



Impact of Conflict on Children in Assam and Manipur States of India

Study done by

NERSWN: The Northeast Research & Social Work Networking, Kokrajhar



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Help for Children in Distress

Imprint

For Private Circulation Only

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Supported by

terre des hommes Germany – India Programme
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Acknowledgement

This study which is being titled as “Impact of Conflict on Children in Assam and Manipur States of India” is being conducted collectively by a team. In the state of Assam Ms. Ansumi Basumatary and Ms. Roshmi Rekha Burman both have carried out extensive data collection and in the state of Manipur, Mr. Adim Gonmei and Mr. Hawaibam Herojit Singh under the supervision of Dr. Komuha Jennifer have also accomplished a herculean task as it was really a challenging job to collect information from individuals and groups who are party to, as well as victims of conflict. My deepest gratitude and thankfulness to all of you. Dr. Komuha Jennifer, special thanks to you for being great source of help in each and every step of this study.

I must thank all the social workers, activists, scholars and all the respondents who have shared valuable information, time and energy without which, this study would not have been possible. Thank you all so much.

Mr. George Chirappurathu, Mr. Ralf Willinger, Ms. Mini Srinivasan & Mr. Athanasios Melissis of terre des hommes Germany, my sincerest gratitude and heartiest thanks to all of you for your continuous support, guidance and valuable inputs.

All my colleagues at North East Research & Social Work Networking (NERSWN) Kokrajhar for extending warm support and care throughout the journey of this study, thank you so much.

Last but not the least, Terre Des Hommes, Germany for supporting this project, which, at least has exposed the research team to such an important issue in the surroundings. Hopefully, this research report will find desired audience and readership thereby help realize its intended objectives.

Raju Kr. Narzary
Executive Director
NERSWN, Kokrajhar.

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Forewords

For a few decades past, the North-East India has continued to be a disturbed and violence ridden region of the country. The present study conducted by NERSWN, Kokrajhar, under the leadership of its executive director Sri Raju Kr. Narzary, has tried to show how seriously it is affecting the children of the region. Although the focus of the study is on children, the study also helps in understanding the overall situation of the region, generating violence and its disastrous effects. It is an eye-opener in many ways. I strongly recommend that the policy makers, public leaders - secular and religious and the civil society organisations should pay close attention to the analysis, findings and the recommendations this study contains.

The study has shown with adequate details and examples how the militant groups have been resorting to the forced recruitment of children to militancy. The picture that is emerging is highly disturbing. Some examples are shocking beyond words. I do not know if there are more such studies undertaken but as far as I am concerned I find this study to be the first for me which contains real life examples and the extent of gravity. Sri Raju Narzary and his team deserve congratulations over their efforts.

I have been a witness to the violent disturbances in Nagaland in particular and in the North-East region in general as a voluntary social worker of Gandhian stream. I therefore am able to understand and appreciate the findings and recommendations that this study contains. One particular feature projected in the study is the miserable conditions in which different relief camps function. This is one situation in which the State must pay immediate attention to this situation and come out with a system and pattern which will ensure best hygienic facilities and disciplined conduct of affairs. This is not a difficult task to achieve. The State also has to find out a way to decrease forced recruitment of children by militants.

I firmly believe that more and more civil society organisations emerge in different parts of the region and act as facilitators, public educators and watch dogs of democracy. The NERSWN has shown through this study what valuable service a civil society organisation can render. If we have a good number of dedicated, conscientious and selfless civil society organisations in the region, the overall situation will greatly improve.

23 November 2014
Camp Gurgaon



Natwar Thakkar
Founder Managing Trustee
Nagaland Gandhi Ashram

I have found the Study Report titled *An Explanatory Study on Impact of Conflict on Children in Assam and Manipur States of India* very thought provoking. A descriptive analysis of the findings has been presented in the Report. The Report depicts the affect of armed conflict on children in two districts of Assam and in two districts of Manipur. It has uncovered a very fearful picture of children facing various circumstantial problems that occur due to armed conflicts. The findings show that we need to do something very urgently towards minimizing the problems faced by the children of the region. The reason that had led to such armed conflicts are here to stay, and therefore the affect on the populace concerned in general and on the children in particular cannot be totally wiped out anyway; it is already too late for that. We can only try to reduce the affects as much as we possibly can

The Report includes a vivid description of how fundamental rights have been totally violated in this context. Justice to children has been found to be totally absent in some cases. Right to education was found to have been violated. Many children have become orphans in the process for no fault to theirs.

Raju Narzary, Executive Director. North East Research & Social Work Networking (NERSWN). Kokrajhar along with his research team, has obviously taken a lot of trouble in collecting the data in such trouble torn areas, for which he certainly deserves appreciation. Finally, terres des hommes Germany too must be thanked supporting the project.

I hope this study report will facilitate better understanding of issues being faced by children in conflict zone thereby enable an effective policy making and action to reduce children's vulnerability. I am confident that the noble purpose for which this study is being conducted will surely be realized.

I wish all the very best for the people who have done this remarkable study, thank you.

19 November 2014
Kokrajhar



Vice-Chancellor
Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

Executive Summary

The north-east of India is a magnificent and tragic tapestry of people, events and nature. There is strength and fragility in its immense diversity – 350 communities in eight states with a population of about 35 million people. While major interstate conflicts are on the decline, there are many prolonged, intractable conflicts within the state and across borders involving a variety of non-state actors. As political and social deprivation give birth to ethnic militancy, economic under development leads to regional militancy.

The conflict in the North Eastern Indian states has been studied, defined and given different terminologies such as armed conflict, militancy, insurgency, ethnic conflict, political violence, armed movement and so on. But the current study will deal only with armed conflict against the state and inter- and intra-ethnic conflict in the two states of Assam and Manipur in order to devote specific focus to the most affected states in the region and also to deal with what are probably the most pertinent issues of the region.

The human cost of armed conflict, especially protracted conflict, has been really devastating. It is more so with the children who hardly develop skills to deal with the intricacies of facing and living with conflict. Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.

