

Chapter 6

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE GARO-RABHA CONFLICT

Impact of the conflict can be viewed as direct and indirect. The direct impact includes death of family members, injuries, loss of home and property, displacement, psychological trauma, etc. On the other hand, indirect impact embraces lack of healthcare, food, nutrition, education, clothes, drinking water, sanitation etc. Consequently rehabilitation of the displaced people is the major and challenging task in these circumstances. The loss incurred due to conflict is very difficult to compensate. It takes a long time to restore normalcy in terms of economic revival, inter-ethnic relationship, etc.

After the occurrence of the Garo-Rabha conflict, the social equilibrium broke down in the Assam-Meghalaya border area. The flow of normal life was disrupted by chaos and trauma. Due to inter-ethnic conflict, many people were displaced, giving rise to problems of health, food and clothes. Besides, many families economically collapsed; inter-ethnic relationships disrupted and many other problems arose.

The chapter assesses the aftermaths and social impact/consequences of the Garo-Rabha conflict from the individual as well as the community viewpoint.

Social impacts of the Garo-Rabha conflict can be divided into two categories- (a) Immediate/direct impacts and (b) long term/indirect impacts. These are being analyzed in this chapter.

A. IMMEDIATE IMPACTS

The immediate/ direct impacts are the problems encountered by the conflict victims in the relief camps. These problems are of health, food, clothes, sanitation and education, and so on. The following is the discussion on the immediate impact of the Garo-Rabha conflict:

1. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is the immediate impact of any ethnic conflict. Maximum problems and troubles are faced by the IDPs in the relief camps. In most cases it is short time phenomenon. But in Mizoram and Tripura the conflict

occurred in October 1997 and November 2009 respectively and more than 30,000 IDPs are still in the relief camps (IDMC 2011). These are somewhat exceptional cases.

Before discussing at length the impact of the Garo-Rabha conflict on the victims or displaced people and the society at large let there first be a look at the definition of IDPs and the plight of such conflict ridden people in Assam as well as in other parts of the world.

The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) constitute the largest of the at risk population in the world. The early definition of internally Displaced Persons presented in the 1992 report of the Secretary General of the United Nations was a large one, a modified version of which says:

internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons, who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (Nath 2005:58).

In North-East India the internally displaced persons can be divided into three categories which are as follows:

- (i) Conflict-induced IDPs,
- (ii) Development-induced IDPs and
- (iii) natural disaster/ environment-induced IDPs (MCRG and NPMHR Report, 2006).

Most of the displaced people in the Northeastern region of India are the conflict-induced IDPs as ethnic conflict includes the conflict between the state and ethnic groups/ insurgent groups or inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts. Conflict has been the main cause of major displacement of population in Assam. Some data about the IDPs caused by conflicts in the Northeastern region are as follows:

- (i) 10,000 of Bengalis, Hindus and Muslims were displaced all over Assam in violence unleashed during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

- (ii) In July-September 1960, almost 50,000 Hindu Bengali were displaced in Assam.
- (iii) In 1972-73, 14000 Bengalis fled to West Bengal and elsewhere after the breakout of riots over language issue.
- (iv) In October 1993 there were displaced about 18000 persons in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts.
- (v) In May 1996, there were displaced 2, 62682 as a result of the Bodo armed movement,
- (vi) In 1998 there were displaced 3,14,342 villagers due to ethnic conflict and till April 2005, there were living 1, 26,263 inmates in 38 state sponsored relief camps in the Kokrajhar district of Assam.
- (vii) In 1994, the Bodo rebels chased out 8,000 Muslims of Bengali origin and they are living on both sides of the National Highway 37 in Bijni of the lower Assam.
- (viii) During the Dimasa- Hmar conflicts in 2003, approximately 350 Pnar people were displaced. Again, 4,000 Khasis and Pnars fled from Assam to Meghalaya after being threatened by Karbi militants in November 2003. The displaced persons were sheltered in camps.
- (ix) In October 2005 there were displaced more than 60,000 persons belonging to Karbi and Dimasa tribes in Assam.
- (x) In November 2003, hundreds of Hindi-speaking people were internally displaced and about 20,000 persons, perhaps more, are believed to have fled the State.
- (xi) In the early 1980s, estimated by 25000 to 35000 Bengalis left Meghalaya and they settled in Assam and West Bengal.
- (xii) Since 1980, more than 1,00,000 Bengalis have been displaced from the state of Tripura.
- (xiii) In 1990s, there were displaced 22000 Kukis and Paites in Manipur.

