

Environmental stress and armed conflict

A study on effects of Maoist insurgency on environmental sanitation and health of internally displaced persons of urban areas of Kathmandu city of Nepal

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Bishnu Raj Upreti

Abstract

In Nepal, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN (M)] started armed conflict since February 1996 to change the 'feudal' political system. It was ended in November 2006 by signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government and the Maoist leader. A decade long armed conflict has brought enormous impacts on people, society and environment. However, this paper examines relationship between armed conflict and environment and its effects on environmental sanitation and health of internally displaced persons (IDP) staying in urban areas of Kathmandu valley, a capital city of Nepal. The paper is part of the outcome of the ongoing research project related to internally displaced people of Nepal. The study analyses interaction patterns, coping strategies, available means of livelihoods, vulnerability and risks in new urban environment policy response of the state towards IDP in Nepal. The methods used in the study are focus group discussion, observation, in-depth interviews and triangulation. The analysis is made from the sociological perspective. This paper focuses on the analyses of a) environmental causes of the armed conflict such as pressure on environmental resources, unequal and power-biased pattern of use and control of these resources, and weak environmental governance practices, and b) the impacts of armed insurgency on environmental sanitation and health issues of IDP of urban areas of Kathmandu valley. Based on the empirical evidences, the paper argues that poor environmental sanitation and health of IDP is directly linked with environmental stress and population factors, which have played significant roles in creating underlying conditions for the armed conflict. Hence, the degrading environmental situation of Kathmandu valley and poor health and sanitation conditions of IDP are directly connected and affecting each other. I conclude that the decade long armed conflict has created several negative impacts on health and sanitation, space and services such as education, drinking water and of IDPs staying in Kathmandu valley. Most of the negative environmental impacts are grounded in the governance problems, social and economic inequalities and environmental injustice and linked with the IDPs. Therefore, mitigating negative environmental impacts in urban areas and improving health and sanitation of IDP requires addressing underlying causes of environmental degradation. The CPA signed by the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the CPN (M) on 21 November 2006 has opened avenue for addressing negative environmental impacts in Nepal.

1. Introduction

The CPN (M) has started armed conflict since February 1996 to change the 'feudal' political system. It was ended in November 2006 by signing the CPA between the GoN and the leader CPN (M).

A decade long armed conflict has brought enormous impacts on people, society and environment. The ongoing armed conflict has severely altered the existing socially constructed relations between environment and human-being. The armed conflict has not only altered the inter- and intra-household relations but also their environmental functions associated with conventional roles and responsibilities.

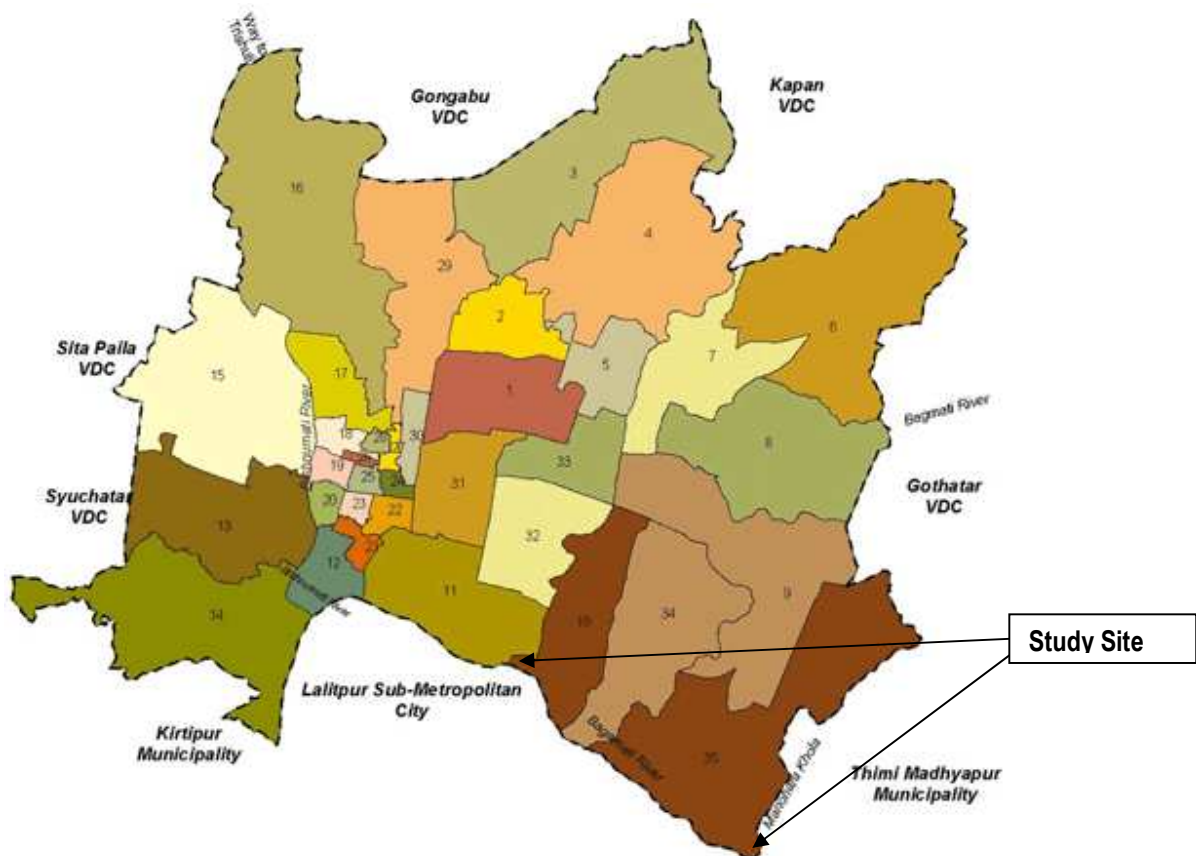
The main objective of this study is to examine the impacts of the armed conflict on environmental sanitation and public health of IDP in Nepal.