Children in armed conflict situations face tremendous problems including risks to the security of their lives. They are subjected to arrest, detention, torture, rape, disappearances and extrajudicial executions by the law enforcement personnel. The disruption of food supplies, the destruction of crops and agricultural infrastructure, the disintegration of families and communities, the displacement of population and the destruction of educational and health services and of water and the sanitation system, all take a heavy toll on children.

The children who are at the transitional age from childhood to adulthood are more vulnerable due to the natural complexities and confusion that they face during this period. It is more so in the conflict-affected societies due to fear, uncertainty, chaos and confusion that violence itself produces. Adolescents are at extreme risk during armed conflict. They are targets for recruitment into armed forces and armed groups; they are targets for sexual exploitation and abuse;

and they are at great risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Findings from State of Manipur

Children have been forced/lured/motivated to join in both underground and government armed groups in the state of Manipur. This finding is substantiated by a series of case studies in the report.

Bandhs (protest shut-downs) and blockades due to civil conflict are a frequent phenomenon in Manipur which have an adverse impact on children. Such a situation creates problems in the public service delivery system of food, water, medical and supplies of other essential commodities. As a result of curfews and boycotts, more than 80% of the schools with more than 300,000 school students across the state were severely affected.

Trafficking is seen as a manifestation of conflict for impoverished people in Manipur. The situation has reached such a level that parents feel insecure about their children in their own state. Many of the parents and guardians are lured easily by people who come promising to provide a dignified living to their children.

Children in Manipur have been denied justice under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act. Children have been regularly apprehended, detained and subjected to torture while many were killed in fake encounters. Others were abused in fake surrender ceremonies organized by State Armed Forces. In these events children are being lured to attend and are detained as fake members of insurgent groups.

The above discussed grim scenario of children's existence and gross violation of their rights is one way or the other linked to the protracted armed conflict in the state.

Findings in the State of Assam

The children are forced to join armed groups due to different circumstances such as economic condition of the family, breakdown of law and order, fast changing social order, destitution, hopelessness, false notion of power and position, etc. The children in the researched area of Assam are being drawn to insurgency groups at a very early age. The report cites several such cases.

Children have been affected by internal displacement due to the conflict. More than 126,263 persons including 19,036 children were forced to live in the relief camps for more

than 15 long years in suffocating and sub-human living conditions. The recent ethnic clash that engulfed four western Assam districts of Bongaigaon, Chirang, Dhubri and Kokrajhar has reportedly displaced 485,921 people belonging to different communities, according to the Government of Assam.

Reportedly, in the spate of killings by a suspected underground outfit in NK Khagrabari village of Baksa district and Balapara village of Kokrajhar district a total of 45 people have been killed out of which 26 were minors. There are many such incidents where children are brutally murdered by both security forces and insurgency groups.

Children have also gone missing in large numbers in the state. The Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR) reports that 4,234 children out of whom 2,819 are girls have been reported to be missing since 2011 and are still untraced.

Many respondents have cited several cases where children are just put behind bars without even applying appropriate provisions of the Juvenile Justice Law. In many instances even minors are shown as adult and jailed.

Conflict also leads to violation of children's fundamental right to education under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. Schools remain closed often, and when they are functioning, children fear to go to school. In most of the focus group discussions and interviews, respondents have talked about children dropping out from schools and engaging in earning activities to support their families.

Major causes for concern

1. One of the major causes of concern in the study area is children themselves becoming participants in armed conflict. But it has also been discussed how in other parts of the country and the world, a child participating in the armed struggle has been considered a victim of conflict rather than a perpetrator. The relevant legislations such as Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000 and India's obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict UNCRC, give enough of scope to rescue, rehabilitate and re-integrate the children associated with armed groups.

2. The second cause for concern that emerges from the findings is children being killed as soft targets in the zones of conflict. The findings have shown how children have

been brutally targeted by both state forces and underground armed groups.

3. The forced displacement and long term residence of children in the relief camps are matters of grave concern.

4. The issue of trafficking in children especially in girl children is a real reason for worry.

5. The high incidence of out of school children, which also is one of the major causes of all the above-discussed child protection related challenges, is a major violation of the children's rights.

6. Having parents killed due to insurgency-related activities, by armed forces or due to ethnic conflict, hundreds of children have become orphaned at an early age. The deprivation from parental care in turn threatens to cause other concerns for children.

Based on the findings, the researchers have made recommendations (see Chapter V) for state and non-state actors to help children to regain their lost childhoods and to prevent such atrocities from happening in the future.

Chapter I – Conflict and North East India

The north-east of India is a magnificent and tragic tapestry of people, events and nature. You can be touched by its rivers, rain and mist, overwhelmed by its seeming gentleness and stirred by its powerful and evocative history. There is strength and fragility in its immense diversity – 350 communities in eight states with a population of about 35 million people. There are communities with kin in neighbouring countries. Not less than four countries share boundaries in this region, which juts out of the mainland of India towards Myanmar, with long borders with China, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Indeed, not less than 98 % of its land borders are with these nations. A bare 2 % is India's share. Is it surprising, therefore, that people and communities there feel alienated and very distant, not just from Delhi, but the rest of the country as well?¹

While major interstate conflicts are on the decline, there are many prolonged, intractable conflicts within the state and across borders involving a variety of non-state actors. An array of labels has been applied to non-state actors. These range from *insurgents* and *resistance movement* to *separatists*, *opposition forces*, *militias* as well as *local defence groups*.²

Isolated and traumatised, the Northeast turned inward. A succession of insurgencies and movements to seek separation or autonomy, assert identity or exclude foreigners and outsiders aggravated the hiatus, with the rest of the country coming to think of the Northeast with disinterest as a far-away place, perpetually troubled.³

As political and social deprivation give birth to ethnic militancy, economic under development leads to regional militancy. Where ethnic and backward regional boundaries coincide, economic deprivation is perceived from an ethnic perspective and ethnic militancy seeks to address both the issues of identity and under development.⁴ Here the armed conflict includes the conflict between the state and ethnic

groups, the state and insurgent groups, as well as inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict. One particular ethnic conflict may reflect one, two or all these three kinds of conflict simultaneously.⁵