- (xiv) The regrouping of Mizos by the Indian Army in the wake of Mizo rebellion displaced a large number of Mizo population. In the first regrouping, 45000 and in the second regrouping 87000 Mizos were displaced.
- (xv) Mizoram has also witnessed a massive outflow of Burmese (Myanmarese) refugees to Myanmar during July-August 2003 due to violence against them; more than 4000 Burmese refugees went back to Myanmar after this violence. More than 50,000 ethnic Chin, Kuki and Naga refugees from Myanmar are left at the mercy of the state governments and the local populace.
- (xvi) From 15th October 1997 onwards, about 30,000 to 40,000 Brus (Reangs) fled the Mizoram State to Tripura to escape a campaign of violence and terror against them allegedly by members of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (Mizo Students Union) and Young Mizo Association (YMA).
- (xvii) In the conflict between the Karbi and Dimasa communities, about 50,000 people were displaced in the hill district of KarbiAnglong (2005).
- (xviii) Conflict between the Dimasa and Hmar tribes over land and governance in the North Cachar Hills has displaced up to 5,000 people (2009).

In Northeastern region of India, more than 830,000 persons are internally displaced and still more than 76,000 displaced persons are in relief camps till 2011 (IDMC Report, 2011).

Regarding Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the fulfillment of basic human needs like food, cloth, shelter and medical aid should be the primary concern of the concerned authority. If they are deprived of adequate food, employment, medical services and other such basic human rights, then they are liable to demand these as per the provisions of law.

The absence of a national policy or legislation regarding the displaced persons stands as a major problem in tackling such sensitive and emergency situations. Crisis of food, clothes, water and medicines leads to unhygienic living condition and severe health problems in relief camps. The states of the Northeast India have largely been dependent on funds allocated to them by Central Government bodies (IDMC Report,

2011). After conflict, the facilities of economic, social and cultural rights stand as challenging issues. Moreover, life becomes very difficult for those who are temporarily settled in relief camps after losing everything in life. The conflict affected people have not only lost their property and home but also faced several problems in the relief camps.

As a consequence of the Garo-Rabha conflict about 50,000 persons were displaced who were temporarily sheltered in schools and other public buildings such as Ghorapota M.V. School, Chorakpara L.P. School, Bongaon L.P. School, Khamari L.P. School, Kalajhar L.P. School, Beldengpara L.P. School, Bamune Pani Khowa L.P. School, Nibari Meselkhowa M.V. School, Chechapani L.P. School, Nakatipara, Borpathar, Jira, Guria, Hirapara, Chenimari, Nowapara, Damra, Khardang, Hatigaon (No. 3) Bordag, Barali, Rongchai, Beldengpara (No. 2), Chotomatia, Nowapara and Nagarapara in Goalpara district of Assam. On the other hand, Mendipathar College and Schools of the Mendipathar town were the relief camps in the East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and a large number of displaced people stayed in the Mendipathar College.

In the Assam-Meghalaya border area, 38 villages were mostly affected by this conflict. The displacement continued for several days. By 12th January 2011, about 35,000 villagers (IDPs) had fled to 39 camps in Assam's Goalpara district, while 18 camps in Meghalaya's East Garo Hills district gave sheltered to 15,000 villagers (IDPs) (IDMC Report, 2011). The most affected villages are: 1. Mendipathar, 2. Harinkata, 3. Hatibasa, 4. Bakenang, 5. Genang, 6. Soinang, 7. Thapa, 8. Dagal, 9. Mongre, 10. Rome, 11. Daram, 12. Jongla, 13. Upper Manikganj, 14. Depa Dangkhong, 15. Noksar, 16. Rabhapara, 17. Tekelipara, 18. Miapara, 19. Tharika, 20. Garomara, 21. Darakona, 22. Nibari Halowapara, 23. Bakripara, 24. Rongrong, 25. Chrokpara, 26. Paham, 27. Nabang, 28. Nehrubazar, 29. Moranodi, 30. Darangshi, 31. Rongdup, 32. Jamgaon, 33. Belpara, 34. Khamari, 35. Khasigara, 36. Chigsin, 37. Mongan and 38. Kodam Nagati.

One of the major problems that arose out of the Garo-Rabha conflict was displacement of the hapless and helpless people. All the people living in the Assam-Meghalaya border were displaced, no matter whether they were affected by the conflict or not. All the people belonging to that area were equally disturbed – those

who fled to the relief camps being tortured and those who were scared of being attacked. There are about 200 villages in the border region and all the people of these villages had lost their normal environment; they even stopped going to their offices or work places. Mr. Sarbesh Rabha, Mr. Phukan Rabha and Miss Aloni Rabha who are all social activists of the Bongaon village (Goalpara district) did not take food for three days and were engaged in the relief camps. Besides the allotted relief camps, they also kept the victims in their own homes and also in the houses of the villagers. Many people in the relief camps were staying without food for 2/3 days. Even clothes, money, ornaments and such other important things were left behind and they only tried to save their lives.

