Conflict, Livelihood Security and Children in the Conflict Affected Kokrajhar District BTAD, Assam

Surashree Pathak
Phd Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, Gauhati University,
Jalukbari, Kamrup, Assam, India.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to investigate into the livelihood insecurity of the people living in conflict prone areas and its resultant impact on the overall wellbeing of the children of the area. It focuses mainly on two communities in Kokrajhar district of Assam i.e. the Bodos and the immigrant Muslims which have experienced series of conflicts in the recent decades. Generally the first priority in conflict prone areas is the immediate concern of the Government and Non Government actors is focused on the immediate loss of life and property. The sufferings of the survivors of conflict however go unnoticed. The survivors are the worst victim of conflict. The conflicts have led to mass displacement of people from both the communities forcing them to leave their homes and to live in makeshift camps. The victims living in the camps are deprived of basic human right to life and livelihood. Many of them are living in the relief camps for more than a decade, with no scope for education and skill development for getting a dignified livelihood opportunity. Even those who are not displaced or have returned to their villages lost their livelihood due to the breakdown of the civil infrastructure. The livelihood insecurity of the parents lead to serious child right violation in the conflict affected area. Several unwelcome consequences like child trafficking, child marriage, child labour can be seen in the area. this paper tries to capture the actual picture from the study area.

Introduction: This paper is an attempt for finding out the link between conflict, livelihood security and the children in conflict affected Kokrajhar district, BTAD, Assam. The focus is mainly on two communities the Bodo and the Muslim. These two communities are confronted in different phases of time. The first time was in 1993 when almost 5000 families of Muslim had to flee as their houses were burned by Bodo militants (BSF at that time). Almost 27000 people had to take shelter in 9 relief camps built by the government in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar. Along with the government, there is also some non-government organizations like an NGO based in Kerala, namely Rehab foundation, which had built shelter homes for the displaced people. On October 3, 2008 violence occurred between Bodos and Muslim in many areas in the two districts of Udalguri and Darrang in Assam. It lasted for three consecutive days. A total of 54 persons were killed in the clashes between Bodos and Muslims, including 25 in police firing. The toll in Udalguri district was 31 persons (including 11 killed in police firing) and in Darrang district 23 persons (including 14 killed in police firing). (Information received from interview with ADC Udalguri)Those killed mostly belonged to the Bodo and the Muslim communities. Hundreds of houses belonging to people of both the communities were burnt rendering thousands of people homeless. The conflict that started on 19th July 2012 was a clash between the indigenous Bodo community and the immigrant Muslims. More than 100 lives were lost and almost 400000 people were rendered homeless. The education of the children came to a halt for more than three months. The HSLC candidates appeared in their final exams without schooling since the outbreak of conflict. (Information received from interview with ADC Kokrajhar)

In all these conflicts the most vulnerable are always the poor strata of the society. Their livelihoods are irrevocably lost; their children's education got disrupted. Children brought up in the relief camps don't get any opportunity for proper education or vocational training. It is not that only the non Bodos suffered loss in these conflicts, but the Bodos also suffered a huge loss.

Objectives: The objectives of the study are….
- To study the conflict-induced livelihood crisis of the Bodo and immigrant Muslim communities of Kokrajhar in BTAD, Assam;

- To study the impact of livelihood insecurity on the overall wellbeing of the children of the study area.

Methodology: For the study qualitative method has been used. Interviews with the local people, NGO representatives, were used. Participatory observation method has been used to study the impact of the conflict on the livelihood of the adults and the wellbeing of the children. Secondary information collected from different literature on conflict and government departments. For the study the conflict of 2012 between the Bodo and the Muslim has been selected.