UNHCR defines IDPs as the uprooted people from their community as a result of persecution, armed conflict or violence. They are forced to abandon their homes and leave their usual place of residence but

remain within the borders of their own country'¹ (UNHCR, 1997). IDPs are therefore among the most vulnerable victims of the armed conflict and often they constitute largest at-risk population. Armed conflict induced displacement is often linked with violence, human rights abuses (such as arbitrary killing, rape, torture, kidnapping, etc) and psychological oppressions. In the armed conflict, IDPs are mostly elderly, women, children and disabled people. They are often traumatized and fearing for their lives and therefore forced to leave their homes and communities to seek refuge in perceived to be more secure areas².

The paper is part of the outcome of the ongoing research project on IDP of Nepal.

The study site:



Map Showing the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and the study site.

The methods used in the study are ethnography (a process of close observation and interpretation of behaviour and function of people and organizations through intimate participation in a community), focus group discussion, observation, in-depth interviews, triangulation and review of secondary literature. The analysis is made from the sociological perspective. In the observation method, situation of IDPs: living conditions, physical facilities and livelihood bases were main focus. Semi-structured interviews with individual IDP, key-informant interview with selected individuals (representatives of Maoist Victims Association; local social and political leaders and IDP activists, state victims); Focused-Group-Discussion with five groups of IDPs (4 persons per group) were conducted in the study area. Secondary source of

¹ See UNHCR, the State of the World's Refugees: A Humanitarian Agenda. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, Page 99 for detail.

² See <http://www.idproject.org/GlobalTrends2004> for details on this tragic debate.

information was collected from reports and publications of Global IDP Project, Geneva Conventions, UNDP, UNICEF, UNCHR, OCHA, Red Cross Society, Government of Nepal and NGOs. Triangulation was made to confirm the findings.

This paper focuses on the analyses of a) environmental causes of the armed conflict such as pressure on environmental resources, unequal and power-biased pattern of use and control of these resources, and weak environmental governance practices, and b) the impacts of armed insurgency on environmental sanitation and health issues of IDP of urban areas of Kathmandu valley.

The case study was conducted in a slum area where a cluster of IDPs located in the approximately four kilometre river bank of Bagmati River of passing through the 34 and 35 Wards (from Tilganga to the joint of Manohara and Bagmati rivers) of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. This area is one of the highly concentrated IDPs settlement areas in Kathmandu Valley. It is self organized settlement without any external support. The government and KMC termed this IDP area as illegal settlement and therefore not providing any support. The settlement has approximately 500 huts and 3500 people in a very crowded space. They are mainly coming from central and eastern Nepal and most of them are from ethnic origins. First, some of the IDPs came in 2002 and built small huts. In 2003, large number of IDPs arrived. As they are illegally settling in the slum, they have no formal access to electricity, drinking water and other services provided by the KMC. Hence, they are using these services illegally.

There are also several illegal settlers in different slums of Kathmandu city. However, this site was purposely selected for the study because of its high level of controversy, associated complications and politicisation³.

2. Armed conflict and displacement

Conflict-induced displacement in Nepal is becoming a major concern. The phenomenon of mass displacement has significantly increased together with the increased intensity of conflict⁴. A report of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division (IDD) Mission to Nepal (11-22 April 2005)⁵ had concluded that *'Nepal faces a very serious political, security and humanitarian situation in which preventive measures are urgently required to prevent further deterioration.'* It further states, *'While the full magnitude of population displacement is unknown, best reliable estimates suggest that up to 200,000⁶ Nepalese may have been internally displaced by the conflict, with perhaps 2 million or more moving to India in recent years'* (IDD, 2005).

³ When the KMC attempted to evict them, politicians of different parties supported the illegal settlers and it was not possible for the KMC to remove them. The KMC constructed a road in that area and used that as an opportunity to remove them. But because of non-cooperation from political parties, the KMC was not able to close the settlement.

⁴ For example, approximately 24000 people of 3500 households of Rajapur areas of Bardiya District in June 2005 left their village and entered to Baharaich and Bachhya areas of India (See Samaya Weekly, Year 2, No 63, Ashad 17-23, 2062/1-7 July 2005) for the detail story).

⁵ The mission was led by Dennis McNamara, accompanied by Carmen van Heese from IDD and Romano Lasker from CRD.

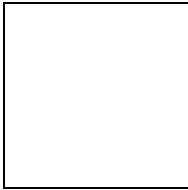
⁶ Source – Global IDP Database, Norwegian Refugee Council



It is very hard to find the clear and authentic data on IDPs in Nepal. The situation of silent IDPs is even unclear. The official estimate of the government is 6000-7000 IDPs⁷. However, human rights activists and advocacy groups estimate the number of IDPs is 400000- 600,000. Nevertheless, international community says that Nepal is not in a situation of humanitarian intervention to address conflict-induced displacement. Based on experiences of other countries, they argue that IDPs are managing themselves. Often IDPs are illegally settling around the East-West Highway and other road sides; diffusing in urban areas and big cities like Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, Biratnagar, which are relatively safe locations with some livelihood opportunities. Many IDPs are diffusing with host communities and staying with their relatives. It is often said that if humanitarian assistance is provided, influx of IDPs will further increase⁸. However, since 2004 only the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and some I/NGOs have initiated minor activities supporting IDPs in different parts of Nepal (Aditya *et al.*, 2006; Khatiwoda, 2006).

