

E-bulletin on IDPs in Nepal



An Overview of the recent scenario of IDPs in Nepal

Displacement of peoples from their homes is a worldwide problem. The United Nations estimates that close to 1 percent of the world's 6.7 billion people are now displaced within their own countries, forced to flee their homes due to armed conflicts, violence, development projects and natural disasters [1]. The displacement due to conflict or natural disasters is increasing rapidly. Some 4.6 million people were newly displaced (of a total 26 million) due to new outbreaks of conflict and violence in 24 different countries in 2008. This represents an increase of 900,000 compared to the same total in 2007 (2). Also, disasters like droughts, tsunamis, hurricanes, typhoons and floods have been increasing over the past 25 years. In 1980, there were only about 100 such disasters reported per year but that number has risen to over 300 a year since 2000 (3). It is estimated that approximately 50 million people around the world are displaced by hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides, and flooding (4).

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Mankumari Bista has been an IDP since her husband was killed by rebels. Many displaced women like her are living in extreme poverty, without any support from the government or international humanitarian agencies.
(Credit: Naresh Newar / IRIN)

In the context of Nepal, the armed conflict between the government and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from 1996 to 2006 has been the main reason for the killings of 13,347 people (5) and the displacement of presumably 200,000 to 400,000 more people (6). Through the peace process and signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, it was expected that IDP issues would be solved very soon, but still a large number of people have yet to return to their respective villages.

As the 10 year long conflict ended, political activities, such as putting the Maoist army in cantonment, uprooting the 243 year old institution of monarchy, the election of a Constituent Assembly and drafting of an interim constitution, and the formation of a new government, became the priorities of the government; therefore, it couldn't manage IDP issues properly.

There are not accurate displacement figures available since the movements have not been monitored and no comprehensive registration has taken place. Also it is believed that a large number of conflict victims migrated to India during this period. OCHA estimated that between 50,000 to 70,000 people remain displaced from the conflict (7). They are scattered around the capital and other cities, living in very unhygienic conditions in the poorest neighborhoods, as they still have not been returned to their property, land and houses. As for the government, the Ministry of Peace & Construction, which is responsible for the welfare of the IDPs, is still in the process of introducing poverty alleviation programs, healthcare and employment for IDPs (8).



(photo source: www.wwan.cn/chinese/event/peaceday/photos.shtml)

As the 10 year long conflict ended, political activities, such as putting the Maoist army in cantonment, uprooting the 243 year old institution of monarchy, the election of a Constituent Assembly and drafting of an interim constitution, and the formation of a new government, became the priorities of the government; therefore, it couldn't manage the IDP issues properly. Additionally, there are problems identifying and registering IDPs. The government's IDPs definition only includes people displaced by Maoist actions, and it doesn't speak about those who have been displaced due to abuses by government security forces. Also, many IDPs are convinced that there is nothing to gain from registering as an IDP, and thus they are remaining anonymous.

Displacement in Terai

Due to threats, violent attacks, ransom, extortion and abduction by newly formed armed groups, forced displacement is taking place in Terai. Terai, plain lands situated in the south of Nepal, is home to the hill-originated Pahadi and Indian-originated Madhesi people. They had been living together cooperatively for decades, but violence between the two ethnic groups has been growing over the last three years. Madhesi claim their community has been neglected and excluded from most of the country's developmental and political processes due to discrimination from Pahadi leaders.

There have been several incidents of displacement and communal violence in the last three years. Between 6,000-8,000 individuals were displaced by communal violence between 16 to 21 September 2007 in Kapilbastu (9). 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). And, according to Media reports, about 3000 individuals were displaced under similar circumstances in the neighbouring Siraha districts in 2007 (10). Saptari has been the hot bed of conflict and displacement, but there is not any estimate on the total number of people displaced there.

It is presumed that more than one dozen armed groups have been operating activities in Terai since 2006, in the name of liberating Madhesh, including: Jantantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM), Akhil Terai Mukti Morcha (ATMM), Madheshi Mukti Tigers (MMT), Samyukta Jantantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (SJTMM), Liberation Tigers of Terai Elam, Terai Kobara, Madhesi Virus Killers, Terai Army and Nepal Defence Army. A total of 383 persons have been killed in 334 incidents in 20 districts (Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Kapilvastu, Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur) of Terai-Madhesh (11). It is widely believed that most of the armed groups are continuing their criminal activities under the guise of politics.

There is not any reliable data regarding the displacement in Terai as there is not any registration of IDPs or any monitoring mechanism for watching population movements. 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. Also, disrespect for civil servants of hill origin by the Madhesis and armed groups. The government employees are forced to terminate the 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 people.

“ It is widely believed that most of the armed groups are continuing their criminal activities under the guise of politics. ”

Displacement by natural disasters

Apart from conflict-induced displacement, people are also displaced every year in Nepal by various natural disaster, primarily floods and landslides. About 270 people lost their lives and a large number of people were displaced by floods and landslides in 2008 (13). The major displacement occurred as Koshi, the biggest river of the country, breached its eastern embankment at Kushaha in the Sunsari district on 18 August. This caused a displacement of 7,306 families (41,340 people) (14). of at least eight Village Development Committees (VDDCs)- Kushaha, Laukahi, Ghuski, Shreepur, Haripur, Narsingha, Madhuban and Basantpur.

Similarly, heavy rainfall and severe flash flooding from 19-21 September 2008 in Kailali and Kanchanpur took 40 lives. According to the Nepal Red Cross Society 16,000 houses were badly affected in 38 villages,, with 15,000 people being displaced in Mahendra Nagar municipality alone.