Defining conflict, livelihood security and child

Conflict is a disagreement through which parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interest or concern. Generally, there is some level of difference in the position of the parties involved. There is a tendency to narrowly define the 'problem'. There are always procedural and psychological needs to be addressed in addition to the substantial needs within the conflict which the conflict area generally presents. Solution of most of the conflicts can prove challenging and time consuming.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the meaning of conflict is a serious disagreement; an argument; a struggle or a fight. In social science, it can be described as disagreement arising between social actors. It can arise out of clash of identity; claim over scarce resources or due to uneven power structure in the society. Conflict is a balancing of powers among interests, capabilities and wills. It is a mutual adjustment of what people want, can get and are willing to pursue. Conflict behaviour, whether hostile actions, violence, or, war is then a means and manifestation of this process. Conflict, thus is understood as struggle over values and claims to status, power and scarce resources.

A conflict divide communities, destroy, hurt, weaken social ties and threatens household survival and undermine family's capacity to care for its most vulnerable members. Most modern conflicts occur within state and are associated with extreme inequality in disruption of resources, failed development, unjust governance.

Over the last two centuries there has been marked change in the scale and nature of warfare and its effect on affected population. A key feature of present day pattern of conflict, war and terrorism is that they take place among the indigenous population rather than on discrete battlefield, between factions split along ethnic, religious or cultural lines. The pattern and characteristics of contemporary armed conflict have increased the risk for lost livelihood security. Manipulation of ethnicity and religion to serve personal or narrow group centered purpose are also causing conflict. There is conflict between government and rebel group, between different groups vying for supremacy and amongst population at large. Distinction between combatant and civilians disappear in battles from village to village and street to street. As a result non-combatant involvement which led to involvement of families. Thus conflict displaced peoples from their original place making their livelihood insecure. It is seen that after the loss of the previous livelihood the people adopted measures which are often unsustainable and undignified.

Livelihood security

The Human Development report 1994, introduced the idea of human security. The concept of human security is much broader than security of life and limb. It includes security of livelihood and employment, of ethnic and cultural identity, of human rights such as rights of education and development. "Livelihood security is the adequate and sustainable access to and control over resources, both material and social, to enable households to achieve their rights without undermining the natural resource base"[i] Livelihood security today is threatened by various factors in the developing countries of the world. There are different challenges to the livelihood particularly of the marginal people living in the area. They are lacking in various fronts regarding livelihood security. They often take the backseat in any developmental planning by the governments.

Livelihood security, according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is 'adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing, time for community participation and social integration'. (Rai, Sharma, Shahoo, & Malhotra, 2008, p. 174). In conflict situations the security of livelihood is lost as is the case of the Bodo and Adivasi communities in Kokrajhar district of BTAD

Livelihood is one of the basic requirements for sustaining our lives. According to the Oxford English Dictionary "Livelihood" not only refers to a manner of life but also to the various means of maintenance. Livelihood is multidimensional whole. Livelihood is also defined as a way of keeping oneself meaningfully occupied by using one's endowments (human and material) to generate adequate resources to meet the requirement of the family in a sustainable manner.

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long-term (Chambers and Conway, 1992,pp 7).

Livelihoods may also be defined as "a set of activities a household engages in on a regular basis in order to generate adequate cash and non-cash income to maintain a minimum desired standard of living, both on a day-to-day basis and over a longer period of time." (Datta, Sharma, 2008, pp15). A livelihood is "adequate" when the income and quality of life it can support meets widely accepted standards – such as the $2-a-day international poverty line. A livelihood can sometimes generate adequate income, but may not be desirable or dignified, such as being a beggar. In other cases, a livelihood may generate adequate income and may even be reasonably dignified, but may not offer adequate opportunities to participate in the wider social, cultural or political aspects of the community one lives in. In yet other cases, it may be adequate, dignified and offer opportunities to participate in social, cultural or political life, but may not be sustainable, as it may be based on fast-dwindling natural resources. For a livelihood to be sustainable a household need to have access to five types of capital: human, social, natural, physical, and financial. Human capital refers to the ability to labour, skills, intelligence and talent. Social capital includes trust, status, networks, local institutions and norms. (ibid) Natural capital includes land, water, forests, minerals and agro-climatic conditions. Physical capital includes tools, plant and machinery, and roads, electricity supply, etc. Financial capital includes cash, savings deposits, insurance paid up, debts given to others and bonds and shares, if any in an enterprise. These five types of capital/assets give a household a livelihood platform, and access to this is either enhanced or thwarted by social relations such as gender and caste, or by institutions such as customs, land tenure or market practices. People's ability to escape poverty depends on access to assets. The diversity and amount of assets and the balance between assets affects people's livelihoods. The availability of assets help a household to determine the best livelihood options suitable to them.