⁷ The reason of such a high differences in the government figures is mainly its procedure of defining IDPs. Government recognises IDPs to those people who have registered in the District Administration Office (DAO) of the government and obtained certificate form there. But, people do not go and register with DAO because of their fear (as it is a local party in conflict) and mistrust (people do not believe on DAO).

⁸ Personal communication with some of the donor representatives.



Adapted: Caritas, 2006

Map showing intensity of IDPs staying in different development regions and district Headquarters

Clusters of settlements of IDP can be observed in many urban centres of Nepal such as Surkhet, Nepalgunj, Dang, and Kathmandu Valley (Adhikari, 2006). Hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of armed conflict during the past 11 years are scattered in different parts of Nepal. The main reason of the displacement was actual or perceived security risk.

People left their place of residence because of fear of general violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters and crossing an international border are considered as refugees and can claim protection and assistance under the 1951 Refugee Convention and can approach to UNHCR for help. However, IDPs have no such privilege and therefore they have to depend on their governments for the protection and assistance. Regrettably, often the governments either ignore or lack means to support and protect IDPs. Consequently, large numbers of IDPs remain at high risk of abuses, violence, malnutrition, diseases and stress, as observed in Sri Lanka (Brun, 2003), Nepal (Duijn, 2003; Tamang and Johan, 2006) and other many conflict ridden countries (Curtis, 2001; Leux *et al*, 2000).

3. Relationship between armed conflict and environment

This section briefly discusses the relationship between armed conflict and environment and its effects on environmental sanitation and health of IDPs staying in urban areas of Kathmandu valley, a capital city of the Nepal.

3.1 Environmental causes of the armed conflict

There are several environmental causes of the armed conflict in Nepal. Some of the main environmental causes of the conflict are unequal and power-centric distribution of available resources; irrational exploitation and pressure on scarce environmental or natural resources; and weak environmental governance practices.

Based on the empirical evidences, the paper argues that poor environmental sanitation and health of IDP is directly linked with environmental stress and population factors, which have played significant roles in creating underlying conditions for the armed conflict. Hence, the degrading environmental situation of Kathmandu valley and poor health and sanitation conditions of IDP are directly connected and affecting each other.

The decade long armed conflict was the outcome of combination of wide range of structural and proximate causes. However, structural causes of inequalities, injustice and discriminations are closely related to the access to and control over of the environmental and natural resources. In the following section, this paper discusses only the natural resources and environmental causes of the armed conflict:

3.1.1 Unequal and power-cantered distribution of available natural resources,

Among the production resources, land is fundamental means of livelihoods of Nepalese people. It is also a basic means of social status, which further provides basis for securing other rights such as citizenship, eligible for loans from the banks, registration of childbirth, etc. If people are landless they not only loses means of their livelihoods but also deprived from enjoying other rights and entitlements. Therefore, land is centrally connected to access of other natural resources such as agriculture, forest and water.

Table 1, Land distribution situation in Nepal

The Table 1 demonstrates a general land ownership situation in Nepal. More than 24 percent people are landless and another 6.98 percent people are semi-landless. When more than 30 percent of the population of subsistence agriculture-based country is landless, they face livelihood insecurity and when state fails to provide means of their survival they frustrate with the state and some of them take arms. Landless people are often disconnected from forest and water resources because of their management and use are associated with land. The state should have addressed this problem to minimise their frustration, a source of conflict. Series of the rallies and mass protests in different parts of the country organised by tenants, landless, squatters and ex-bonded labours are the glaring evidence of their frustration. When people feel ignored, neglected, or victimised by the state, they get organised and start protest to demand their rights. This is one of the perennial sources of conflict and instability in Nepal. In addition to land, similar inequalities can be observed in access to and control over of forest and water. In forest, threat to forest-based livelihoods of poorest, lack of decision making role of poor, women are common. In case of water, privatisation of water and higher user fees, irrigation water linked with land ownership, access of drinking water strongly linked with social status are excluding poor and marginal people from access to water resource.

Previous study (Seddon and Hussein, 2002) shows that in rural areas 20 percent people are wealthy landowners and peasants and remaining 80 percent people experiences livelihood insecurity and risks. The lives and livelihoods of women, girls and children are more threatened from the conflict, as they live in chronic poverty and social insecurity. Livelihoods of poor, marginalized and socially excluded people of Nepal involve a constant struggle for their survival because of lack of their control over and access to productive resources, weak social capital and networks, lack of stable or regular source of income, etc. (Upreti, 2006; Seddon and Hussein, 2002). The extremely poor people entirely rely on casual or daily wage labour for their survival, which is also severely disturbed by the conflict. Exploitation and social discriminations are forcing poor people for deprivation and indebtedness. Livelihood insecurity of poor people is further aggravated by the armed conflict (Upreti, 2006; UNDP, 2004). All these factors are directly causing health and sanitation related problems to poor and IDPs.