Internal conflicts in India's Northeast are overwhelmingly conceptualised within the framework of unique ethnic identities that are threatened by, and in confrontation with, the nationalist state, which is often seen as a representative of an inchoate cultural 'mainstream'. While some of the conflicts in the region certainly fit into this general framework of interpretation, few, if any, are completely explained by it; others, moreover, are entirely unrelated to this reductionist scheme of 'freedom struggles' by ethnic minorities against the 'homogenising state'. Indeed, even where militant groups direct their rhetoric and their violence against the symbols of the state, the underlying motives and ideologies are more correctly interpreted in terms of conflicting tribal identities and histories of internecine warfare based entirely on tribal, sub-tribal, or tribal-outsider rivalries and corresponding competition over limited resources, especially land.⁶

Oldest amongst the armed conflicts is the Naga conflict, with the formation of the Naga Club in 1918, which became the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946. The NNC declared Naga independence on August 14, 1947, a day before India declared its own independence. The Naga movement turned violent since the 1950s and is active to date under the leadership of the NSCN (IM). India's Northeast has been the theatre of the earliest and longest lasting insurgency in the country in the Naga Hills – then a district of Assam - where violence centring on the demand for independence commenced in 1952, followed by the Mizo rebellion in 1966 and a multiplicity of more recent conflicts that have proliferated especially since the late 1970s. According to one estimate, there are about 65 major militant organizations presently operating in the region. Every state in the region excepting Sikkim is currently affected by some form of insurgent violence and four of these (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura) have witnessed scales of conflict that could, at least between 1990 and 2000, be categorized as low intensity conflicts in which fatalities were over 100 but less than 1000 per annum.⁷

1 Sanjay Hazarika, Ethnic conflict and civil society in the Northeast, www.littlemag.com/bloodsport/sanjoyhazarika.html

2 Machel Study 10 Years Strategic Review, Children and Conflict in a Changing World, Unicef, 2009. Pp-10

3 Ajay Sahni, Survey of Conflicts & Resolution in India's Northeast? Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi, pp43

4 Gurudas Das, Identity, Underdevelopment and Violence: A Road Map for the Restoration of Peace in North East India, Social Unrest and Peace, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2011, pp-119-134

5 Manirul Hussain & Pradip Phanjoubam, A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007

6 Ajay Sahni, Survey of Conflicts & Resolution in India's Northeast? Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi, pp43

7 Sanjay Hazarika, Background of Conflict in India's North East, 1994, www.mcrg.ac.in/Core/Northeast_Report.pdf (sighted on 10 Nov'13).

The conflict in the North Eastern Indian states has been studied, defined and given different terminologies such as armed conflict, militancy, insurgency, ethnic conflict, political violence, armed movement and so on. But the current study will deal only with armed conflict against the state and inter- and intra-ethnic conflict in the two states of Assam and Manipur in order to devote specific focus to the most affected states in the region and also to deal with what are probably the most pertinent issues of the region.

In Manipur, the two major conflicts are: (i) Armed conflict between the Government of India (GOI) and the insurgency groups or Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) and between these non-state armed groups since 1950, and (ii) Inter- and intra-ethnic conflict in the 1990s between and among the ethnic groups, or as someone generously called them, 'ethnic warriors'.

The state violence, arising out of the creation of new social and political structures, depriving the indigenous people of safety, dignity, participation, economy, identity and culture, has been considered as the base for the existing conflict. It is claimed that such an attitude was never in existence in the pre-independence period. But when Manipur was merged with the Indian Union, insurgency gained a form of legitimacy. The first insurgency group for the right to self-determination was the legendary Hijam Irabot (Irawat)-led group known as Manipur Communist Party (MCP) in 1950s. Manipur at that time followed a democratic monarchical form of government. Therefore, the people were averse to the King's agreement of merging Manipur with the Indian Union, which became a serious concern amongst the educated youth. The agreement was considered void and invalid because it was not approved of by the Council of Minister of the State Assembly of Manipur.

As a second wave, the Meitei State Committee (MSC) emerged in 1960s. Then, formally the UNLF came up in 1964. In the third wave, PREPARK, PLA, KCP, KYKL followed the path of the legendary Irabot. This generation veered into the liberation movement fighting for the restoration of sovereignty. Particularly, PLA and MPLF of UNLF have been attempting to map Manipur into the decolonised movement of the United Nations. The terrible attacks of such groups justified the extension of the draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958⁸ in Manipur. But

even the AFSPA was ineffective in dealing with challenges emerging out of insurgency in the state. Therefore, many other laws such as Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002 and National Security Act (NSA) were also applied. Operation Tornado, Operation All Clear and a number of other military operations were conducted in the Loktak lake and hills area. The Chief Minister of Manipur, Mr. Okram Ibobi Singh said that 8,000 civilians and 12,000 members of the government forces and Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) have been killed till 2005 since the armed resistance began.⁹ With the imposition of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) 1958, the number of extrajudicial executions committed by state and central security forces from January 1979 till May 2012 was 1528.¹⁰

In Assam a new wave of terrible armed conflict broke out in the aftermath of the bifurcation of the severely conflict-affected districts of Naga Hills which became Nagaland in 1963 and Lusai Hills which became Mizoram in 1986. Ever since the ULFA was set up on April, 7, 1979, in the eastern Assam district town of Sivasagar, 350 kilometres from Guwahati, the state capital, the ULFA has been engaged in a violent insurrection-killing, kidnapping and resorting to extortion of money –to achieve its proclaimed goal of a 'Sovereign, Socialist Assam'. The situation had reached such a pass during 1989-1990, that the ULFA was almost calling the shots in the state.¹¹

Suffering a serious setback during Operation All Clear in Bhutan in 2004, and with the change of political regime in Bangladesh resulting in diminishing safe hideouts leading to arrest of several top ranked leaders, ULFA did not have much of a choice but enter into a ceasefire agreement for a negotiated settlement. While the arrested chairman, Mr. Arobindo Rajkova along with a major chunk of its cadres is now holding talks with Government of India, its army chief Mr. Paresh Barua is still in hiding and carrying forward the subversive activities.

ram, Nagaland and Tripura]. This Act is termed as draconian and un-democratic, and has faced stiff opposition throughout its history of existence from the citizen.