A household adopts different livelihood strategies in the context of demographic trends, technical changes and policies and programmes, as well as specific shocks like a flood, an epidemic or civil unrest. People's livelihood strategies depend upon a broad range of factors, including location, security regimes, the strength of local governance structures and social networks, and access to roads, markets and water. These comprise a set of natural resource-based activities such as farming, livestock rearing or fishing, as well as other activities like trading. There is consequently a great deal of variability among areas, groups and even villages and households within the same locality. Coping strategies too can vary enormously. People may respond to the various threats to their livelihoods posed by conflict and natural hazard in a wide range of ways, from reducing food consumption, sale of assets, diversification and migration. (ibid)

The livelihoods of the people cannot be understood by only looking from the economic point of view. It encompasses very diverse elements which - taken together - constitute the physical, economic, social and cultural universe wherein the families live. (Hogger Ruedi, 2004, pp 94-125) Thus, the livelihood system is more than just a set of physic-economic preconditions for continued existence. It also encompasses psychosocial dimensions of experience of living. While dealing with livelihood it is necessary to consider the other things that the poor might be vulnerable to; assets and resources that help them thrive and survive policies and institutions that impact their livelihoods, how the poor respond to threats and opportunities and what sort of outcomes the poor aspire to. (Hiremath, 2007,pp 1-10) Policies and institutions play a pivotal role in determining the livelihood security of the people. Assets and resources help them cope with any difficulty due to unfriendly policies and institutions.

The status of livelihoods is determined by two types of conditions – external and internal. While the first describe the surrounding context of the intervention, the second highlight the possible interaction between the change agent and the people whose livelihoods are being impacted. The Coolies' Framework adopted by Datta, Mahajan and Thakur (Datta, Vijay and Thakur, 1999) so-named to honour the labouring poor (coolies, or porters) of India, recognises four external conditions. The first – factor conditions – are those resources that go toward enabling production or services. Broadly, these are natural, physical, human, social and financial resources. They include land, water, agro-climatic conditions, availability of labour, and physical infrastructure such as roads and electricity. The second – institutional conditions – refer to the larger policy environment, local institutions including social norms, producer associations, financing, training and promotional institutions. The third – demand conditions – are the market demand for a particular livelihood product or service. Finally, industry conditions refer to the status of the sub-sector or industry of which a particular livelihood activity is a part. This framework also recognises two internal conditions: those of the producer and those of the intervening organisation. The first take into consideration the livelihood portfolio (types of livelihood activities), livelihood capacity (skills, opportunities, resources) and livelihood strategy (preference in adaptive response, risks and shocks, entrepreneurial ability) of a household. The second take into consideration the agenda and the ability of a change agent. The framework suggests that the interaction of all these six conditions determines how the status of a livelihood will change. (Datta , Sharma, 2008 p18,)

Livelihood security till today is a major problem in India for most of the marginalised people. They have to fight against various challenges while struggling to maintain a sustainable livelihood. They have to face violent conflicts disrupting their life and property, flood drains their belongings as well as their crops with it, unfriendly development projects which rob s them of their land and livelihoods. On one hand development means a better life style for a section of people. On the other hand it seizes the livelihood opportunities from another section of people.

Children

The UN 'Convention on Rights of Children' defines a child as every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. It is ratified by 192 out of 194 member countries of the UN. Some English definitions of the word include the fetus and the unborn. In terms of actions by UNHCR, the word "child" refers to all children falling under the competence of the Office, including asylum-seeking children, refugee children, internally displaced children and returnee children assisted and protected by UNHCR and stateless children.(UNHCR, 2008)

As defined above childhood means a space between birth and the attainment of adulthood. However it is much more than it. It is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe

from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation. [1]It is now fairly well established axiom of sociology and anthropology that childhood and youth are social rather than biological constructs.