3.1.2 Irrational exploitation and pressure on scarce environmental or natural resources,

When there is greater control on natural resources by small section of society and other large section has to depend on limited amount of available resource there is always competition. When some people gain more and other have to suffer, feeling of injustice develops. The land ownership pattern presented in the table 1 clearly demonstrates that the unequal distribution of land and land based resources not only threatened the livelihoods of people but also excluded from access to other resources and implanted feeling of injustice. The insurgents tactfully capitalize this feeling and gained sympathy of the exploited people. The state was simply not able or unwilling to address the concerns of poor and marginalized people (Upreti, 2004a and 2004c).

Local dynamics of resource use patterns are entirely shaped by power relations. The winners take all' model is common, as local elites hold almost all production resources and exploit poor and marginalized section of society. Inequitable use of natural resources by powerful elites of village is depriving poor people. For example, it is almost impossible for poor and marginalised people to get irrigation water in dry summer before the local elites. Further, exploitation is not limited to physical resources. From the conflict perspective, irrational exploitation of human resources is a major cause of the armed conflict.

3.1.3 Weak environmental governance systems

Previous studies of the author of this paper (Upreti, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d and 2004e) demonstrate that, despite the several claims of the government, environmental and resource governance principles, processes and practices are extremely top-down, elite-centric, non-transparent and corrupt. Government is inherently weak in mainstreaming and ensuring environmental/ecological issues and concerns in policies and plans, laws and regulations, strategies and decisions and actual actions at different levels within a good governance framework (i.e., consensus oriented, participatory, guided by rule of law, effective and efficient, accountable and transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive). Further, natural resource governance became almost dysfunctional during the time of armed conflict.

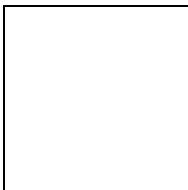
3.2 Impacts of armed conflict on environmental sanitation and health

The respondents shared their view that there are several consequences of the armed insurgency on their surroundings, sanitation and health and livelihood while they are staying in the slums of Kathmandu valley

Most of the respondent IDPs explained that they are suffering from lack of food, health facilities, enough drinking water and sanitation, legal and other physical protection. They are not able to exercise their economic, civil and political rights in the settlement. Particularly elderly, children and women are suffering from lack of food and nutrients, medical facilities, drinking water and sanitations. They had further explained that the IDPs in the study area are facing severe harassments and problems from the municipality authority and local host communities.

Shelter was one of the serious health related problems observed in the study settlement. Several small, closely attached dark thatches with congested spaces are illegally constructed in the bank of rivers, without having access to electricity, drinking water and public spaces. All of them are unsafe, as they are simply erected in fragile edges of the both sides of the river banks. There are no proper ventilations in the houses, extremely congested spaces and no toilet facilities.

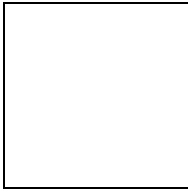
The pressure of IDPs is beyond the carrying capacity⁹ of settlement area, in terms of ecological services, open space and physical requirements because of their heavy concentration in small fragile area.



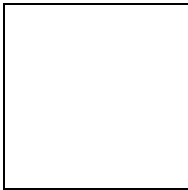
The settlement area has faced real problem of collection, management and disposal of solid and liquid waste. They dispose waste in the Bagmati River and polluting the already polluted river. The Bagmati River becomes almost dead in the dry season and remains centre of waste disposal. Public frequently complained that the IDPs are responsible for pollution within and the surrounding areas of settlement and nearby communities.

Settlement is too dirty and no one is interested to clean up it. The residents are not concerned with sanitation, health hazards and pollution in their areas. They simply ignore it (see photographs for the IDP situation in the settlement).

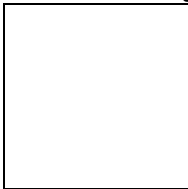
⁹ The study site is small open areas in the both sides of Bagmati river bank, which can not sustain the existing number of population of IDPs.



Energy difficulties: As settlement is being in city, they have to rely on electricity. However, they are not allowed to use electricity because of illegal settlement status. Ultimately they use it illegally by connected directly from the transfer lines, which is extremely risky. Such practices invite potential electric shocks, fire and other health hazards. ,



Security tension: There are continuous tensions between local host communities and IDPs. Local people expressed that the petty thefts, gang fights, rapes, assaults and insecurity has sharply increased in the areas once the IDPs came and settled in the river bank. One local people¹⁰ from the host community said, *"We are facing real security threats from the IDPs, I stopped waling from the settlement areas in early morning and evening. Numerous looting, grabbing of purses, watches and looting are occurring weekly. My house was theft twice. Police are not able to control these crimes. Rather some of the police officers are helping them and getting share from the earning of criminals. Women and girls have completely stopped passing through the settlement areas. Until the illegal settlements of IDPs are dismantled and removed them from the Bagmati River bank and settle them in other areas, we do not feel safe".*



The buildings and spaces inside are too congested. Some families are also keeping pigs and poultry inside the house. There is possibility of transmission of disease from animals to human beings.

The population in the settlement is seriously lacking availability of adequate safe drinking water. The Drinking water supply office has not allowed the IDPs to access the water from its supply system. Hence, some of the IDPs have illegally punctured the water supply pipes and obtained the water. Others placed boring pumps to get water. However, the water pumped from the shallow boring is highly suspected as contaminated from the polluted water of the Bagmati River. Children are severely exposed with the pollution as they play in the polluted water of Bagmati River.