9 Meetei Lc. Jinine .(2008). "The Violence and Violation in Manipur". Justice First, Vol. I, No.1. P-34.

10 A Memorandum on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions submitted by Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur and the UN to Christof Heyns, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Mission to India, 19-30 March 2012. pp 27-106.

11 Wasbir Hussain, Diplomacy As A Tool To Combat Trans-Border Terror: The ULFA Case, CDPS, 2010, pp-56-57.

8 The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, An Act to enable certain special powers to be conferred upon members of the armed forces in disturbed areas in the State of 1[Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizo-

A militant organisation, the Bodo Security Force (BSF) came into being in 1989 under the leadership of Ranjan Daimari. The BSF, later renamed as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), resorted to terrorism in order to secure an 'independent Bodo nation' north of the river Brahmaputra. A very large proportion of the violent activities in the state, including killings, explosions, arson, and attacks on police stations, have been carried out by the NDFB. This is an organised and well-trained militant group. Another armed group, the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF), has been fighting for a separate State of Bodoland within the Indian Union. While both of these ethnic insurgent groups fought against the state forces, both the organizations were also engaged in a bloody fratricidal fight resulting in huge loss of human life and property. From 1992 to 2013 the total number of reported dead due to insurgency-related incidence is 7779 (4052 civilian, 815 security forces and 2912 insurgents).¹² This would be considered as conservative reporting of violence-related casualties in the state, the actual figures will surely be much higher.

The BLTF headed by its chairman, Mr. Hagrama Mohilary subsequent to its ceasefire and fast tracked peace negotiations with Government of India, had signed a peace accord on 10th February 2003 to pave the way for the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) consequent to Operation Flush Out in Bhutan, jointly carried out by the Royal Bhutan Army and the Indian army, has entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India in 2004. Complaining of the lack of progress in the peace process, a section of NDFB cadres carried out deadly serial bomb blasts in Assam, killing more than 100 and injuring over 400 people on 30 September 2008. Following this incident the organization split into two factions, one being headed by its founder chairman, Mr. Ranjan Daimary and another headed by its secretary-general, Mr. Gobindo Basumatary. While the later is involved in peace negotiations with the Government of India, the former is still carrying on with its militant activities to pursue its demand for a 'Sovereign Bodoland'.

With the changing socio-political and cultural landscape, comprehending armed conflict has become ever more challenging. The old issues are fading away and newer issues are invented by the warring groups in the absence of a holistic approach to end the armed conflict from all quarters. The

recent history of the fissionary trend in which every tribal, linguistic, religious or cultural sub-group demands separation from the others, compounded by the rhetoric of ethnic sub-nationalism, radical demographic shifts and a long history of poor governance, make this area, perhaps more than any other region in the country, a potential source of increasing mass strife.

Ethnic Conflict in Assam and Manipur

One of the defining feature of the Northeast states is inter- and intra-ethnic conflict. The situation, in fact, reflects the classic security dilemma faced by states at the systemic level. When one state arms itself, neighbouring states feel insecure. Consequently, the best way to protect oneself is to increase one's own armament. This situation is reflected when two or more ethnic groups occupy the same space. When one ethnic group arms itself, other ethnic groups also arm themselves creating a vicious cycle of violence and counter violence.¹³ Some of this generalized violence caused massive internal displacement, of hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁴ 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, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border».¹⁵

Among the North-eastern states, internal displacement has been quite high in Assam. Conflict has been the main cause of major displacement of population in Assam. Tens of thousands of Bengalis- Hindus and Muslims-were displaced all over Assam in violence unleashed during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, particularly during six years of the 'anti-foreigners agitation' led by students and the dominant Asamiyas. During the worst phase of violence in July-September 1960, almost 50,000 Bengalis, mostly Hindus, crossed over to West Bengal seeking shelter there. Again in 1972-73, 14000 Bengalis fled to West Bengal and elsewhere after the outbreak of riots over the language issue. However, the real figure of displacement is far more than mentioned here

13 Namrata Goswami, *Armed Ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India and the Indian State's Response: Use of force and the 'notion' of proportionality*, Heidelberg University, 2011

14 This is Our Land, *Ethnic Violence and Internal Displacement in North East India*, Norwegian Refugee Council, 2011

15 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IDMC, www.internal-displacement.org/idp, (sighted on 17 Nov 2013)

12 www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/data_sheets/insurgency_related_killings.htm (sighted on 17 Nov 2013)

because government account includes only those people who took refuge in the camps of West Bengal. Thousands died in the riots during the agitation between 1979 and 1985-almost 2,000 in the village of Nellie alone.¹⁶

It may be pointed out that in the ethnic violence that occurred in October 1993 between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims, as many as 3568 families consisting about 18,000 persons were internally displaced, who were termed as forest encroachers.¹⁷ In 1996 a terrible ethnic conflict broke out between Bodo and Santhal tribes resulting in hundreds dead and rendering 2,62,682 people homeless. While the displaced population were returning from the relief camps to their original homes, another episode of conflict occurred in 1998 in which a total of 3,14,342 persons were displaced and were to remain in relief camps for more than a decade in sub-human conditions.¹⁸

Recently, in July 2012, the ethnic clash between the Bengali Muslims and Bodos engulfing four western Assam districts has displaced 4,85,921 and reportedly took 109 lives.¹⁹ The camp conditions in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon are very poor. Shelters consist of rows of temporary sheds made of polythene and aluminium sheets. People sleep on the ground on makeshift beds of bamboo. There is a lack of clean drinking water; and diseases such as malaria, jaundice, dysentery, diarrhoea and influenza pose a serious threat. Groups of five to six people are forced to share essentials. To supplement food rations, which are adequate for at most 10 days a month, they are reportedly compelled to consume snails, insects and wild plants. Pregnant women, children, and the elderly suffer the highest health risks in the camps.²⁰

Manipur also has witnessed some of the worse inter- and intra-ethnic conflict in history. These have caused massive internal population displacement in the state. Ethnic relocation in the wake of the Naga-Kuki and Kuki-Paite feuds in the 1990s led to nearly 1700 deaths and destruction of

property worth millions of rupees. At least 600 villages were burnt down during the Naga-Kuki feud, in which 10,000 houses were destroyed. In another inter-ethnic conflict involving Paites and Kukis more than 508 people were killed from both the communities. Almost 3000 houses in 47 villages were destroyed. During the riots between the Meiteis and Pangal community more than 100 were killed in which 196 houses in 9 villages were destroyed.²¹

The history of both Assam and Manipur will remain largely scripted based on its armed conflicts. The extent of human exodus and its accompanying tragedies has never been compensated. Whenever such an incidence of human tragedies surfaces in society, it is the politics that dominates public discourse and almost every time monetary compensation only is handed over as a token of justice. Perhaps, the meaning of justice has been lost in this region in the whirlpool of confusion and chaos thereby losing sight of enduring peace, respectful justice and human dignity. The impact of all these is visibly more acute on children as they remain the most voiceless, marginalised and excluded from the social, cultural, political and economic discourses.