The UN Convention on Rights of Children speaks about a lot of rules and regulations requiring a safe and secure environment for the development of the children. However these are yet to be materialised. As the North East India is suffering from low intensity conflicts for decades, a safe environment is denied to the children here, in every possible way. In spite of the call of the UN CRC to the governments of the states to stop separation of children from parents, they are increasingly being separated due to the violent conflicts. The convention recognised the individual rights of the children, but a space tensed by conflict rarely secures rights of the child.

As for example according to one 2006 estimates, more than 1 billion children under the age of 18 were living in areas in conflict or emerging from war. Of these, an estimated 300 million were under age five and more than 18 million children were refugees or internally displaced. Children and youth are increasingly becoming victims of conflict and terrorism. (UNICEF, 2009) It is currently estimated approximately one in every three hundred children around the world is displaced by war and political violence. (Machel, 2000) These statistics present us with gloomy picture about the children of the conflict area. In India certain areas like Kashmir and different parts of North Eastern region are constantly under varieties of conflict caused by either demand for autonomy, intra and inter ethnic conflicts due to contesting demands by various indigenous groups.

Linking conflict, livelihood security and children: The reality

The focus of the study is the conflict that took place in the year 2012 between the Bodo and the immigrant Muslim. The conflict started on 19th July 2012. It was a clash between the indigenous Bodo community and the immigrant Muslims. More than 100 lives were lost and almost 400000 people were rendered homeless. The education of the children came to a halt for more than three months. The HSLC candidates appeared in their final exams without schooling since the outbreak of conflict. (Information received from interview with ADC Kokrajhar)

Table 1 is a detail of camps in the study area as on 24/09/2012. Table 2 is the statement of Relief Camps and inmates under Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bongaigaon and Dhubri District under BTAD as collected from the Jt. Director i/c & CHD, Social Welfare, BTC, Kokrajhar in 2012.

Table 1
Total Camp Details As on 24/09/12
Number of Inmates in the Relief Camps

Sl. No	Sub- Division	No Relief Camps	No of Inmates	Category		
				Bodo	Minority	Others
1	Gossaigaon	28	48612	7878	40629	109
2	Kokrajhar	10	5441	5135	306	0
3	Parbatjhora	2	435	164	271	0
4	Total	40	54488	13177	41206	109

Source: DC Court Kokrajhar Sadar

Table 2
Statement of Relief Camps and inmates under Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bongaigaon and Dhubri District under BTAD area and under this Division

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[1]www.unicef.org/sow05/english/childhooddefined.htmlaccessed on 5/11/2012

District	Sub Division	ICDS Project Area	No. of Relief Camp	No. Of Children Below 6 yrs	No. of PW	No. of L M	No of AG	No of ICDS Beneficiaries
Kokrajhar	Kokrajhar	Kokrajhar	8	606	45	58	403	1112
		Dotma	3	197	12	19	122	350
	Parbatjhora	Debitola (Part)	3	170	7	22	68	267
		Rupshi (Part)	1	65	12	7	35	119
		Mahamaya (Part)	1	44	5	5	16	70
	Gossaigaon	Kachugaon	14	4097	241	434	1165	5937
		Gossaigaon	16	2086	233	289	954	3562
		Hatidhara	4	2172	155	92	674	3093
Chirang	Kajalgaon	Sidli Chirang	16	4218	335	509	1275	6337
	Bijni	Boro-Bazar	22	3683	259	270	1406	5618
		Dangtol/Manikpur						
Dhubri	Bilashipara	Mahamaya, Bilasipara Nayaralga, Chapar-Salkocha	82	12988	976	1251	3839	19054
	Dhubri	Gauripur, Debitola, Rupshi, Golakganj, Hatidhura (Part)	49	7031	521	567	2390	10509
Bongaigaon	Bongaigaon	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total			219	37357	2801	3523	12347	56028

Source: Jt. Director i/c & CHD, Social Welfare, BTC, Kokrajhar, As on 27th September 2012