The IDPs are facing problem of accessing basic services such as health and education, and legal protection because of lack of their legal status. Extremely poor sanitation facilities and lack of toilets, direct disposal of human excreta and other solid and liquid waste in Bagmati River have frequently caused various diseases such as frequent diarrhoea, dysentery, fever, jaundice, etc. Similarly, they are also not able to access to social benefits provided by the state or municipality. Their traditional cultural values were threatened in the new settlement areas because they were not able to exercise these cultures.

¹⁰ Interviewed by the author on 20 May 2007.

The settlement has also serious environmental problems because of destruction of vegetation cover, loss of bio-diversity, soil erosion, damage of ecosystem functioning and pollution of the river and surroundings.

The respondents frequently reported that they are suffering from large number of rats and public health officials said that increased number of rats serve as disease carrying vector. However, the IDPs do not know about disease carrying vector and therefore they do not bother. Large numbers of poorly managed pig and poultry are also polluting in the settlement areas and disrupting local environment.

There are several health and sanitation related issues and problems of the IDPs in the study site. If these problems are not solved, not only the IDPs will face a grave humanitarian crisis but also the degradation of environmental service and social tension is eminent. The Liberian experiences documented by UNEP (2006) reveals that if these issues are not addressed promptly, it could lead to huge environmental and social problems. Hence, urgent attention is needed to address the health and sanitation problems faced by IDPs and their long term rehabilitation.

The IDPs explained that displacement has made them poor and vulnerable because of their inability to meet their basic needs. Hence, they are facing severe impoverishment and suffering from societal stigmas, political restrictions, limited economic and wage-earning opportunity, insufficient access to required resources for basic needs and inadequate assistance. Consequently, displaced people exhibit disproportionately high levels of malnourishment, disease affliction, physical stunting and wasting, illiteracy and innumeracy, morbidity and mortality. They are highly vulnerable; once they are not able to get legal protection from the state. This case study indicates that risk, uncertainty and vulnerability are integral part of IDP. In an interview one leader of IDP stated, *"Once, we suffer from livelihood insecurity and psychological tensions, environmental and health considerations are secondary for us. Our first and foremost priority is to gain dignity, safe return home and re-establish normal life"*¹¹

3.3 Livelihood insecurities, coping strategies and stresses

The displaced people were unable to meet their basic livelihood requirements because of dissociated from their farming as existing means of livelihoods. They have faced severe impoverishment because of societal stigmas, political restrictions, limited economic and wage-earning potential, insufficient access to necessary resources and inadequate assistance. Consequently, they exhibit disproportionately high levels of malnourishment, disease affliction, physical stunting.

In the study area, main livelihood basis of IDPs is wage labour. Some of them work as street vendors; others work as skill labour in building construction. Some of them are engaged in poultry farming, pig farming and retail shop, and others are washing dishes in reach people's houses in the neighbourhood to sustain their livelihood.

The case study reveals that when IDPs left their homes either by force or voluntarily, their social relations with their neighbours, friends or relatives were severely disrupted. In such a situation, a deep grief and even trauma are common (Orner, and Schnyder, 2003).

Those IDPs who had better living conditions, prestige, name and fame, dignified lives in their native places have to leave with nothing but uncertain and helpless future pose them severe psychological stress. Once there is forceful move from dignified life to harsh condition, that incurs huge psychological loss to any individual (Palmer, 2002). The respondents expressed that it is more painful when responsible bodies such as government officials, political parties and organisations engaged in IDP issues ignore their problems. Often they are treated badly by the government as well as the host community. Local people blame them as

¹¹ Interviewed on 2 June 2007 in the settlement area. Upon his request his name is not stated in the paper.

land encroachers and source of insecurity. Therefore, IDPs are more frustrated and felt psychologically stressed from the behaviours of government staff and community members. Some of the respondents said that they felt insulted, humiliated and forced to think of suicide from the behaviour of the KMC, government and host communities.

Human rights organisations are raising concerns of abuses of human rights, economic and political rights of IDPs (INSEC, 2005 and 2006; IA, 2005a and 2005b). One of the main concerns of IDPs in Nepal is protection of civil, economic and political rights and ensuring justices. Protection of displaced people is undermined in Nepal in the context of insurgency and counter insurgency campaigns. They are victims of attacks by rebel groups as well as security forces. In Nepal, the rights of displaced populations are ignored.

The freedom of movement is one of the central rights in relation to internal displacement¹². The implementation of the freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence is especially important. Once people are internally displaced, their rights to return voluntarily and in safety to their place of residence must be guaranteed. However, IDP situation in Nepal clearly demonstrates that the rights of IDPs to return their homes are largely ignored at the policy level. Even after the 9 months of signing of the CPA, the provisions related IDPs stated in the agreement are not translated into action.

IDPs have deep feeling of injustices. Reconciliation is important first step to cure feeling of injustice and reintegrate them in society (Dhakal, 2004; ICG, 2005; ICRC, 2005; IDD, 2005; Upadhaya, 2006). The famous saying of Nelson Mandela 'we forgive but not forget' is a basis of reconciliation for IDPs. However, the GoN is not yet serious to engage in reconciliation. The provision of Truth and Reconciliation Commission stipulated in the CPA has not yet formed.