The government, through coordinated action with national and international organizations, provided immediate support to IDPs. The support included temporary tents, food, etc. This support is still continuing, but there is a lack of basic facilities and medium to long-term livelihood support. IDPs are seeking shelter, drinking water and health facilities. Nutritious items and supplementary food is also lacking for pregnant women and mothers with babies living in the camp. According to OCHA, 95 percent of displaced persons have returned to their pre-flood areas of the origin; most of them are eagerly waiting for government assistance for education, healthcare, food and water.

As reconstruction of the Koshi embankment has not been completed, and monsoon season has just come, people are living once again in highly vulnerable areas. If proper construction is not completed on time it may not only increase the number of IDPs, but several lives may be lost as well.



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(photo source: www.nepalnews.com.np)

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Locating IDPs and their problem

People of rural settings were displaced to the cities during the period of war between the government and Maoists, which is still continuing in the current crisis in Terai. People from Terai have been migrating to metropolitan areas from their respective villages and towns. The displaced move to urban centers in search of food and a safe environment for living. A large number of people were displaced to the capital during and after the armed conflict between the government and Maoist. The reports show that IDPs living in Kathmandu have been facing numerous difficulties. They have been hard-hit by food scarcity, lack of sufficient shelter and amenities for basic living. Employment opportunities have been and remain nearly non-existent. As most of IDPs are illiterate and already old, it is beyond their capacity to earn a livelihood. Similarly widows are suffering from psychological trauma, livelihood issues and their children are missing educational opportunities due to their poor economic condition (12).

The status of people displaced from Terai is still unclear, as they are not living in groups like most Maoist victims. Most IDPs are assumed to be living in great turmoil, as they have lost their land, which is their major source of income. They are also not able to applying their traditional occupation in the city. Due to their low income, they are unable to fulfill basic needs for their family. They are facing malnutrition and lack of safe drinking water and sanitary facilities as most of them are living in slum areas. For a long time, they did not even have access to basic humanitarian assistance, despite the fact that it is their right. These IDPs are unwilling to return home, as the conflict in Terai is becoming more complicated.

Conclusion

Since the rebel group and government signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, a large number of historical political activities have taken place, like the abolishment of 243 years of institutional monarchy, the Constituent Assembly election, the drafting of the interim constitution, and the formation of a government headed by former rebels. During this period, the Government of Nepal adopted a national policy on IDPs. It also developed the 'Return and Re-integration Package' and distributed it to 73 districts with a budget from the Nepal Peace Trust Fund. Similarly, humanitarian agencies have been facilitating returns and providing assistance to IDPs. Despite these positive processes, there are a number of issues yet to be addressed, like the actual number of internally displaced persons and returnees and their concern for the return of property, livelihood options, and access to services and security.

Urgent action is needed to manage the new displacement taking place in Terai due to threats and killings for ransom by newly formed armed groups. Most of these victims come from the hills and are migrating discretely, hoping to remain anonymous in the capital and hill towns. It is presumed that they face food scarcity, a lack of sufficient housing and the amenities for basic living. Thus the identification of newly displaced persons and their registration is necessary for further support.

Likewise the people displaced due to conflict, the IDPs displaced by floods and landslides have been facing the same problems, although they are identifiable. It is presumed that 95 percent of IDPs have returned to camps provided by the government in cooperation with national and international organizations. Yet there is still lack of shelter, drinking water and health facilities at these camps and the IDPs are living in high vulnerability as the construction of embankments have yet to be completed.

-By Som Niroula and Sujit Saksena

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Training and workshops

- Orientation course on Forced Migration to be held in Kolkata, India (1-15 December 2009)
<http://www.mcrg.ac.in>

Recent publications on IDPs in Nepal

- Internally Displaced Persons in Nepal: Neglected and Vulnerable
<http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/view/2471/2318>
- Report of National Human Rights Commission of Nepal
http://www.nhrcnepal.org///publication/doc/reports/IDPs_Nepali%20Report.pdf
- Refugee Watch – Online Editions
<http://refugeewatchonline.blogspot.com/>
- Forced Migration Review – Issue 32 (April 2009)
<http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR32/FMR32.pdf>
- 2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons
- Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends & Developments in 2008

News / updates

- Thousands displaced as Indian forces drive Nepali families out of their villages
<http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2009/jun/jun02/news01.php>
- Indian excesses trigger exodus
<http://www.ekantipur.com/kolnews.php?&nid=197410>
- OCHA situation Overview
<http://www.un.org.np/situationocha/metadata.php?id=1326>

International Organizations working on IDPs

- Norwegian Refugee Council www.nrc.no
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) www.internal-displacement.org
- International Organization for Migration <http://www.iom.int>
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies www.ifrc.org
- Mahnirban Calcutta Research Group <http://www.mcrg.ac.in>
- Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement www.brookings.edu/idp
- Forced Migration Online (FMO) www.forcedmigration.org
- Refugee Studies Centre – University of Oxford www.rsc.ox.ac.uk

Dear Reader,

This is the first E-bulletin published by the Nepal Institute of Peace (NIP). Following the success of this first issue, we plan to publish a monthly E-bulletin focusing on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nepal. We will focus on IDPs caused by internal armed conflict, natural disasters, and forced displacement due to 'development' work, among other pertinent issues that may arise. This bulletin is one part of the advocacy campaign of NIP to safeguard the rights of IDPs. As part of this campaign, we have also developed a website on IDPs www.idps-nepal.org. This website serves to broaden the reach of NIP and act as a catalyst for continued dialogue on IDPs.

We request all of you to send us your short case-studies, articles, and initiatives to safeguard the rights of IDPs in Nepal or South Asia. We are expecting your valuable suggestions and comments to improve this advocacy E-bulletin. Please send your suggestions and comments to nipnepal2009@gmail.com, or post your ideas to G.P. O. Box: 12855, Kathmandu, Nepal. Thank you.

- Editor



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