During my survey in the study area the local people of the area who faced the conflict were interviewed. They informed me about the seriousness of the effect of conflict on the livelihood of the people. During the conflict of 2012 each house was set fire by the other group and cattle were taken away. These people returned home but are not able to repair their houses. It was the time of cultivation during the conflict. Therefore they could not cultivate in their fields. They had to flee from home in the peak time of cultivation. When they returned home the season for cropping was gone. Therefore they had to face many difficulties in getting sufficient food even after the conflict. The schools were closed for almost five months. In the camp there was no facility of schooling for the children. In the month of November 2012 arrangements were made for coaching classes for the HSLC candidates. Schools are regular now, but the education loss during their stay in the camps is difficult to recover. All the students affected by conflict were promoted to the next class. However, how this will help the students in their studies is questionable. No teacher's training was given to the teachers of the conflict affected children. Students from far away areas still fear to attend school.

Post conflict situation survival becomes the priority. There is absolutely no concern about the children's education. In many families, a child is regarded as a partner in bread earning. This has resulted into forced migration, forced drop out of school and irregular schooling of the children. There are numerous cases of trafficking from among the conflict affected people. In some cases it is found that family itself is involved in the trafficking of the children. For them one mouth is less to feed is a big relief. Also they get some money from the traffickers. The problem of trafficking is due to the

vulnerability of the family. Thus loss of livelihood resulted in numerous setbacks for a healthy society viz trafficking, school drop outs, child labour, domestic violence etc. one NGO, North East Research & Social Work Networking (NERSWN) has taken various measures to improve the livelihood security of the conflict affected people of the area. They provide two types of compensation to the victims viz. 1. Conditioned cash compensation and 2. Non conditioned cash compensation. The former is provided to people with the condition that with the compensation they would develop their livelihood security by adopting positive measures. The later is provided to the most vulnerable people with no condition. (Interview with the Director NERSWN)

Children are indirectly affected because adults lose their capacity to protect and parent them, social dislocation, loss of education and other support for their development. This is a space devoid of the most basic human values; a space in which children are slaughtered, raped, and maimed; a space in which children are exploited as soldiers; a space in which children are starved and exposed to extreme brutality. Such unregulated terror and violence speak of deliberate victimization.[2] In addition to it, most of the war-affected women are the poorest of the poor, refugees and internally displaced women and children often remain invisible in development analysis and programs. (Hanemann, 2005). Livelihood insecurity of the parents leads to increased violence on women and children. It was revealed from the interview with Jenifer Leon, (The Ant, NGO) conflict leads to the further marginalisation of the poor. During conflict the houses were burnt, assets were destroyed. The livelihood of the poor was irrevocably lost. After conflict the men have no work. The Bodos have boycott order against the engagement of minority labour. They Muslim labourers stay all day without work. As a result gambling started among them. Their frustration is expressed in a way by using physical violence on the children and women. Therefore violence against children has been increased after conflict by their own parents. The Bodos also suffer due to the boycott of Muslim labours as they were mainly dependent on them for cultivation and other purposes.

Another ill effect of conflict on the girl children of the study area is that as the parents loss their capacity to sustain the family girl child of the family are married of early to lessen the burden of the family. She thought that especially for the girls, education stopped here. Many early marriages were there in the relief camps. The marriages were conducted to increase the number of the households, as government ration was provided on household basis. Marriage was also resorted as a measure to save the girls from sexual abuse and molestation in the crowded camps as it became very difficult to save the girls from sexual abuse in the crowded camps.

Children living in conflict area are at high risk for developing various types of psychological problems, especially post traumatic stress. Moreover they go through depression, anxiety and trauma. The violence during the conflicts experienced by the children often created trauma in them. Trauma is a psychological impact of an unusual, unnatural horrifying incident experienced by a person. It may be a physical injury to oneself or seeing near and dear ones being victims of such violence. Trauma is an extremely subjective experience. What may be traumatic for one person may barely affect another. In a general sense though, trauma results when a person experience excessive stress that overwhelms his emotional or physical ability to cope. Psychological trauma can last for many years, and if unresolved, can even become more devastating than the original traumatic event.