IDPs have often left their property including house and land. Land is a major source of livelihood of the IDPs in Nepal and often their lands are either uncultivated or captured by others. As land being main source livelihoods, regaining the land and cultivation is main concern to secure their source of subsistence. Ensuring full access of their land and possession is important step in the process of reconciliation, reintegration and rehabilitation (Upreti, 2006; Aditya *et al.*, 2006). The CPA has made provision of returning the ceased lands and property of people by CPN (M) but it has not yet fully implemented.

As many IDPs in Nepal are staying with their relatives, and depending with other people and only very few are residing in camps, depending with others makes them socially and psychologically insecure and vulnerable (Adhikari, 2006, Upadhaya, 2006). This feeling further strengthens once they found negative attitudes of hosts, government and other organisations working in the issues of IDPs. It is also observed that many displaced people are hesitant to return in their homes because they loss their property, houses, business. They feel insecure to return. Some of the IDPs are workers of ruling political parties and getting regular financial supports from GoN, I/NGOs sources by using their party's power and influences and therefore they do not want to return back home. Interestingly, it was frequently reported in the media that some IDP leaders supported by influential political parties are earning millions of rupees in the name of IDPs from donors and INGOs and used for personal benefit. Hence, the IDP issue is a highly politicised subject in Nepal and IDPs are used to undermine political opponents (by both CMN-M and the other big political parties).

Experiences of different conflict-ridden countries show that IDPs face several problems when they return in their community (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2006). Some time, they are perceived as supporters of the 'enemy', by the influential party in the community. In such a situation, they face continuous risks and threats. A hostile environment after their return to home/community can expose to physical violence, capturing of their land and houses or persistent discrimination (UNHCR, 1997). Unless confidence and security are

¹² Guiding Principle for Internally Displaced Persons, 2001, OCHA of United Nations.

restored, the situation remains in a state of social instability. Reconciliation and confidence-building measures are therefore important elements in any attempt to achieve lasting solutions of IDPs (Orner and Schnyder, 2003).

For the children, family is the most basic unit of protection and a cornerstone of psychosocial support. When the children are involved, family members who are separated by displacement should be reunited as quickly as possible in accordance with Principle 17(3). In this process, children who are separated from family members need to be registered to facilitate tracing for reunification. Children need to be sheltered, cared and safeguarded against potential risks of trafficking and military recruitment (MacCormack, 2003; Norwegian Refugee Council-Global IDP Project, 2006). However, so far GoN is almost indifferent in this issue. Despite the continuous pressure from child rights activists and human rights organisations GoN has not taken further steps.

IDP rehabilitation and recovery process seeks to prioritise interventions focusing on the psychosocial needs that arise in a situation of crisis. Psychosocial needs and problems refers to those problems and needs that have a psychological (referring to emotions, behaviour, cognition and individual coping resources) and a social (referring to the support mechanisms necessary for a collective coping process) origin (Palmer, 2002). In contrary, the IDP situation in Nepal reveals that neither psychological nor social concerns are taken into proper consideration (Terres des Homes Nepal, 2005; Khatiwoda, 2004; Duijn, 2003; Dhakal, 2004, IDD, 2005; Adhikari, 2006). Political parties always look problem from vested political interests and IDP problem is not an exception. This attitude of the political parties of the current coalition government is core resisting block to resolve the IDPs problem.

Rehabilitation is one of the important elements of the long term management of IDPs and making peace process successful (Upreti, 2006). It is not only a question of the infrastructure, but also a matter of reaching out to the hearts and minds of people for reconciliation (Burn, 2003; Curtis, 2001; Deng, 1999, 2001 and 2004). Long term social and economic development, immediate needs and rehabilitation programmes must be envisioned to foster social cohesion, solidarity, tolerance and encouragement and maintenance of cultural, ethnic and religious diversities (Gomez, 2002; Holtzman and Nezam, 2004; ICRC, 2005; Leux *et al.*, 2002). Once, the political and security situation eventually allows IDPs to return home, they often encounter with ruined property and infrastructure, lack of resource to meet the basic needs, as well as need for health, sanitation and education, livestock rearing, equipment and seeds for agriculture and lack of employment options. Consequently, they fall into a cycle of debilitating poverty (Orner and Schnyder, 2003; Moore and Shellman, 2002; Phuong, 2003). However, the Government of Nepal is not giving priority to rehabilitate IDPs even after the 9 months of signing of the CPA.

Return of displaced people can be viable only when conditions for their dignity and safety are assured that include protection of their social, cultural and political rights, return of their assets and properties they lost and ensure appropriate state help for resettlement and rehabilitation¹³ (ICRC, 2005; SCF-US, 2005; Sinclair, 2002; OCHA, 2003). But while examining the ongoing activities of the government and the coalition partners in the interim government (main political parties) it is hard to find encouraging progress. Politicisation of peace process and IDP is a glaring reality.

While managing IDPs, often, relief and reconstruction efforts are focused on providing immediate shelter (ICRC, 2005). Reconstruction and relief interventions are essential for desperate IDPs who need immediate shelter and food. However, there should be long-term strategies focused on determination and implementation of realistic and permanent reconstruction plans for affected communities, tie up with rebuilding community confidence and support structures for local responsibility through participatory planning of reconstruction processes (Phuong, 2003; Leux *et al.*, 2000).

¹³ See <http://www.icrc.org/> for detail.

