

CHILD PROTECTION BULLETIN

STATE CHILD
PROTECTION
SOCIETY, ASSAM

MONTHLY BULLETIN OF ACTIVITIES CONCERNING CHILD PROTECTION IN ASSAM

EDITORIAL

Assam has a repeated history of genocide in the name of ethnic cleansing. Whatever may be the justification for such an act, it is unacceptable. When such kind of tragedies erupts, the whole community gets paralyzed along with their families. The children and women become the easiest target. It is seen that the children are strayed and become even more vulnerable to other circumstances like abuse, trafficking, etc. Therefore, children require an extra eye for protection when such calamities occur.

Children may be adversely affected regardless of whether they are victims or witnesses. Research has shown that exposure to community violence may have enduring consequences on children's development, beginning in the pre-school years and continuing through adolescence. It has also been demonstrated that children who witness community violence are likely to develop a view of the world that is hostile and dangerous. Therefore, a collective effort to bring about a solution through proper care and protection of children will bear a positive result.

This month's news bulletin is on violence affected children in the recent carnage that took place in Assam. Several talking points have been highlighted in the issue, which needs to be carried forward for better development, protection and care of our children.

Editorial Board,
State Child Protection Society, Assam

CARCASSES OF HUNDRED BROKEN DREAMS....



How safe are our children? This pertinent question constantly hovers around my mind often. Have we been successful to create safer spaces for them? We must delve deeper into these questions and introspect our actions and words to find honest answers.

The recent floods and militant attacks in the state have created havoc in the lives of thousands of people living in those areas and in the vicinity of the affected regions. While reaching out to the victims of the devastating floods in the month of October 2014 in Goalpara district, the blank eyes of the children haunted me for quite some days. The desperation of a parent to get that one packet of biscuit and water for his child was something which is beyond explainable words. The weeping swollen eyes of a mother consoling her small girl of 6 years to wait for food in a makeshift camp in Sonitpur district are witnesses of how miserably we have failed to secure a world full of possibilities for our children.

Tracing India's multi scale development in this era of post modern world, no doubt it has emerged as one of the world's leading economies but when it comes to dealing with the deep rooted social evils of child protection, somewhere all efforts boil down near zero. The nation sure does have adequate laws in place to deal with manifold issues of child labour, crimes committed by juveniles or crimes committed on juveniles, policies and schemes on holistic development of a growing child but the implementation of such acts have to be strengthened further more. For e.g. The Juvenile Justice Act of 2000 calls for instituting a special police force to deal with cases of juvenile and have child friendly courts to process cases of juveniles but how far has it been implemented in our state is a big question in itself to think over and answer. Together with the laws, it has to be ensured that the loopholes are dealt with and the structural implementation measures are at place.

Another perennial problem is the rampant corruption across all systems. Interacting with some children going to Government schools, I learnt that how only rice and lentils is provided to them for lunch all days in a week which is otherwise supposed to be a flagship program named Mid-Day meal scheme that

seeks to address nutritional needs of a growing child and ensures adequate nutrition to be provided to all school going children. The question here is, who do we blame?

Amidst such sad instances and depressing incidents, there are positive things happening within the systems as well. There are brilliant examples of schools that provide excellent quality and variety of food in their mid day meal menu. A visit to Bal Bhawan would enthrall every visitor when they see small children dancing to the beats of table and taking guitar lessons.

The bone of contention in this context of child protection is how we ensure safety and security of every child who is forced to live in camps and are victims of conflicts. In such situations, they are exposed to various vulnerabilities resulting in heinous crimes like human trafficking, child labour etc and also are the worst sufferers in terms of losing out on education, living in constant fear and insecurity which might result into psychological disorders in their later lives. The children living in such conflict situations need special care and protective measures which every individual in the society has to take the onus of delivering it and ensure speedy interventions to meet such specific needs. It's easier to admonish anything and everything by blaming it on the lackadaisical attitude of the government but the encumbrance of creating a healthy

tomorrow for our budding generation lies equally on every citizen which is possible only if everyone, willingly, involves himself or herself to ensure that every child in the home or in the street receives equal and proper care.

During times of conflict, special care has to be taken so that the vulnerabilities does not result in a child losing out on his/hers dream and is forced to be a child labour or be a victim of human trafficking or is forced into flesh trade. Along with immediate relief, long term rehabilitation measures also has to be looked at considering the fact that the major sources of livelihoods are lost by the families who are currently living in camps and are victims of such conflicts. The entire process of rehabilitation and restoration has to be a speedy process which is substantiated in the grass roots and not just lost in paper works within the premises of the offices.

It is only through collective consciousness and determination to work for child rights that we can boast about development as the child is the torch bearer of a beautiful dream of tomorrow. Until then we all shall have to bear the brunt of burying down the carcasses of the broken dreams.