Let us have a look at the major problems faced by the displaced people in the relief camps under the following heads:

(i) *Health Problems*

Health is one of the major problems in the relief camps. Overcrowded, unhygienic and very humid conditions lead to sleep deprivation and lack of fresh air. Children lacked space for recreation and they had to put their schooling on halt. Due to lack of space some people had to sleep on the school verandah without mosquito nets. Food provided to them was inadequate, lacked nutrition and was not suitable for children. The authorities initially provided health services but proper sanitation was not available. Later, there was no presence of medical practitioners on regular basis or security persons in the relief camps. Only nurses came regularly to provide first aid facility. Inmates of the camps needed a regular/resident doctor in order to avoid outbreak of any epidemic. The camps were overpopulated and humid due to non-existence of air ventilation system. Moreover, pregnant women and new born babies had no access to special care. Diseases like fever and diarrhea spread rapidly in the relief camps. The following table shows the status of the medical facilities provided by the Government in the relief camps as reported by the victim families:

Table 6.1

Medical Facilities in Relief Camps Provided by the Government (Percentage in Parentheses)

Medical Care	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	GrandTotal
	Belpara	Bongaon		Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa		Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Yes	25 (96.15)	8 (80.00)	33 (91.67)	5 (50.00)	11 (100)	30 (85.71)	21 (95.45)	14 (100)	22 (96.65)	9 (81.82)	42 (95.45)	154 (90.59)	20 (95.24)	12 (100)	32 (96.97)	20 (95.24)	239 (91.92)
No	1 (3.85)	2 (20.00)	3 (8.33)	5 (50.00)	0	5 (14.29)	1 (4.55)	0	1 (4.35)	2 (18.18)	2 (4.55)	16 (9.41)	1 (4.76)	0	1 (3.03)	1 (4.76)	21 (8.08)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

Members of the sampled families 8.08% families reported that did not receive medical care in the relief camps. Particularly the villagers of Khamari Garopara (Goalpara district) and Jamgaon and Nokchar (East Garo Hills district) did not receive proper medical facilities. In the relief camps the doctors visited not frequently because the relief camps were located in remote places.

(ii) *Scarcity of Food*

Problem of food is an inevitable problem that was faced by the displaced persons in most of the relief camps. Many political leaders and bureaucrats from both the states visited the camps but the problems persisted. Only low quality food was provided (only rice and no vegetables). There was no proper schedule of providing food. It was because the supply of food from the state authority was not adequate. People of the neighbouring areas sometimes donated food items. After a week's time the food provided by the state authorities was stopped. Therefore, the IDPs had reportedly difficult time for getting food in Bongaon and Kukurkata camps in the Goalpara district. Many of them had to survive on one time meal a day by May 2011. By the end of February 2011, the state authorities stopped to distribute food and other essentials to the IDPs. They were to compelled to return to their homes, though many of them needed assistance due to the displacement. Here, urgently needed is a national IDP legislation and policy so that rights of the displaced persons are protected and their needs addressed properly in order to do away with this helpless and pathetic situation. Moreover, safe drinking water was another major problem in the relief camps. Due to lack of safe drinking water, IDPs suffered from fever and diarrheah, specially the children in most of the relief camps. In the area not a single tubewell existed and no system of water purification was provided in the relief camp. However, at home they used filtered the water. The following table shows the status of the nutritious food provided by the Government in the relief camps as reported by the families of 13 conflict affected villages:

Table 6.2

Nutritious Food Provided by the Government in the Relief Camps (Percentage in Parentheses)

Whether Nutritious Food Provided	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Yes	21 (80.77)	5 (50.00)	26 (72.22)	3 (30.00)	5 (45.45)	28 (80.00)	21 (95.45)	10 (71.43)	22 (95.65)	6 (54.55)	40 (90.91)	135 (79.41)	20 (95.24)	12 (100)	32 (96.97)	5 (23.81)	198 (76.15)
No	5 (19.23)	5 (50.00)	10 (27.78)	7 (70.00)	6 (54.55)	7 (20.00)	1 (4.55)	4 (28.57)	1 (4.35)	5 (45.45)	4 (9.09)	35 (20.59)	1 (4.76)	0	1 (3.03)	16 (76.19)	62 (23.85)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

Thus, 23.85% of the Garo and Rabha families were deprived from nutritious food. Their demand was not for nutritious food but for regular food which they were not able to get. The Garo families of the Goalpara district faced more scarcity of food, particularly in the Khamari village.

(iii) *Educational Problems*

Education is one of the major sectors to be affected by conflict. In the Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005, education of 20,000 students was adversely affected as schools were used for relief camps (ACHR 2005). The hampered students are divided into two categories: those who were in relief camps and those who were studying in the schools which were used as relief camps. In the area under the study, the half of the relief camps were in primary schools and IDPs stayed there for long time. Children's education was therefore interrupted for six weeks. Authorities pressed IDPs to leave the school compounds as academic session in the schools was to commence in February 2011. However, they provided alternative way to those who were not able to return home or to find other durable solutions. Nonetheless, the establishment of camps in school buildings interrupted education of the local children. As of May 2011, children including the displaced ones sheltered in camps got no schooling in some areas whereas schools in the villages near the camps were burnt and not reconstructed. The camps were closed in February and March 2011 despite the fact that many people were reluctant to return due to fear of further clashes. The Mendipathar College (Meghalaya) which was the largest relief camp remained closed for students for several weeks when it was time for examinations.