The situation of the case study area in specific and IDP situation of Nepal in general demonstrate that IDP support should include not only food, non-food items, medicines and shelter but also measures to ensure physical safety and respect for human rights, including advising the government on drafting laws to protect specific rights of internally displaced persons, intervening to register the internally displaced, thereby entitling them to assistance, access to health care and education, as well as establishing monitoring mechanisms. Further, environmental health and sanitation should be integral part of the long term management and rehabilitation of IDPs.

3.4 Vulnerability and risks in new urban environment

During the focused group discussions and interviews, most of the IDPs expressed that they are suffered from lack of enough means of livelihood, exhausted, traumatized. They are separated from their community or family. They have no physical security or the necessary basis for subsistence. They live in bank of Bagmati rivers with full off insecurity, uncertainty and hardships. Because of this situation, they are highly vulnerable and in high risk.

It was observed in the case study site that serious psychological problems and stress are part of the daily life of IDPs. Most common problems observed were a) Feeling of isolation, frustration and helplessness, b) Emotional and psychological stress; and c) Feeling of revenge and retaliation. The condition of children is worst in terms of sanitation, basic health and access to education as most of them are not enrolled in school and consequently excluded from their right to health and education.

Elderly, children and women IDPs expressed their frustration, feeling of isolation and helplessness because of the human insecurities such as destruction or discontinuity in livelihoods, separating from their means of production, severe restrictions on mobility, disruption of social relations, hungry, lacking proper shelter and enough clothing, sick and children missing school. Their normal life is disturbed because of the separation from relatives and friends, lose of property and possession. IDPs frequently encounter emotional and psychological stress and trauma (Upreti, 2006). All these emotional and psychological aspects have contributed to develop feeling of revenge and retaliation in some IDPs, which can be perennial source of conflict and tension in society and threat to ongoing peace process.

The IDP respondents of the in-depth interviews explained that they have always felt risks and uncertainties. They are worry and thinking on: what happens to their property and possession, when to regain them, what government does to assist them, when and how to re-establish relations became always unpredictable and uncertain. This situation forced IDPs to continue their life with full of uncertainty, insecurity and vulnerability.

Once displacement is longer, it develops a situation of chronic insecurity and poverty, lack of opportunity for economic and social integration. Consequently, IDPs develop a very high sense of dependency and feeling of uncertainty and helplessness. In such situation, IDPs do not know exactly what to do and often they wait for the government and aid agencies to decide their fate.

Experiences of other countries with IDPs show that IDPs are often excluded from participating in the political process as well as employment opportunities, unable to manage their property, face harsh travel restrictions (Phuong, 2003; Moore and Shellman, 2002). They are socially excluded and face a heightened risk of sexual and physical violence. They are afforded limited access to education and healthcare. IDPs face impoverishment and destitution as a way of life¹⁴ (Burn, 2002; Gomez, 2002; Holtz and Nezam, 2004; Sinclair, 2001).

¹⁴ See <http://www.fmreview.org/text/FMR/15/01.htm> for detail

Recalling his past situation in the home village one respondent said, *"When we were living in our home area, we had greater mutual trust, cooperation in our community. All were ready to help each others for any individual and communal affairs. We had social safety-nets, mutual support and stronger tie among the villagers. We had developed resilience capacity in the difficult circumstances. But when we left our communities, all these networks, solidarity mechanisms and social capital have been broken and now we are facing such a grave situation¹⁵".* The work of MacCormack (2003) and Ormer and Schnyder (2003) in different countries has also demonstrated similar situation of IDPs. It is common elsewhere that in the situation of displacement, there is not only hard to get basic needs and safety but also IDPs expose to life threatening experiences, the tolerance ability of IDPs deteriorates and chance of suffering from psychological trauma including depression, frustration, pessimism, uncertainty, helplessness and hopelessness increases.

It is observed in the study area that IDPs are highly vulnerable and impoverished. They are suffering from discrimination. They are experiencing significant deprivation and marginalization, loss of economic opportunities, breakdown of cultural identity, loosening of social and familial structures. The children face interruption of schooling. They also suffer from increased poverty levels.

3.5 Policy response of the state towards IDP

The problems of IDPs are not yet taken seriously by the government of Nepal. It was an urgent need to address physical, social, cultural disruptions and livelihoods insecurities faced by IDPs. Providing lip-service and uncoordinated, unplanned small occasional relief in a biased manner (giving only to the victim of one side) can not address the widening problem of IDPs in Nepal. IDPs are in vicious circle of losing physical, social and emotional aspects of their live. Mere articulation of words of sympathy would not reduce the problems. The problems of IDPs are multidimensional in nature and therefore demand multidimensional solutions. Political, social, economic, environmental issues are attached with the displacement. Therefore, combination humanitarian components, security, special legal provisions as well as immediate and longer-term needs should be addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

Box 2. Some general measure for helping IDPs:

- Emphasis on long-term development and not just short term relief,
- Emphasis on respecting social and cultural context,
- Viewing traumatic experience as one of stress-inducing aspects of life, ,
- encouraging a view of problems and solutions as belonging to the collective community
- Promoting reconciliation and reunion among separated members,
- Addressing community prejudices and misconceptions about youth soldiers
- Creating a mechanism at communities to advocate for the needs of its children and youth
- Increasing community resources, facilities, and capacity to care for the returning people
- Training all concerned stakeholders to deal with the special needs of ex-combatants
- Rebuild needed infrastructures including education and health
- Train people to deal with the special needs of ex-child and young adult soldiers

Currently the government, particularly the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction has developed policy on IDPs. However, the government has yet to arrange instructional mechanisms, regulatory framework and operational procedures in translating policy into action and to address the IDP issues. All what the government is occasionally doing on IDP so far is paying some money to return home. However, it is ad-

¹⁵ Interviewed on 2 June 2007 in the settlement area.

hoc, incomplete, biased and consequently controversial. Responsibility for managing IDPs primarily goes with government and local authorities. Disturbingly, however, IDPs find themselves in a vacuum of responsibility within the state and politicised for the vested political interests of powerful political parties.