Megha Kashyap

Social Worker

Violence affected Children: A Report

From the lessons of bygone days, the agony that were left behind only tell us that senseless violence gives us nothing but shatters our lives with induced hatred. It severely affects the livelihood of a family and depriving them of the basic needs for sustenance. It blocks access to basic services such as education and healthcare. Armed violence has a substantial impact on the health of populations and hampers social and economic development.

Assam Commission for Protection of Child Rights visited the following 4 relief camps in Kokrajhar district:

Sub-division	Name of the School which were converted to relief camps	Relief Camp housing specific community
Kokrajhar	1. Patgaon High School Camp;	Adivasi
	2. Shankardev School Camp, Patgaon;	Adivasi
Gossaigaon	3. Kochugaon High School Camp;	Adivasi
	4. Basugaon High School Camp	Bodo

Observations of the Commission from the field visit:

The Commission observed the conditions under which children were living in the relief camps. Children, by reason of their tender age, are the most vulnerable and therefore the worst affected in any kind of violence. The children living in the relief camps, under the relevant provisions of Section 2(d) of the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2000-Amended 2006, can be categorized as "Children in need of care and protection" and therefore are in need of immediate care, protective and rehabilitative interventions.

Following the visit, the Commission, made the following general observations to share with the concerned authorities and the Government of Assam:

1) Status of management of the Camps and its condition: Till the day of visit in none of the 4 Camps visited by the Commission, any measure was undertaken by the District and/or BTAD authorities to set up a structured Camp Management Committee. Due to the absence of such a Committee, the accurate list of the total number of residents taking refuge in the relief camps was not available. Large number of people from 2

nearby villages kept pouring into camps without any organized system of registration. It is absolutely necessary to prepare an age specific register of children (0 to 18 years) staying in the camps, so that necessary age relevant assistance can be provided by the agencies responsible for protecting such children in distress.

2) Status of relief work in the camps: At the time of the visit, the Commission noticed that the progress of relief work catering particularly to the relief camps was slow and much below the required needs. People were seen lying down on the floors of the relief camps, without adequate warm clothing or blankets. As observed, the authorities had failed to provide adequate number of warm clothes, food items or requisites for installing makeshift tents to the affected families.

The concerned authority failed to make necessary provisions for mothers of children who need exclusive breast feeding and basic amenities for babies and young children who need winter clothing at such a time of the year.

3) Status of child specific intervention: It was observed that children were loitering around the relief camp areas without any supervision. Most importantly, children were exposed to the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) upon seeing their parents, siblings and near ones killed, injured and/or involved in violent activities. It was disheartening to observe that there were so many pregnant/lactating mothers in the camps without much amenities for care of the infants and the pregnant/lactating mothers. As mentioned above, no specialized and emergency care for infants and pregnant women were available in the camps, which should have been the priority in the relief camps.

4) Status of Health Care: The relief camps had no Health Care facility whatsoever. The 4 relief Camps were providing shelter to an estimated 7000 children of various ages, including infants ranging from two weeks to one month old. There were pregnant and lactating Mothers with children below the age of 6. The Commission found out that many children were suffering from fever and illnesses due to cold weather conditions. However, till 27th of December 2014, not a single child specialist (Pediatricians) had visited the Camps to address the health issues of children or to provide them with necessary medical assistance. As per verbal reports received from the relief camp residents, no one from the Health Department had visited the mentioned 4 camps to assess the health status and provide assistance to children, lactating mothers and pregnant women. In fact, the Kochugaon Camp reported a birth of a child inside the camp premises due to lack of immediate medical attention. Similarly, the Basugaon Camp reported the death of an infant due to the absence of medical intervention.

5) Status of water and sanitation: All the 4 aforementioned camps lacked adequate space to house thousands of people coming from remote villages out of fear and anxiety. Adequate provisions of safe drinking water were completely unavailable. People were seen defecating in open space. Such unhygienic conditions would adversely affect the health of children living in the camps. There were even reports of residents not being able to bathe for 3 days.

Recommendations

Armed violence or ethnic conflict is not new to Assam. The BTAD Districts have, for years, borne the brunt of one of other forms of violence. The area and its people have witnessed a history of human causalities. Children living in these areas, by reason of their tender age, are the worst affected. The well-being and development of children gets severely derailed in an atmosphere of conflict and violence. Under an assault, such as the one that was unleashed by the NDFB (S) in BTAD and Sonitpur districts, children lost their lives, some were orphaned and many others have to live in constant trauma and fear inside the makeshift arrangement of relief camps. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the Government to have emergency preparedness to protect children, living in conflict areas that are or are likely to be victims of violence.

In coherence with the Constitutional mandates, the provisions of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and the specialized legislations the Government must do its best to provide protection to children who are "in need of care and protection."