(iv) *Sanitary Facility*

Lack of sanitation was a major problem in the relief camps. Each relief camp was overcrowded. Number of the sanitary toilets was not adequate. Some temporary toilets were made. But these were quite unhygienic. As a result of such toilets, human excreta littered here and there. It polluted the environment and diseases spread in the locality. In Bongaon L. P. School relief camp, more than 40 persons suffered from fever and other diseases. The following table shows the status of the sanitation facilities provided by the Government in the relief camps as reported by the victim families:

Table 6.3

Sanitation Facilities in Relief Camps Provided by the Government (Percentage in Parentheses)

Whether Facility of Sanitation existed	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon		Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa		Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Yes	22 (84.62)	7 (70.00)	29 (80.56)	4 (40.00)	5 (45.45)	30 (85.71)	20 (90.91)	13 (92.86)	18 (78.26)	7 (63.64)	41 (93.18)	138 (81.18)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	17 (80.95)	217 (83.46)
No	4 (15.38)	3 (30.00)	7 (19.44)	6 (60.00)	6 (54.55)	05 (14.29)	2 (9.09)	1 (7.14)	5 (21.74)	4 (36.36)	3 (6.82)	32 (18.82)	0	0	0	4 (19.05)	43 (16.54)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

Members of the sampled families 16.54% reported that not sufficient sanitation facilities were provided in the relief camps. They said that due to the inadequacy of sanitation they had to engage in open defecation.

V. *Clothes*

Insufficient clothes were another problem that the conflict victims faced in the relief camps. In most cases the general public collected huge number of clothes for the victims. But these clothes were second hand and not of proper size. Moreover, the donated clothes comprised of men's dresses and sarees for women. There was dearth of clothes for babies and children. As the conflict occurred in the winter season and there was a great scarcity of blankets. The Khamari village, camp had so much scarcity of blankets as the victimsspent nights sitting by bonfires. The following table shows the status of the supply clothes by the Government in the relief camps as reported by the families of the conflict affected villages:

Table 6.4
Supply of Clothes in Relief Camps by the Government (Percentage in Parentheses)

Availability of Supply Clothes	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon		Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa		Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Yes	23 (88.46)	9 (90.00)	32 (88.89)	5 (50.00)	11 (100)	35 (100)	20 (90.91)	13 (92.86)	20 (86.96)	9 (81.82)	40 (90.91)	153 (90.00)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	20 (95.24)	238 (91.54)
No	3 (11.54)	1 (10.00)	4 (11.11)	5 (50.00)	0	0	2 (9.09)	1 (7.14)	3 (13.04)	2 (18.18)	4 (9.09)	17 (10.00)	0	0	0	1 (4.76)	22 (8.46)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

Thus, members of some families 8.46% reported that they were not supplied clothes in the relief camps. Ginogre and Khamari of the Goalpara district were deprived from the facilities that were provided by the Governments. These two villages were situated in Assam side and most of the villagers were not demanding compensation for them and were very scared of the Rabha villages of Assam because the Garos are minority in the Goalpara district of Assam.

Having taken a look at the problems of poor health, lack of nutrition, disruption of children's education encountered by the conflict affected people in the camps as the after-effects of conflict, let us now focus our attention towards some of the most dangerous social impacts of conflict which could be termed as long term impacts under the following heads:

B. LONG TERM IMPACTS

The long term impacts basically refer to the socio-economic consequences of the conflict– disruption of inter-ethnic harmony, collapse of economy etc. Such kinds of impacts may sometimes last for ages and may become part of history.

(i) Loss of Inter-community Harmony

The Garo-Rabha conflict has resulted in the loss of fellow-feeling and goodwill among the members of the two communities. The two communities lived together in a state of harmony for many decades. Although in the post-conflict period peace has returned to the affected areas, yet the relationship between the Garos and the Rabhas is not the same as it was before the outbreak of the conflict. An instance will make it clear. During the field investigation there was observed a football match which was going on among the Rabhas in the Resubelpara area. Suddenly, two Garo persons tried to disrupt the football match as the persons were seen walking without any hesitation across the field in which the match was going on.

Moreover, in the post-conflict period more than 15 Rabha families had already left Dainadubi and Thapa villages (East Garo Hills district). On the other hand, the headman of Khamari village (Goalpara district) reported that there were 45 families in pre-conflict period and after conflict 6 Garo families left the village. The ongoing shift of Rabha families from Maghalaya to Assam and Garo families from Assam to

Meghalaya signified the loss of inter-community bonding between the two communities.

The people in the Meghalayan side whose houses were burnt or destroyed have not re-constructed permanent houses because they are in dilemma – whether or not they will be able to stay there permanently. It indicates a sense of insecurity that has replaced the goodwill and trust that existed between two communities in the past.