Although government is primarily responsible for the welfare of IDPs, in the past few years the government has indicated that it is unwilling to take responsibility. The IDPs are separated from their normal support systems and mostly without identity paper issued by the CDOs of their respective districts, which is required to get small relief assistance from government or NGOs. Consequently they are unable to any formal assistance. This situation also making IDPs susceptible to arbitrary actions and all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, rape and recruitment into armed forces.

In principle, displaced people have the same rights as all other citizens. However, in practice, they face discrimination. In fact, they need special protection and attention during their displacement, return, resettlement or reintegration.

Regrettably, IDPs stem from the ongoing armed conflict are often perceived by the government as burden or added problem or even threat. In the past ten years the government is one of the belligerent forces in the armed conflict. In the past ten years history of the armed conflict, the Nepal government in the guise of security was creating terror and forcibly evicting or removing people from their home in the name of the supporters of the insurgents, ignoring the provisions of humanitarian law that prohibits the forcible removal of civilians from their residence. In the interaction with respondents, some victims of the state security force said that they had faced far more difficulties particularly when government's security forces viewed them as 'enemies of the state'. In dealing with IDPs, government during the past ten years of armed conflict did not respect international instruments such as the Geneva Conventions. Nepal was unwilling to meet its obligations under international laws (AI, 2005; INSEC, 2006).

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the GoN and CPN=M on 21 November 2006 made specific provision on IDP. Article 5.2.1 of the CPA states, *"Both parties express the commitment to allow without any political prejudice the people displaced due to the armed conflict to return back voluntarily to their respective ancestral or former residence, reconstruct the infrastructure destroyed during the conflict and rehabilitate and socialize the displaced people into the society"*. However, this provision is not translated into action. If this provision is translated into practice and if the CPA is honestly respected, it could provide greater scope for addressing concerns of IDPs and helping to deal with the environmental health and sanitation problems associated with IDPs.

There is also urgent need to rehabilitate¹⁶ the Bagmati River bank by returning IDPs or settling them in proper manners in socially, economically and environmentally appropriate places. However, environmental dimension in IDPs mass settlements and camps is largely ignored so far that lead to crisis in terms of ability of these areas to sustain basic ecological and environmental services.

Immediate actions needed from the state, the municipality and the host communities to address environmental sanitation and health related problems of IDPs:

- Initiative environmental awareness campaign,
- Establish environmentally sound support service (follow UNHCR's Environmental Guidelines, 1996 and 2005),
- Devise and operate proper monitoring service,
- Develop and implement environmental rehabilitation plan and action,
- Provide proper waste management support to IDP communities and local people,
- Supply of safe drinking water,

¹⁶ Rehabilitation is a full or at least partial restoration of degraded landscape and impaired ecosystem services to their stage prior to the arrival of IDPs.

- Support in return and reintegration of IDPs.

4. Conclusions

Displacement leads to adverse social and psychological consequences to the displaced people. As displacement are rooted in the social and economic inequities and psychological dimension attached to it, remedies for IDPs should also come from broad social policies tied with the strategies for addressing root causes of the conflict, which address psychological aspect of exclusion and injustice.

As IDPs are pushed out of their homes and forced to live in an alien place, often they have no control over their lives, they become victims to acute depression that exacerbates their trauma¹⁷. Their sense of powerlessness leads to increased despair, melancholia extreme loneliness and greater distress.

Emotional and moral supports obtained by IDPS within a secure social setting dismantle when they have to separate from families, relatives and friends and seek refuge in different places. The displaced life demoralizes them and affects them physically, physiologically, socially and psychologically. Displacement disrupts social services and social relations; results in a loss or destruction of property and erosion of a person's social identity.

The decade long armed conflict has created several negative impacts on health and sanitation, space and services such as education, drinking water and of IDPs staying in Kathmandu valley. Most of the negative environmental impacts are grounded in the governance problems, social and economic inequalities and environmental injustice and linked with the IDPs. Therefore, mitigating negative environmental impacts in urban areas and improving health and sanitation of IDP requires addressing underlying causes of environmental degradation. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed by the Government of Nepal and the CPN (M) on 21 November 2006 has opened avenue for addressing negative environmental impacts in Nepal.

Displacement is a social phenomenon that requires preventive strategies within the framework of human security that addresses the main causes of conflicts and displacement of individuals and groups. Social and economic development is the only means to avoid IDPs subjugation or permanent dependency on humanitarian assistance.

Environmental health and sanitation is one of the fundamental but often overlooked factors in dealing with IDP issues. Only attempting to deal with IDP issues based on the existing laws and regulations does not work in IDPs case. For example, if Electricity Authority had supplied electricity and Drinking Water Supply Office had given potable drinking water service, the health and sanitation problem in the IDP settlement would not be so serious. But the state authority responsible for drinking water or electricity took very controlling attitude instead of helping or supporting IDPs and that had ultimately resulted in more health and environmental sanitation related problems.

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¹⁷ http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch20_voices.htm

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