16 Monirul Hussain & Pradip Panjoubam, A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007, pp.07.

17 Action Plan for Rehabilitation of Refugees, 1993, 1996 & 1998 Ethnic Violence, Government of Assam.

18 Monirul Hussain & Pradip Panjoubam, A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007, pp.07.

19 Annual Report 2012-13, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, www.mha.nic.in

20 The Status of Children in India, An alternate report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on India's first periodic report, ACHR:2003, www.achrweb.org.

21 Monirul Hussain & Pradip Panjoubam, A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007, pp.14-15

Chapter II – Armed Conflict and Children

In India, the word ‘child’ has been defined differently by different legislations and policies. In accordance with the standards prescribed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2000 defines a ‘juvenile’ or ‘child’ as a person who has not completed 18 years of age. Under the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA), 1956, the age prescribed for a child is 16 years. The laws regulating employment, such as the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986, the Factories Act, 1948 and the Mines Act 1952, prohibit employment of children under 14 years only, in line with the constitutional provision. There has been no uniformity in respect of the definition of ‘child’ under different Acts and other instruments.²²

The previous chapter has dealt substantively with armed conflict and its different manifestations and consequences. Though parties (both state and non-state) involved with armed conflict aim to achieve better human conditions and better politics and society, the consequences are usually otherwise. The human cost of armed conflict, especially protracted conflict, has been really devastating. It is more so with the children who hardly develop skills to deal with the intricacies of facing and living with conflict.

Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.

While most countries are no longer engaged in inter-state warfare, they are often host to one or even several armed conflicts involving non-state actors. These can include rebellions or opposition or secessionist movements involving paramilitary groups, anti-government guerrillas or others. Such armed conflicts may yield fewer military battle deaths but they exact a high human cost: unarmed civilians are victimized, basic services deteriorate, societal divisions deepen and local economies decline.²³ This proposition seems to be a real reflection of the situation now in India. The armed internal conflict as deliberated elsewhere has coincided with the attainment of freedom and since then has been engulfing

more and more sub-national states in India. Beginning with Naga Hills district of Assam to a secessionist movement in Jammu and Kashmir, and now the ongoing attack and counter attack between state forces and Naxalites, India faces insurgency to a considerable extent. As of March 2013, a total 197 out of 640 districts remain officially designated as ‘disturbed’ under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958, and as ‘Left Wing Extremism Affected’.²⁴

While the armed conflict in Northeast India started right from 1918 with the coming together of the Nagas, it has always since then been present in the social and political discourse of the region. It is practically impossible to exactly gauge the impact of these enduring armed conflicts but surely it has been enormous.

Armed conflicts today have an even more horrific impact on children and on civilians generally.²⁵ Children in armed conflict situations face tremendous problems including risks to the security of their lives. They are subjected to arrest, detention, torture, rape, disappearances and extrajudicial executions by the law enforcement personnel.²⁶ The disruption of food supplies, the destruction of crops and agricultural infrastructure, the disintegration of families and communities, the displacement of population and the destruction of educational and health services and of water and the sanitation system, all take a heavy toll on children.²⁷

The children who are at the transitional age from childhood to adulthood are more vulnerable due to the natural complexities and confusion that they face during this period. It is more so in the conflict-affected societies due to fear, uncertainty, chaos and confusion that violence itself produces. Adolescents are at extreme risk during armed conflict. They are targets for recruitment into armed forces and armed groups; they are targets for sexual exploitation and abuse; and they are at great risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.²⁸

24 India’s Child Soldiers: Government defends officially designated terror groups’ record on the recruitment of child soldiers before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ACHR: 2013

25 Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review, Children and Conflict in Changing World, UNICEF: 2009

26 The Status of Children in India, A Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ACHR Report, 2003

27 A Study On Impact of Conflict and Violation of Child Rights, MACR, Imphal, 2010

28 Impact of armed conflict on children, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/graca/a51-306_en.pdf (sighted on 18 Nov, 2013)

22 Third and Fourth Combined Periodic Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2011, MWCD, Government of India, pp39

23 Children and Conflict in a Changing World, UNICEF:2009, pp08

The Asian Centre for Human Rights, while submitting a shadow report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, said, “the recruitment of child soldiers is rampant and hundreds of children remain involved in the conflicts. Both the government and the armed opposition groups have recruited children including for combat purposes”.²⁹ The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) team in its report on the plight of the children in the areas of civil unrest says “we saw inhuman living conditions in camps in Assam, Tripura and Manipur, and public testimonies revealed an alarming rate of child and maternal morbidity and mortality due to poor healthcare, sanitation and water facilities. Children also lacked secure access to education. These deprivations are layered upon the violence and insecurity that these children and their families live with.”³⁰

Besides all the critical aspects of children’s life, armed conflict takes a heavy toll on the education and health of the children which otherwise could have enabled children to face the crisis created by the conflict. One of such classic example of armed conflict snatching the opportunity of education from children happened in Manipur during August to December 2009. A national television channel NDTV reported “Manipur’s classrooms have been empty since August in protest over an alleged fake encounter in Imphal. The future of lakhs of Manipuri students hangs in balance as the stalemate between protestors and the government continues. By any standards it is shocking as more than 3 lakh school students are forced out of classes because student unions, civil society organisations and the state government cannot come to a consensus on how to end an anti-government agitation over an alleged fake encounter.”³¹