In the conflict ridden areas of Assam-Meghalaya border the Garo and Rabha villages are located in an alternative pattern (one Rabha village followed by one Garo village) as has been mentioned earlier. Before the outbreak of the conflict there was goodwill among the villagers. People belonging to the two communities used to visit each other's places at the time of cultural festivals like Christmas, Bihu, New Year etc. But after the conflict, as has been reported by the members of the sampled families, there has arisen a sense of absolute alienation between the two tribes. Except for those who are working together in offices other members of both the communities have suspended any kind of relationship that existed between them for centuries. The following table exhibits the views collected from the sampled families over security and peace they have been experiencing in the post-conflict period:

Table 6.5

Views of the Sampled Garo-Rabha Families over Security and Peace during the Post-conflict Period (Percentage in Parentheses)

Views on Post-conflict security and peace	Rabhas Families of Assam			Rabhas Families of Meghalaya									Garos Families of Assam			Garos Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soingang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Secured as normalcy has returned	01 (3.85)	0	01 (2.78)	0	01 (9.09)	09 (25.71)	03 (13.64)	0	01 (4.35)	01 (9.09)	10 (22.73)	25 (14.71)	07 (33.33)	04 (33.33)	11 (6.47)	21 (100)	58 (22.31)
Not Secured and not satisfied with contemporary peace situation	25 (96.15)	10 (100)	35 (97.22)	10 (100)	10 (90.91)	26 (74.29)	19 (86.36)	14 (100)	22 (95.65)	10 (90.91)	34 (77.27)	145 (85.29)	14 (66.67)	08 (66.67)	22 (12.94)	0	202 (77.69)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

Of the Rabha families of Meghalaya, 14.71% opined that normalcy had returned in the post-conflict period. On the contrary, 85.29% Rabha families of Meghalaya viewed that the normalcy, and peace and security of the earlier days would not return easily after the devastating conflict. Majority of Rabhas located in Meghalaya had lost their hope for re-establishment of peace and security as after the conflict the Garo insurgency groups like GNLA became more active and started harassing the Rabhas living in Meghalaya; they imposed unfair taxes on the Rabhas: Rs. 4 lac each on middle class families and a minimum Rs.10000/- to Rs.20000/- each on poor families. In the post-conflict period another act of harassment was used in the Mendipathar village (Meghalaya). The Rabha villagers said that some Garo youths often came to the Rabha villages, surrounded the Rabha villages and bursted numerous fire crackers (bombs) shouting, "This land is ours".

(ii) Loss of Life

As a result of the inter-ethnic conflict, 20 person lost their lives and several others were seriously injured in the affected villages. Though the conflict took place in the Assam-Meghalaya border area but the impact spread in the entire Goalpara and Garo Hills districts. Here, one can show how the Garo-Rabha conflict spread even outside the study area. Many Rabha people were working in the East Garo Hills and West Garo Hills districts as masons, labourers and road construction workers. They mostly belonged to the Goalpara district of Assam. Mr. Madan Rabha was working as mason in the remote area of West Garo Hills district. He said that when news spread among the Garos that many Garos were killed by Rabhas, their employer advised them to leave the workplace immediately. Accordingly, in the night of 4th January 2011 they hired a vehicle and left the Garo Hills district. Many Rabhas who were working in remote areas of the Garo Hills district were targeted and some of his friends are missing. Most of the killings took place in those remote places. In this conflict the innocent people were targeted. In the study area also the innocent Rabhas of the East Garo Hills district and the Garos of the Goalpara district were harmed. But originally discontentment rose between the Rabhas of Goalpara district and the Garos of East Garo Hills district.

Loss of life may be the loss at individual level but it had a major adverse effect on the concerned families. The death of those family members who worked as daily

wage earners and were bread winners in the poor families shattered their economic condition and thereby rendered crippled their economics. Therefore, the loss of a family member is that loss which can never be recovered.

(iii) Collapse of Economy

Economic impact is the major area of concern after the occurrence of conflict. After a life-long struggle a family becomes economically self-dependent. Due to ethnic conflict the entire property got collapsed in a few moments and an earning members of families died in the riots. In such situations the Government aids or grants are not at all sufficient. Therefore, the families find it very difficult to revive their earlier state. Thus, conflict in a sense hinders social development by pushing the people to the dark dungeons of economic backwardness.

(a) Loss of Property

The Rabha people have mostly lost their properties as 1500 houses were burnt down, many of cattle, food grain stocks, vehicles, household stuffs and cash were destroyed. The photographs of the brutal killings of the innocent people including children corroborate to the statement of this pathetic and heart rending sight. This conflict like all other violent conflicts has brought an irreparable loss to several families which have lost their near and dear ones. No compensation or anything else can replace this loss. Mr. R. Rabha who is an inhabitant of Jonglapara village in the East Garo Hills district describes his situation, “I have lost everything that was built during the last 20 years- three pacca houses, one rice mill, one motor cycle, gold jewelry, cash and domestic animals. Now, I have not that much energy to re-establish myself”.