Traumas can be categorized as either one-time or single-incident events or repeated, long-term traumas. One-time traumas can result from natural causes or be deliberately inflicted by another person. A long term trauma is the result of a prolonged horrific experience such as an individual held captive or one who is repeatedly abused. In my study, the children spending their whole childhood in relief camps and experiencing violent conflicts repeatedly are subject to the long term trauma. Post-Traumatic Stress

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[2]UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/graca/ accessed on 17th November, 2012

Disorder (PTSD) is a frequent result of long-term trauma. One such example was that of a child aged about 13 years staying in an orphanage run by the All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) who witnessed murder of his both parents in front of his eyes. Due to the trauma inflicted by the incident he behaved in a particular manner which was far from any normal behaviour. But the people of his community thought he was affected by some evil power and they adopted a traditional method to get rid of the evil power. Even the educated founder member of the orphanage had faith on the process.

In one of the relief camps, a Bodo child was staying with his relatives. He witnessed murder of both his parents in front of his own eyes. But instead of understanding his mental makeup at that time and shifting him for treatment, his relatives and peer groups enjoyed projecting him in front of different guest visiting the camp. This was actually a torture for a traumatised child. Thus neither the government took up any measures for these traumatised children nor were the general public conscious about the seriousness of the situation.

Another Muslim child aged about 13 years faced similar situation. The father of the boy was killed by the extremists during the conflict. The boy informed that he was working with his father in the paddy field. When his father was killed he was at his home taking lunch. The incident created anger as well as fear in him. Ever since, his heart is filled with hatred for the Bodo people. The feeling of revenge is still afresh in his mind. The trauma in him can be well noticed as he had no friends inside the camp. He was very scared while answering the questions. Like the other boys in the camp, he did not come in group. The most unfortunate thing is that the inmates of the camp took the incident for granted and stressed more on the unavailability of compensation for the murder of the boy's father.

Thus children being traumatised are common factors in conflict ridden communities. The conflicts have left deep psychological impact on the children of the district. The respondents witnessing violence faced frustration, helplessness and depression after conflict. Their children faced multiple problems like frustration, helplessness, depression, lack of sleep and appetite. The fear psychosis created during the conflict is still present in the minds of the respondents of the study area.

Conclusion: Visible effects like destruction and displacement are a very common factor in the North Eastern region like any other place. In different reports prepared on conflict either by the state or the non state actors no specific mention has been made about the effect of conflict on children. As effects of these conflicts are concentrated on underdeveloped places, children already suffering are deprived of minimum rights that they should enjoy. Usually ethnic conflict takes place between neighbours. Children grew up with their neighbours with sense of oneness. With the outbreak of conflict the situation changed. People once living in close harmony with one another turned into their enemy. In general people are displaced overnight. The impact of sudden change on children is more devastating. The violence and conflict thus have become a part of life for the children belonging to BTAD area, Karbi Anglong, Manipur etc. even when there is normalcy. No war or conflict has been started by children. Children are the grass beneath the feet of the men, the tribes, the armies that are engaged in armed conflict. "Even if not physically injured, a majority of affected people experience catastrophic loss and welfare problems'. (Richard and John, 2011, pp 57) Number of children develop psycho- social problem which usually go unnoticed. Distress is an anticipated response of children experiencing any kind of conflict.

Violence, conflict and war challenge received normative understanding about the nature of children and boundary of the childhood. (Deniel and John, 2011) Children have been fighter, victim, refugee and in some places peacemakers. They comprehend armed conflict in their own way. Millions of children are victims of conflict in which they are not only bystander but targets, some fall victims to a general onslaught against civilians, other die as a part of the calculated genocide. Children in our study areas are not target but affected by general onslaught against ethnic group. The children suffer as a result of trauma as many of them are exposed to brutality like the slaughter of either or both of their parents, post conflict they are exposed to a situation where they are deprived of minimum necessities of life.

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[i]http://www.concern.net/sites/www.concern.net/files/livelihood_security_policy.pdf accessed on 15/11/12