Kokrajhar district of Assam that has witnessed protracted conflict for the last three decades has one of the highest infant mortality (IMR) rates in the country. While the state of Assam has an IMR of 54, the IMR in Kokrajhar stands at 76 per 1000 live births.³² Epidemiological and humanitarian

surveys are beginning to qualify the impact of armed conflict on disease, its transmission and the disease burden in a given country. In addition, emotional distress during and after the armed conflict is often exacerbated by the displacement, life in overcrowded camps, disruption of social institutions or services, loss of livelihood, tension within communities and the collapse of political authority and rule of law.³³

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) described the plight of children in the aftermath of the 1996 and 1998 Bodo-Santhal ethnic conflict saying “displaced children living in the camp were not allowed to attend the nearby government school. One SSA School had been set up in the camp, with only one teacher responsible for 200 children and receiving a salary of Rs. 1,500 (\$30) per month. No mid-day meals were provided in the school and no supplementary nutrition was available for younger children.”³⁴

When armed conflict touches a child’s life the fabric of their societies can be torn apart. Homes, communities, schools, health systems, and religious institutions may all be gone. Children lose their right to lives and well-being, to be with their families and communities, and to be nurtured and protected. They suffer physical and psychological damage, moral and spiritual impacts, social and cultural losses. After being affected by armed conflict children’s lives and their futures are never the same.

In 2005 the then UN Secretary General announced that six grave violations of children were chosen for regular monitoring, reporting and response because of their exceptionally brutal and deliberate nature. These were: killing or maiming children; recruitment or use of child soldiers; attacks against schools or hospitals; rape and other grave sexual violence, abduction of children and denial of humanitarian access.³⁵

In the backdrop of the stated principles, we cannot delay any further in responding holistically and pragmatically to reduce the sufferings of the children in the zones of protracted conflict. The present initiative is undertaken as part of the endeavour in this direction, so that more informed policy formulation and practice can take place and thereby initiate a process towards reducing the sufferings and victimization of children due to armed conflict in the region.

29 India’s Child Soldiers: Government defends officially designated terror groups’ record on the recruitment of child soldiers before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ACHR: 2013

30 Protection of Children’s Rights in Areas of Civil Unrest, NCPCR, www.ncpcr.gov.in/Reports/Policy_Document_on_Protection_of_children_rights_in_areas_of_civil_unrest.pdf

31 www.ndtv.com/article/india/manipur-schools-shut-since-august-13733

32 Annual Health Survey, Assam, 2011-12, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, pp.07

33 Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review, Children and Conflict in Changing World, UNICEF:2009, pp.20

34 This is Our Land, Ethnic Violence and Internal Displacement in North East India, IDMC,2011, pp.18

35 Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review, Children and Conflict in Changing World, UNICEF:2009, pp.18

Chapter III – Scope, Aim and Methodology

Scope and importance of the study

Children by and large are affected in all aspects of their life by conflict. Therefore this study attempted a wider scope for exploring different facets of this impact. At the same time, considering the limited time and resources, the specific issues looked at were in consonance with the UNCRC framework of Survival, Development, Protection and Participation. It is expected that in the absence of such data and research, the current study will become a handy tool for policy makers, academics, development practitioners, NGOs, INGOs and others.

Aim of the Study

The impact of armed conflict on children in the states of Assam and Manipur is studied, analyzed and documented.

Hypotheses of the Study

- The children have been involved and made participants (soldiers, messengers etc) of conflict by various parties, insurgent groups as well as government armed forces, involved in the long-standing conflict in the state of Assam and Manipur.
- The insurgent movement and armed conflict in the region have had an adverse impact on children.
- The children have been both participants in and victims of conflict.
- In the wake of the conflict the children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation have been grossly violated.
- A systematic study can identify the root causes of the problems and suggest a way forward for resolving these problems affecting the children.

Universe of the study

The universe of the study was the Indian states of Assam and Manipur. Both the states are located in the Northeastern region of India. Assam is a state with a geographical area of 78,438 sq.km which accounts for 2.4% of the total geographical area in the country. It has 27 districts with 54 sub-divisions. The population of the state according to the Provisional Census Report 2011 is 31,169,272 and the literacy rate of the state is 73.18% (78.81% for male and 67.27% for female). Manipur is a comparatively smaller state with an area of 22,327 sq km. The state has 9 districts. The popu-

lation of the state is 27,21,756 with a sex ratio of 987. The literacy rate of the state is 79.85%. The states of Assam and Manipur may vary in terms of population, geography and so on but both have remained the most volatile states in India since independence. In every corner, there exist different armed underground outfits involved in factional wars to gain control over overlapping small territories or demanding a separate state or sovereignty from the Union of India. Besides armed conflict, both the regions have been wracked by severe ethnic conflicts which have been discussed in the previous two chapters.

Sampling design

A multi-stage sampling method was adopted for the study.

Assam

The state of Assam consists of 27 districts. The state is further divided into four administrative divisions namely: Lower Assam Division; North Assam Division; Hills & Barak Valley Assam Division; and Upper Assam Division. For the purpose of the study, the two worst affected districts were randomly selected from the Lower Assam division. They are Kokrajhar and Chirang Districts.

i. Kokrajhar District

Kokrajhar can be described as the gateway to the North-eastern Region of India. Kokrajhar was originally a part of undivided Goalpara district. At present the district has three revenue sub-divisions- Kokrajhar, Gossaigaon and Parbat-jhora. According to Population Census 2011, Kokrajhar has a total population of 887,142 of which male and female are 452,905 and 434,237 respectively. The literacy rate of Kokrajhar District in 2011 was 65.22 %, compared to 52.29 % in 2001, whereas male literacy rate was 71.89 % and female 58.27 %. The sex ratio of Kokrajhar district is 959 per 1000 male, compared to the 2001 census figure of 946. The density of population is 269 per sq km. Kokrajhar district administers 3,296 sq kilometres of areas. The Bodo, Rajbongshi, Santhal, Bengalis Hindus and Muslims are major communities inhabiting the district. Kokrajhar is also, the headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

ii. Chirang District

Chirang is one of the four newly-created districts of Bodoland Territorial Council in western Assam. Kajalgaon is the district headquarter and also the centre for trade and commerce. Kajalgaon is well connected by road and is about 119 Km by road to Dispur, the capital of Assam. The district has two civil sub-divisions, Kajalgaon and Bijni. The district

covers an area of 1468.42 sq km. According to Population Census 2011, the total population in the district was 4, 81,818 of which 2, 44,673 are male and 2, 37,143 are female. The sex-ratio of Chirang is 969 female per thousand male. Total literacy rate is 64.71 % (male-72.24 and female-56.65). The density of population is 251 people per sq. km. The dominant communities are the Bodos, Koch-Rajbangsis, Adivasis, Nepalis, Bengalis, and Assamese & Biharis.