The concept of home is of prime importance in the life of a person. While making home a family invests a lot and when it is destroyed a family loses everything needed for survival. The members become homeless, devoid of shelter. The Garo-Rabha conflict also rendered several families homeless. It is an irreparable loss. Most of the victims said that they would not be able to rebuild their dream home. It took them 20 or 30 years to accumulate the household goods. So it is not an easy task to revive the earlier state of life. Moreover, during the field investigation, it was known that the Rabhas of Meghalaya were not building new houses; instead, they simply

repaired their burnt houses to live in. They said that they were not feeling safe though the Meghalaya Government claimed that normalcy had returned. They were threatened by GNLA.

(b) Loss of Jobs and Livelihoods

Another impact of the Garo-Rabha conflict was loss of jobs and livelihoods. The Rabhas of Meghalaya were economically sound as compared to the Garos. Settled agriculture was the main stay of their life. Besides, they owned auto rickshaws for business purpose and most of the drivers of these auto rickshaws belonged to the Garo community. The Garos also worked in paddy fields of the Rabhas. But after conflict no Garos worked under Rabha families. The Rabhas of the Goalpara district were also affected by this conflict, particularly those who were working on daily wage basis. Many of them were engaged in construction works as masons and blacksmiths in the entire Garo Hills region. All of them left their jobs as they were also targeted by the Garos. Many Rabhas who are daily wage earners shifted to Shillong and Guwahati, searching livelihood. During the conflict many Rabhas left their jobs and workplaces and returned home by buses in the night. This loss of job or livelihood has resulted in the loss of economic security of several families. It has brought an unnatural financial hardship or crisis to the society at large in the region.

Besides, many of the people's shops, rice mills, equipments and workplaces have been destroyed in the conflict. These workplaces or earning sources were not repaired till the time of field investigation due to the collapse of financial system. Such kind of destruction again poses a threat to the financial security of several families.



FIGURE 1: Houses on Fire in the Jonglapara Village

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 2: Food Grains Destroyed

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 3: Household Properties Vandalize and Looted

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 4: Domestic Animals/Cattle Killed or Stolen

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 5: Gathering of Displaced Persons in Mendipathar (Meghalaya)

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 6: Administrators and Social Activists Announcing to Displaced Persons in Resubelpara (Meghalaya)

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)

PROBLEMS OF REHABILITATION

In the post-conflict period, rehabilitation became a challenging task for the authorities as well as the conflict victims. In some cases it could be noticed that rehabilitation takes several years or in some cases there is no solution to this problem of rehabilitation till the present day. For instance, due to the conflict between the Bodos and Muslims that occurred in Kokrajhar in the year 1993, about 18,000 persons were displaced and till the time of data collection, i.e., 2011 these displaced people were not rehabilitated. In Mizoram and Tripura 35,000 persons were displaced in the years 1997 and 2009 respectively and till now 30,000 are yet to be rehabilitated (IDMC 2011). In the Garo-Rabha conflict, approximately 50,000 persons were displaced and they have all returned to their original places. However, they have not reconstructed permanent houses in the hope of a return of good time.

Role of the Governments and NGOs in the Rehabilitation

The initiative taken by the Government and NGOs for the rehabilitation of the Garo-Rabha conflict victims is not at all satisfactory. A meager amount of Rs. 10,000/- (Government aid) and a few household goods cannot compensate the heavy loss incurred by the victims. They have lost almost everything in life. In the rehabilitation process, the Government authorities as well as NGOs were working in the conflict affected area. In January 2011 the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR), a Delhi based NGO, asked the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to direct the Governments of Assam and Meghalaya to provide assistance to the IDPs and to facilitate sustainable return. The Government authorities and such NGOs assessed the situation of the people displaced due to the outbreak of violence in the Goalpara and East Garo Hills districts to their houses at two points of time - 31st December 2010 and January 2011. Due to efforts of the NGOs, the displaced people were provided support according to their needs, focusing particularly on livelihood, skill development and education, in order to facilitate durable solutions. Measures were also taken by the Assam and Meghalaya Governments to provide adequate compensation to those displaced ones whose homes were partially or fully destroyed in the violence. By early February 2011, the Assam and Meghalaya state governments were collaborating in relief efforts and had announced similar kind of compensation for the conflict affected people. Each family whose house was destroyed by fire in the

violence received Rs 10,000/- and three bundles of galvanized iron sheets as compensation. But this amount is not sufficient for constructing a kachcha house in today's expensive world. The government's Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) (a housing scheme designed for below poverty line families) sanctions Rs. 48,300/- per house. But in contrast to this the victims of the Garo-Rabha conflict were offered an amount of only Rs10,000/- which was absolutely inadequate for the victims who lost everything in their lives. The following table shows the opinion on the compensation provided by the Government to the conflict victims as reported by the families of 13 conflict affected villages:

Table 6.6

Views of the Sampled Families on the Compensation Provided by the Government to the Conflict Victims (Percentage in Parentheses)

Whether the Compensation was adequate	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Yes	4 (15.38)	0	4 (11.11)	0	0	0	0	0	1 (4.35)	0	4 (9.09)	5 (2.94)	0	0	0	0	9 (3.46)
No	22 (84.62)	10 (100)	32 (88.89)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	22 (95.65)	11 (100)	40 (90.91)	165 (97.06)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	251 (96.54)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

The data revealed that the conflict victims were highly dissatisfied over the amount of compensation that was provided by the government. Of the sampled families 96.54% found the Government aid not sufficient. Only 3.46% of the sampled families were satisfied with the government assistance.

