing for ransom by unidentified armed groups. The lack of respect for civil servants of hill origin by the Madhesi population and armed groups is also causing the displacement of number of civil servants especially the VDC secretaries, Government employees in the village level local government. The government employees are forced to resign from their job or ask for transfer to another region of Nepal. IDPs have been attempting to sell their land and property. In some cases, the IDPs have fled before being able to do so or have sold their property at less than half the market price. Most of the displaced have moved either to the capital or nearby cities dominated by the hill origin people. There are also few armed and non-armed groups in eastern hill region, who are claiming for their ethnic state. Ethnic groups such as *Limbuwan Mukti Morcha*, *Khumbuwan Mukti Morcha* and *Kirant Janawadi Workers Party* are threatening, intimidating and forcing people to leave the region¹⁵. There is no information available regarding displacement of people even if people are migrating to the capital from these areas. However, the clear reasons of those migration phenomena are yet to be explored. Despite being clearly mentioned in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) regarding the return of the confiscated property and land by the CPN (Maoist), the restitution of property and land has not started in many places¹⁶. Likewise, the breakaway party of UCPN (Maoist), newly formed Communist Party of Nepal (M) is capturing lands and property in different districts of Terai.

Conclusion

Nepal still faces a serious challenge of addressing the problem of IDPs. Due to various new armed groups' violent activities and Maoists' action, the number of internally displaced persons is increasing gradually. The Government of Nepal is yet to set up an effective mechanism to register or monitor the newly displaced persons as well as, evaluate the displacement situation in post conflict period. Government and international agencies have brought out many programmes to address the issues of IDPs, However, these programmes have not been implemented properly due to poor assistance delivery and there is an urgent need to improve the assistance mechanism. It is time that a proper assessment of the current situation is undertaken to work towards an effective solution.

Notes

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