Manipur

There are 9 administrative districts in the state out of which 5 districts, that is Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Churachandpur districts are situated in the hills and the remaining 4 districts of Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur and Thoubal are situated in the valley. The districts are further divided into 38 sub-divisions and the hill areas are divided into six Autonomous Districts: For the purpose of the study, one district from the hills i.e Tamenglong and one district from the valley i.e Imphal West were randomly selected. Besides, minor supplementary data was collected from Senapati, (Jiribam) Imphal East and Thoubal Districts of Manipur to substantiate the study.

i. Imphal West

The Imphal West district is a tiny plain at the centre of Manipur. Imphal town, the state capital is the nodal functional centre of the district. Other important towns of the district are Sekmai, Singjamei, Mayang Imphal, Lamsang etc. The area of the Imphal West district is 519 Sq. Km. According to the 2011 census, the population of the district is 5, 14,683. The density of the population per sq.km is 92. The sex ratio of the district is 1029 per 1000 male. The literacy rate of the district is 86.70 %. The head quarter of the district is at Lamphalpat with four sub-divisions: (a) Lamphalpat (b) Lamsang (c) Patsoi (d) Wangoi.

The state's lone airport (Imphal airport) is located in the Imphal West district. The district is dominated by Meitei and Meitei Brahmin (composite part of Meitei identity) but other ethnic groups also inhabit the area. Manipuri Muslim (Meitei Pangal) and Zeliarong tribes (known as Kabui to the Meitei) are settled all over the district. Bengalis, Biharis and Marwaris also live here and they play a vital role in trade and commerce.

ii. Tamenglong District

Tamenglong is one of the Hill Districts of Manipur situated between the Barak Valley of Assam and the Imphal Valley. There are a total of 242 villages in the district. The main tribes of the district are Zeliangrong Nagas (combination of

three sub-tribes: Rongmei, Liangmai, Zeme), Puime, Kuki besides minority Hmars and Chirus. More than 70% of the population in the district directly and indirectly depends on agriculture. Forest land covers nearly 9/10 of the total area whereas only 32.5% of the land is lived on by the total population of the state.

The district comprises an area of 4, 391 sq.km. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Tamenglong is 140,143 with a male population of 71,762 and female population of 68,381 respectively. The sex ratio of the district is 953. The density of population per square km is 32 and this is the least populous district in the state. It is of general opinion that the district has less population due to frequent experiences of landslide, earthquake and avalanches leading to migration. The average literacy rate of the district is 70.40 percent.

Sample Size

In each of the above mentioned districts, a total of at least 20 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and 5 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have been conducted to prove the stated hypotheses. Hence a total of 80 IDIs and 20 FGDs have been done for this study.

Research Design

For this particular study a qualitative approach has been chosen. Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behaviour. Research in such a situation is a function of the researcher's insights and impressions. Generally, the techniques of focus group discussions, projective techniques and in-depth interviews are used.³⁶ Qualitative Research applies methods such as participant observation or case studies which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice.³⁷ It is with these understandings that the qualitative approach has been adopted. And as there has not been much information available and there is much to be explored, the study is largely exploratory in nature.

This has been done by conducting case studies or in-depth interviews with persons who joined the armed groups (state and non-state) before 18 years of age, persons who have sur-

36 C.R. Kothari, *Research Methodology, Methods and Techniques*, New Age International Publishers, New Delhi, 1985, pp.05

37 *Qualitative Research, Defining and Designing*, www.sagepub.in/upm-data/48453_ch_1.pdf

rendered to government or police, senior underground members, children affected by conflict, parents of the affected children, civil society organisations/ movements, service providers, community leaders, academicians, and media persons. The total number of persons interviewed was more than 80. Though it was not possible to get reliable information from all the respondents, it was felt that the information given by at least 80 respondents was adequate for analysis and interpretation. Telephonic interviewees were held as per the convenience of some respondents especially with underground groups. Likewise, a total of 20 FGDs were organised with different groups: children affected by conflict, community leaders, service providers, Village Development Force (VDF), media persons, academicians, research scholars and associations, Church Women Society, women's welfare organizations, students unions, doctors, activists, NGO personnel and other key informants. Observation as a method of data collection was also used to some extent. Fieldwork was conducted during August to October 2013.

Tools and techniques of data collection

Primary data was collected from 80 respondents by conducting interviews and case studies using an interview guide and from 20 FGD by using an FGD guide. Secondary data was collected from the four chosen districts of Assam and Manipur states of India from government and non-government organizations in the form of published and unpublished reports, news paper reports, journals, previous research reports, websites and so forth.

Data Processing and Analyses

The data collected was first transcribed, translated and edited. After the draft data edition was ready, the research team went back to respondents to fill in the gaps. Each piece of data was coded through which emerging concepts and themes were identified. Based on the coding case and cross case analysis was undertaken.

Limitations

With best of efforts and intention, this study has limitations on many fronts. First, language to an extent was a challenge while interviewing the respondents and conducting focus group discussions. This has the possibility of affecting the accuracy of information as the researchers might miss out or misquote the responses of the respondents. Second, while interviewing or conducting FGDs the non-participants in such processes also used to intervene in between, disrupting the flow of the narratives by the real respondents. Third,

some of the respondents did not allow their responses to be recorded, as a result some important information may be left out. Fourth, due to limited time the researcher could not include all the information being collected in both the states. Fifth, due to the distance the research team in both the state of Assam and Manipur could not sit together for cross sharing and inputs thereby losing out opportunities to supplement each other's work. Finally, the research team, having undertaken research on a sensitive issue such as the current one for the first time, may have failed to look at some important variables and this may pose a challenge in generalizations of research findings.