To execute rehabilitation of the displaced people several organizations participated. The Government and non-government organizations which participated in the rehabilitation process and preparation of documentary reports are listed below.

1. Action Aid India,
2. North East Network,
3. Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development,
4. Assam Nagarik Samaj,
5. Anwasha,
6. SPADE,
7. Mahila Samata Society,
8. Ajagar Social Circle,
9. Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS)
10. Bakdil,
11. Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR),
12. Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR),
13. Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS),
14. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),
15. Caritas India

Some NGOs provided utensils, clothes and water resistant cloths for making temporary tents to the conflict affected people. Assistance was also provided by the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In the month of January in 2011, NGOs and research institutes including Action Aid, North East Network, Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Assam Nagarik Samaj, Anwasha, SPADE, Mahila Samata Society and Ajagar Social Circle organized a public meeting where they made a point that the specific needs of displaced women and children be addressed by the authorities. They called for provision of adequate security to the returnees and emphasized the need for reconciliation between the two communities. A series of

community meetings which involved local institutions and elders in Guwahati and Resubelpara were held aiming to facilitate return of normalcy (IDMC Report 2011:04-14). On 24th January 2011 another meeting was organized by the Resubelpara Peace Committee with an objective to normalize the situation.

In the month of February the Assam and Meghalaya State branches of the IRCS distributed non-food item kits to the victims in more than 1500 families in the camps in the Goalpara and East Garo Hills districts who had lost their homes and all of their belongings. These kits each consisted of a kitchen set, two blankets, two tarpaulins, a large jerry can, and cleaning and bathing soap, donated by the Indian Red Cross Society (ICRC). From March to September 2011 Caritas India with the support of ECHO carried out a programme to assist more than 12,000 persons affected by the violence with shelter material, cash for work and livelihoods. The programme was implemented by Action Aid India, Guwahati Gana Seva Society (GGSS) and Bakdil, the social service wings of the Catholic dioceses of Guwahati in Assam and Tura in Meghalaya. In the month of October, the Assam State branch of the IRCS launched a micro-economic initiative project to help the most vulnerable ones among the violence affected families to rebuild their livelihoods through the activities like weaving, cattle raising, and small scale trading (IDMC Report 2011). The responses of the victim families in respect of the assistance are given in the following table:

Table 6.7

**Views of the Relief Assistance Provided to the Victim Families in the Conflict-Affected Villages by the Government and Non-Government Organizations
(Percentage in Parentheses)**

	Name of Villages	Which one was more Beneficial Agency			Which one was more interested Peace rather than providing only Material Assistance		
		Govt.	NGO	Total	Govt	NGO	Total
Rabha Village	Belpara	16 (61.54)	10 (38.46)	26 (100)	13 (50.00)	13 (50.00)	26 (100)
	Bongaon	10 (100)	0	10 (100)	5 (50.00)	5 (50.00)	10 (100)
	Daram	10 (100)	0	10 (100)	3 (30.00)	7 (70.00)	10 (100)
	Jamgaon	11 (100)	0	11 (100)	5 (45.45)	6 (54.55)	11 (100)
	Jonglapara	35 (100)	0	35 (100)	20 (57.14)	15 (42.86)	35 (100)
	Mendipathar	21 (95.45)	1 (4.55)	22 (100)	10 (45.45)	12 (54.55)	22 (100)
	Nokchar	14 (100)	0	14 (100)	6 (42.86)	8 (57.14)	14 (100)
	Rompara	21 (91.30)	2 (8.70)	23 (100)	10 (43.48)	13 (56.52)	23 (100)
	Soinang	11 (100)	0	11 (100)	4 (36.36)	07 (63.64)	11 (100)
	Thapa	40 (90.91)	4 (9.09)	44 (100)	25 (56.82)	19 (43.18)	44 (100)
Garo Village	Ginogre	1 (4.76)	20 (95.24)	21 (100)	6 (28.57)	15 (71.43)	21 (100)
	Khamari	1 (8.33)	11 (91.67)	12 (100)	4 (33.33)	8 (66.66)	12 (100)
	Resubelpara	10 (47.62)	11 (52.38)	21 (100)	10 (47.62)	11 (52.38)	21 (100)
Grand Total		201 (77.31)	59 (22.69)	260 (100)	121 (46.54)	139 (53.46)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period from 15th June 2014 to 20th December 2014

Regarding the post-conflict relief assistance the families' opined that although it was not sufficient the government provided more financial assistance as compared to the NGOs. But the NGOs showed more interest in peace process.

