

Women in Post Flood Situation: A Study on Human Security of IDPs Women in Golakganj, Dhubri District, Assam

Topu Choudhury,

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Chilarai College, Golakganj, Dhubri,
Assam

Email: topuchoudhury22@gmail.com

Prince Zakir Abdullah,

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Chilarai College, Golakganj, Dhubri,
Assam

Abstract:

The flood in Assam is such a regular feature that today hardly anyone takes a serious note of it. The state of Assam is frequently ravaged by the fury of mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries causing untold human misery and devastation of indescribable nature. The flood situation in Assam have resulted unending sufferings and populations displacement in the region with no national or state policy to permanently solve the situations. Thus, the human security of those displaced persons living in the flood and post flood situations since decades have been very poorly addressed with no solution on unending crisis on the ground. Among the displaced populations, women and children were one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of defending their rights and security. Moreover, gender based violence is also a common occurrence. Under the pretext of this, the present study attempts to study the human security of IDPs women in the post flood situations.

Keywords: Flood; Brahmaputra; Displacement; Unending; Security.

Introduction:

Every year not only in Assam, but in most parts of India, millions of men, women and children are compelled to flee their homes due to natural disasters like storms, floods and earthquakes. Most people are affected by devastating floods and it is also a regular feature. The poorest and most marginalized people are disproportionately affected by floods and among all the groups of people, the women and children face a serious risk of abuse due to the flood- induced displacement. During such displacement situations women's physical and social vulnerability increased manifold. Stress and malnutrition endangered the health of pregnant and lactating women and their children. Traumatized women and children had no practical or emotional support and they faced unequal treatment and this is perpetuated by unequal access to resources, formal education, decision making, etc (Mushahary, 2018: 183).

According to the Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement, “all national authorities should take equal steps in case of treatment and protection of IDPs under international law. They have all the rights to be protected against violence, have the right to receive humanitarian assistance, protection and to have access to basic service and justice. They have the right to acquire education, proper health care, to own land, home, property, etc. But from the past researches it has been observed that the issue of IDPs has been poorly communicated with unending miseries. The present paper is an attempt to study the human security of IDPs women in Golakganj through empirical based research who has been forced to flee their homes due to flood and take shelter in relief camps.

Theoretical Reflection of Human Security:

The concept of human security especially after the publication of first United Nations Development Programme Report (UNDP) in 1994 has been considered as one the most important prerequisite of governance in modern day world. According to the report of UNDP, human security is not concern with weapons- it is concern with human life and dignity. Human security relates the protection of people more than the security of the nation. Human security and national security is the same thing but nation do not automatically mean secure peoples. Protecting people from the attacks of enemy may be necessary condition for the security of the people, but it is certainly not a sufficient one. In the broader sense, human security is the security of individuals rather than of states. National security or state security is linked to states and its military power. The notion of human security was an attempt to broaden and deepen the concept of threat, influenced by ideas such as human development. To that context, human security is relevant to people irrespective of societies, whether rich or poor nations. In poor countries, human security is related with the issues like hunger, malnutrition and diseases, whereas in the rich countries, issues like drugs and crimes are threats to human security. Moreover, there are some issues of human security which has no international boundary and cross all over the world, such as- global poverty, global terrorism, human rights violation, epidemic, migration, unemployment, etc.

Mahbub ul Haq was the pioneer in providing the most comprehensive definitions of human security. He defines human security as ‘security of income, employment, food, health, education, environment, insecurity arising from violence within the household, community, even the states against women, children and the minorities’. Thus, human security is concerned with the people’s daily lives and the fear of being disrupted by societal injustice and natural calamities. It also asserts people’s rights to protection against the inefficiency and injustice of the institution of governance. All proponents of human security have a common notion that the basic and primary goal of human security is the protection of individuals and to confront and overcome poverty, illiteracy, diseases, discrimination, restrictions of political freedoms and the threat of violent conflict to achieve an overall and inclusive human development that focuses on building human capabilities.

According to the UNDP report 1994, human security has two main aspects. It means first safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means

protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development. Moreover, UNDP has listed seven main categories of human security threats such as:

1. Economic security
2. Food security
3. Health security
4. Environmental security
5. Personal security
6. Community security
7. Political security

UNDP states that these seven categories are very much related with the concept of human security. Human security, in true sense can happen only if these threats are addressed properly and human development must involve all section and communities of people.

Objectives of the Study:

The present paper is an attempt to make a critical and in-depth understanding of human security of IDPs women in Golakganj, Dhubri District, Assam through field based empirical findings with the following single objective in mind.

1. To study the security of IDPs women as per the seven fundamental categories of human security as listed by UNDP.

Methodology of the Study:

The present paper is a field based empirical one based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The data interpretation will solely depend on qualitative rather than quantitative. The primary sources have been collected from the field visits and interviews with much focus on semi controlled focus group discussion with the camp inmates, extracted from the field visits carried out in the month of June, 2021. The secondary sources include relevant books, journals, magazines, articles, newspaper, published and unpublished works from various sources.