The Commission after reviewing the situation in the camps recommended the following:

- ◆ Camp Management Committees should be formed immediately after establishment of a relief camp to facilitate & monitor the progress of relief work in the camps. A magistrate, DSWO, DCPO, CDPO, ICDS Supervisors, Anganwadi workers, Teachers, Siksha Karmi or Local youth club could be deployed for the same. There should be a proper age wise list of children taking shelter in the Camps. A separate list of pregnant and lactating mothers should also be prepared by the Committees.
- ◆ Anganwadi Workers, Supervisors and CDPOs under ICDS projects mandatorily should visit relief camps and should make a survey on children, focusing on health, psychological issues and needs faced by children and pregnant women. Sarba Siksha Abhiyan Mission officials should also visit and take the educational status of children and provide basic counseling by trained teachers. Anganwadi workers, teachers and Siksha Karmis should attend the children in an attempt to keep them engaged throughout the day while diverting their attention from the atmosphere of fear and anxiety.
- ◆ All the concerned Govt Department like PHE, Health, Social Welfare, and Education must work in close collaboration and coordination to provide fruitful services to the victim children without delay.
- ◆ Child Specialists, with adequate number of trained health professionals, should visit the camps regularly from the date of establishment. Counseling sessions should be organized if necessary. A 24/7 medical team should be present in all relief camps with assistance from medical students. Generic medicines, rehydration salts should be made available.
- ◆ Every District Disaster management Authority should constitute a Specialized Committee, comprising of specialists from Health sector, Education, Police, Legal Service Authority, Psychology, Social Workers and Service Providers that can respond immediately to crisis. A State Level Specialized Committee is also needed to plan out emergency plan of action and draw up Standard Operating Procedures for the same. State Disaster management Authority can take progressive steps in this regard.
- ◆ The District Disaster Management Authority should conduct, from time to time, emergency drills with local communities, with assistance from social workers, to be prepared to face post conflict situations with more precision. District Administration in collaboration with CWC's and local NGO's are to push for the establishment of adequate children's homes and "fit institutions" in their respective District for providing rehabilitative support to children who are victims of conflict.
- ◆ The Commission also strongly recommends that Government should deliberate upon organized stay facilities for survivors in case of displacement rather than overcrowding schools and unsafe, unprotected locations.

The Commission strongly feels that a focus on the victims of armed violence should not result simply on a call for special services. Rather it should provide a mechanism that supports mainstreaming of efforts to address issues of health, education, protection, justice and disability, whilst providing a lens for a more specific focus where this can identify special needs or cast light on the limitations of existing provisions. Improving services for victims of armed violence across areas of health, justice and social inclusion requires long-term commitment. Responding to the rights and needs of victims of armed violence provides a morally pressing basis for seeking improvements in vital services, and a focus around which partnerships for reform and wider development progress can be built.

Assam State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights
Guwahati

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Status Report on the functioning of the Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committees in Assam for the month of January 2015

Sl. No.	Districts	Juvenile Justice Boards			Child Welfare Committees		
		No. of cases instituted	No. of cases disposed	Total cases pending	No. of cases instituted	No. of cases disposed	Total cases pending
1	BAKSA	Cases are jointly dealt with Nalbari JJB			6	2	13
2	BONGAIGAON	7	3	37	32	32	5
3	BARPETA	5	4	98	1	0	3
4	CACHAR	0	2	72	6	3	8
5	CHIRANG	3	0	35	1	2	1
6	DARRANG	0	3	138	4	0	21
7	DHEMAMI	10	0	25	5	5	2
8	DHUBRI	5	8	179	2	3	12
9	DIBRUGARH	2	0	61	13	14	2
10	DIMA HASAO	0	0	3	0	0	1
11	GOALPARA	6	0	117	8	8	1
12	GOLAGHAT	6	5	29	3	2	5
13	HAILAKANDI	0	0	10	0	0	1
14	JORHAT	2	0	43	0	3	3
15	KAMRUP (M)	2	6	166	51	45	79
16	KAMRUP (R)	Cases are jointly dealt with Kamrup (M) JJB			0	1	15
17	KARBI ANGLONG	1	5	50	1	0	1
18	KARIMGANJ	1	0	55	1	0	10
19	KOKRAJHAR	10	8	165	1	3	6
20	LAKHIMPUR	1	5	27	4	5	34
21	MORIGAON	3	0	13	2	2	24
22	NAGAON	5	5	268	29	36	2
23	NALBARI	5	0	43	3	1	23
24	SONITPUR	1	2	133	2	2	37
25	SIBSAGAR	2	3	62	2	2	40
26	TINSUKIA	4	3	61	1	0	9
27	UDALGURI	0	0	19	3	3	18
Total		81	62	1909	181	174	376

Source: MIS Cell, SCPS, Assam

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