77.31 % of the Garo and Rabha families said that they were financially more benefited by the Government than the NGOs while 22.69% of them reported to be more benefited by NGOs.

Regarding the initiative towards peace process, 53.46% of families took the name of NGOs and 46.54% spoke about government. Some people were of the opinion that the missionary based NGOs were helping the Rabha people with the hidden motive of turning them into Christianity. This indicates the ongoing mistrust between the two communities as well as towards the relief providing agencies.

PROBLEM OF PEACE AMONG THE GARO-RABHA COMMUNITIES

As has been mentioned earlier, peace process is at work among the Garo-Rabha communities living in Meghalaya. The Rabhas of the West Garo Hills in Meghalaya have an association Rabha Sewa Sangha, formed with the objectives to unite the Rabhas of Meghalaya and to encourage them to establish a good relationship with the other indigenous communities in Meghalaya especially with the Garos. The Rabhas of the West Garo Hills try to maintain peace through cultural tolerance towards and respect for other ethnic groups in their surroundings. It is perhaps due to such endeavours at the community level that the effect of the Garo-Rabha conflict was lesser in degree at that place in comparison to the East Garo Hills district where such initiatives for inter-community bonding and goodwill were not undertaken.

In the Garo-Rabha inhabited border areas of Assam there could be seen lack of affinity and fellow-feeling between the two tribes. They belong to two different religions – Christianity (Garos) and Hinduism (Rabhas) and there is perceived a lesser degree of affinity between them. The consumption of beef, for instance, is regarded as an act of desacrilization in Hinduism whereas it is a custom in Christianity and Islam. Therefore, in the conflict-ridden areas, bordering the states of Assam and Meghalaya there could be seen goodwill between the Garos and the Muslims (both consuming beef) who have distanced from the Hindu Rabhas among whom beef eating is considered an act of desacrilization. The Muslims are establishing marital relationship with the Garo women whereas the gap between the Garo and the Rabhas has been widening since the Rabhas follow Hindu religious codes. Thus, the Garo and Rabha communities have distanced from each other, although they belonged to the same racial stock and linguistic family.

For the return of permanent peace the Government and the NGOs are both working together in the conflict ridden areas and they are taking some steps to restore peace among the Garo and Rabha people. As part of this process of restoration of peace, friendly food ball and volley ball matches have been organized between the Garo and the Rabha youth. Students belonging to those areas are also encouraged to organize peace rallies. Athletic competitions between the students belonging to the Garo and Rabha communities are also organized. Peace restoration has been attempted by establishing good will among the village headmen, students' leaders, and community leaders of the two communities.



FIGURE 7: Peace Rally of Students Taken Out in Resubelpara (Meghalaya)

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 8: Toward Peace: Friendly Athletics Competition between Garo and Rabha Students in Resubelpara (Meghalaya)

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)



FIGURE 9: Restoring Goodwill among the Village Headmen and Community Leaders of the Garos and Rabhas in Resubelpara (Meghalaya)

Source: Collected from Khanin D Momin, Social Activist, Resubelpara (Meghalaya)

CONCLUSION

The problem of IDPs should be regarded as a problem of the entire human race and as such it should be addressed on a very urgent basis. This problem should not remain confined to a state or national level but the international organizations like UNO should prioritize the actions for redressing the horrible plight of the conflict victims. But unfortunately, even the state governments are not giving adequate response to these victims, not to speak of the rest of the world.

Therefore, the social impact of conflict is far-reaching and it encompasses several sensitive issues which influence immensely the particular social structure where it occurs. The Garo-Rabha conflict had also left some unavoidable marks on the Garo and Rabha societies such as 1. In the Garo-Rabha conflict lots of innocent people suffered a lot by losing their near and dear ones, their homes and their entire possessions, 2. the Garo-Rabha conflict also brought misfortune and destruction to the society. The entire economic system and the process of education came to a standstill, 3. the Garo-Rabha conflict pushed the already backward tribal societies to the realm of poverty, backwardness and loss. After the collapse of economic system, destruction of homes, private and public properties, the Garo and Rabha victims became as backward as they were many years ago, 4. due to the Garo-Rabha conflict thousands of people were displaced and for those conflict ridden people life was not easy – in the relief camps as well as after returning to their dwelling places. In the relief camps they had a claustrophobic life, without proper food, cloth and shelter. After returning to their dwelling places also they faced the problem of fulfilling the basic needs of life and 5. in the border area of the two states the Garo and Rabha communities have lived peacefully since time immemorial but the outbreak of the conflict shattered all the threads of harmony between them and return of the pre-conflict state of harmony and goodwill seems to be impossible, now.