Area of the Study:

The study covers two relief camps in Golakganj under Dhubri District, Assam namely Nandinipar and South Tokrerchara Part-IV. Golakganj is a newly formed town committee area in 2021. Golakganj is situated at the extreme western part of Assam and it shares the interstate border between Assam and West Bengal and also the international Indo – Bangladesh border at a distance of 5 kilometers. The camp I- Nandinipar has 47 inmates out of which 13 are male, 19 are female and 15 are children. The camp II- South Tokrerchara Part-IV has 29 inmates out of which 9 are male, 12 are female and 8 are children.

Findings of the Study:

In any internal displacement situations, women are the worst sufferers. They have to bear the most crisis situations when they had been displaced from their homes. By and large, the displaced persons remain outside the public domain experiencing the high degree of alienation, marginalization and exclusion from the larger society (Mushahary, 2018: 187). The question of human security, human rights, care, protection and justice for the Internally Displaced Persons is not properly addressed in our country with no national or state policy to deal with the crisis.

During our visit to the relief camps and after interviewing especially the women inmates and after a thorough observation of both the relief camps, we have analyzed the following findings:

1. Relief is only in name. A minimum quantity of food items is distributed to them by the local administration. However, the local NGOs, clubs supplied food grains, vegetables and medicines. Sanitary napkins are also supplied by them for the women.
2. Men, women and children along with their cattles live together in a very unhygienic condition. Baby food items and food items for cattle are rarely supplied by the local administration, nor supplied by the NGOs or clubs.
3. Food is prepared by women under a spread tarpaulin sheet, in the midst of heated environment which is unbearable.
4. Pregnant and breast feeding women go through same degree of worries and hurdles. Due to lack of facility to build a toilet worries everyone, especially the girls and women. Most of the time, to urinate women has to wait until the day gets dark. Unable to urinate during day, many women face health issues.
5. Rain and cold affect children very soon, for any health issues; they have to wait until the next morning.
6. Once the water level decreases, the men folk went to their houses to look after that where they changed their dresses and make clean themselves, which is not possible for women as they have to remain in the camps to look after their children and also their cattles.
7. Mobility also allowed men to access spaces where critical decisions were being taken, particularly with regard to relief from the state. Men, for instance, had gathered near a police station or circle office or at a chowk to voice their frustrations about material not received. But, the women, confined to their private spaces in the camp, could not be a part of such deliberations. The people who were part of the decision making process concerning relief were only men.
8. Doctor's check-ups and treatments are routine.
9. The state remains absent for women in these relief camps, does not care enough about their needs.

Human Security of IDPs Women in Relief Camps:

During displacement, it is the women and children who have to bear one of the most crisis situations on the ground. While all types of displacement have detrimental impact on all, however women often tend to be disproportionately affected and bear the brunt of abuse during the displacement. Women are soft targets of psychological or physical intimidation and harassment. This makes the IDPs women more and more insecure and vulnerable groups. The so called relief camps does not always reflect the needs and desires of the displaced persons, thus insecurity in all respects (Mushahary, 2018:187). The present study depicts the gloomy picture of insecurity and human rights violation of IDPs women.

Economic Security:

According to UNDP, the economic security includes an assured basic income. However, this definition can hardly be relate to IDPs women in flood relief camps. During our visit to both the camps, we found no single women working in formal sector. Majority of the women are domestic helpers and some of them worked in bricks factory as daily wage labourers. During their stay in the relief camp, they are completely dependent on whatever little they received from the administration, NGOs and others. So, during our visit, we found that there is nothing called economic security for the IDPs women as they are devoid of any regular income to support their livelihood.

Food Security:

Food security includes physical and economic access to basic food. The right to adequate food is a basic human right that is realized when all people have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food, free from hunger and malnutrition without any kind of discrimination. Adequacy, availability and accessibility are the three main aspects of right to food. Thus, the availability of food is the necessary precondition of security. But, for the IDPs especially women and children in both the camps of Golakganj, food is neither available nor hygienic. Moreover, baby food items and food for cattles are neither supplied by the administration nor NGOs. In both the camps, malnutrition is a common feature. So, UNDPs fundamental food security is hardly accessible to both the relief camps.

Health Security:

Health security includes protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles. It is a basic human right and is a necessary condition to live in dignity. As kofi Annan says ‘health is a key building block for society. It is also essential for economic growth, poverty reduction and social justice’. So, to remain healthy one must have access to clean and safe water, adequate sanitation, healthy and nutritious food, healthy environmental conditions and of course gender equality. But when we visited the relief camps, none of these were available. For the IDPs women in the camps, there were no proper sanitation facilities,

though temporary bathrooms are available but are not accessible for women. Tube wells are available with iron water which is not safe for drinking. IDPs women living in the camps are deprived of basic health care facilities. So, there is nothing called health security in the camps, which is regarded as one of the basic fundamental human rights.

Environmental Security:

Environmental security involves protection from human induced environmental degradation. The present study reveals that IDPs including men, women and children are living in sub-human conditions with overcrowded populations without basic livelihood facilities. IDPs have to come across various environmental conditions without primary factors like sufficient power supply, temperature, water, atmospheric gases. There is always the threat of spreading diseases like malaria, jaundice and other communicable diseases among the IDPs as the surroundings which they live are always unhygienic and overcrowded.

Personal Security:

Personal security is one of the most important forms of human security among all the aspects of human security. Personal security is all about all forms of physical violence. In any conflict or natural induced displacement, among the worst personal threats are those to women and children. In no society, women are treated at par with men. During our visit to the camps, we found that 96% women are frequently beaten up by their husbands. Most of the husbands are addicted to alcohol and because of alcohol consumption they abuse their wives for one or other reason during their stay in the camps. The main reason behind the physical assault is that the husbands are not completely satisfied with the fooding facilities and other necessary aspects for living a comfortable life. The present study shows that women, be at their own home or as IDPs, their insecurity increases manifold as women are often voiceless engulfed with lack of self confidence and space.

Community Security:

Community security is a people oriented approach to tackle issues causing insecurity, whether they emerged from peace, security or development deficits. It explicitly aims to improve the relationships between and behaviours of communities, authorities and institutions by providing opportunities for policy makers to identify their security concerns, plan and implement collective responses (Mushahary, 2018:191). During our visit to the camps, we found that the help and assistance provided by the administration is below per quality. Though the NGOs and local clubs, at the initial days supplied food items, water bottle and medicines, but it was stopped as days passed on. During interaction with the IDPs women, we came to know that none of their relatives are willing to provide shelter in their homes. However, 4% IDPs women and children have moved to their relative's homes after staying couple of days in the camps. The study shows that the inability or reluctance of the state to provide facility and justice for IDPs is often a fundamental cause of human insecurity.

In times of crisis, relatives and communities are also reluctant to provide assistance which is always practice in our so called civilized society.

Conclusion:

The concept of human security reflects a number of developments that have incrementally challenged the aspects of human security as the protection of individuals from various types of displacement, conflict, diseases, etc. As the study shows displacement has resulted complex and multiple effects on women. To that pretext, women's role to be shield to protect herself and her children increase manifold during their stay in the camps. IDPs women found it very difficult to survive in the camps as the surroundings are very unhygienic and with very limited resources. The central government or the state government of Assam does not have any proper policy and implementation to deal with the issues of flood and flood induced displacement. Most of the women though completely unknown about the concept of human rights and human security, still they have every right to live in dignity which has been announced by the General assembly of the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

To sum up, natural induced displacement or conflict induced displacements have devastated individuals, families in the region. People are torn apart from their loved ones and often lose their livelihoods, their lands and their entire way of living. The displaced people found it very difficult to live camps with overcrowded population and temporary arrangements. The state has to come forward with proper policy and implementation for the permanent solutions of displacement.

References:

1. Dutta, Akhil Ranjan (2009) "Changing Paradigms of Security Discourse in North East India" "Human Security in North East India: Issues and Policies 9ed), Anwasha Publishers, Guwahati.
2. Gautam, P (2014) "Women and Human Rights", Swastik Publication, New Delhi.
3. Guruswamy, S (2009) "Human Rights and Gender Justice", A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.
4. Hussain, Monirul (2006) "Internally Displaced Persons in India's North East", EPW, Vol-41
5. Hazarika, Sanjoy (2014) "Complexity and Conflict in Assam's Bodoland". Cited from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinion/2014/05/complexity-conflict-assam-bodola-20145865624188703.html>.
6. Hazarika, Lakshima (2019) "Protection of Women from Domestic Violence: An Observation, Violence against Women: Issues and Solutions", journal of ACTA, Guwahati.

7. Mushahary, Jhanin (2018) “Women in Post- Conflict Situation: A Study on Human Security of IDPs Women in Bodoland Territorial Council” “Journal of North East Region”, Issue 6, Vol-4.
8. Saikia, J.P (2010) “Gender themes & Issues”, Naba Bharati Prakashani, Kolkata.
9. UNDP, Annual Human Development report, New York, OUP, 1994,pp-3.
10. Ibid, pp-22.
11. Ibid, pp-24.
12. UNDP, Community Safety and Social Cohesion: Towards a UNDP Approach, 2009.
13. South Asian Human Development Report, Karachi, OUP, 2005.
14. Saferworld, Hand Book on Community Security, April 2014- www.saferworld.org.uk.