Experience of the Research Team

In the first place, data collection had not been easy because not many conflict studies, particularly on children, are available. Many of the government departments in both the states have refused to provide documents, reports and information on the pretext of maintaining confidentiality. Though some of them have been obtained through RTI applications, due to lack of time, information from many government offices could not be obtained. Some VDF respondents and children involved in armed groups did not permit the recording of their responses, taking photos or revealing their full identity. Children affected by conflict (particularly who are and were in underground groups) could be contacted only with the help of the NGOs or people known to them very well. Moreover, due to lack of trust or fear, they even refused to answer some questions posed to them lest it be used against them. They would not understand why there was a need and interest in such studies. Hence, there was a need to reassure them constantly about the purpose and aims of the study. Children surrenderees of underground outfits admitted that due to the vows taken at the time of discharge from the underground, the incidents of conflict in the underground groups cannot be revealed. At times, interviews could not go smoothly due to emotional outbursts of the family whose children have been abducted. Some children feared that the researcher was a spy. A small boy in jail thought that the researchers had come to save him or bail him out from the jail.

However, over all, the team is really amazed by the openness of the respondents to reveal the information. The extensive travelling, making appointments, building rapport, extracting information, lengthy discussions, at times facing adverse situations, cancellation of appointments, etc. really have been very enriching learning experiences for the team.

Chapter IV – Findings and Discussion

The previous chapters have shed light on how armed conflict affects the life of the people, particularly the children. This chapter will deal with the major findings of the current study based on the analysis of both primary and secondary data collected from two states of Assam and Manipur.

A considerable amount of primary and secondary data has been collected based on the interviews and discussions conducted for this study. In addition, the major findings that have a bearing on lives of the children have been presented in this chapter. The findings have been presented state-wise. Though a total of 80 respondents were interviewed in 4 districts in the two states of Assam and Manipur, a total of 60 cases have been considered for analysis based on their quality and relevance with the topic. For FGDs too, though the initial target was for 20 FGDs, due to un-avoidable circumstances, only 14 FGDs could be conducted.

The profile of the respondents of IDIs and participants of FGDs has been given in Annexure 1.

Findings from State of Manipur

Children have been forced/lured/motivated to join in both underground and government armed groups in the state of Manipur

A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.³⁸

From the extensive primary data collection in two districts, Imphal West and Tamenlong, supported by a considerable amount of secondary data, it is found that children joining both underground insurgent groups and government armed forces is on the rise in the state due to various reasons. One of the chief reasons is the formation of newer and newer insurgency groups in the state and rapid increase in recruitment of armed forces personnel to counter these groups.

The Manipur Alliance for Child Rights (MACR) report is really alarming as it states that an observational home in Churachandpur District, which houses 147 children has 100 children who had been involved with the insurgency movement. It is found from the interviews with children in armed groups, arrested children in jail, absconders, surrenderees, parents of the child soldiers, the recruiters of children in

armed groups and other key informants that children themselves get involved in armed groups for different reasons. One of the prime reasons is due to unbearably poor economic conditions of the families. The following case based on an interview with a child member of an insurgent group illustrates this.

Case 1: Hopeson (name changed), 12 years, sent by his parents to join an armed insurgency group

Hopeson (name changed) 12, is the second eldest among five siblings. He has studied only up to nursery. Both parents are farmers holding marginal land. Because of his parents' financial difficulties, his education was supported by a benefactor from abroad through a missionary school where he studied. However, he could not continue his schooling because he was sent to his relative's family in the town for babysitting. After 3-4 years of taking care of the relative's baby in the town, he returned home. From a very shy and obedient boy, he became a very aggressive and angry child. He never liked to work in his parents' field. Very often he would fight with his family members and neighbours. So his father, a gambler himself, contacted members of an insurgency group to recruit his son into their group. When the recruiters spoke to the child, he also agreed. Currently he is in the group and his parents during the course of interview mentioned that their son is about to complete the military training.

In the state of Manipur especially in the researched area, with an increasing number of broken families due to various reasons such as alcoholism, drug-addiction, forced separation, etc., the children are left with no better option but to join insurgency groups who are actively looking for fresh recruits in a competitive environment for recruitment. The following is a case from an interview to substantiate this proposition.

Case 2: Rinku (name changed), 16, joined an insurgency group and is now in jail.

Rinku joined an insurgency group as a child at the age of 15. His mother had eloped with another man leaving his father behind and his father too has married another woman. Out of shame and reluctance to face his community, he joined the insurgency group.

He was arrested by the police in 2012 and put in Sajiwa jail in Imphal. His group wanted to get him out of jail but he preferred to remain inside as he was fed up with the life of an insurgent. Hence, he is still imprisoned despite being under age. Since the time of his arrest, the researcher is the first person to visit him. Indeed he was really happy to have

³⁸ Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 2007

been visited by someone who at least enquired about his life. He wants to get out of jail but not with the help of his group as he will have to join the group again. He remains really depressed and at times feels worthless and not interested in living.

The forced recruitment of children into the insurgency groups has become a common phenomenon in the state of Manipur. Many of the respondents have cited several incidents of abduction and thereafter forcing the children to join the group. The researcher has come across many instances where respondents have mentioned incidents in which the family members are threatened of dire consequences if they do not let their children join the insurgency groups. The following are representative cases among many of the respondents interviewed by the researcher-

Case 3: Suraj (name changed), 15, abducted by an insurgent group

Suraj's father is bedridden with a serious illness and mother is home maker. Being the only son and eldest of four siblings, Suraj was forced to drop out from school and contribute to his family income. Sometime in April 2012, while Suraj and his two friends were returning after watching a football match, a man who was known to one of the children accosted them and asked the three of them to accompany him to the football match next day.

On the following day, when Suraj and his friends were going to watch the football match, the man picked them in a van on the pretext of dropping them to the playground. But instead of dropping them to the football match venue he took them to Indo-Myanmar border of Morey. After keeping the children for a night in a hotel in Morey, all three of them were taken to the camp of an insurgent group. In the camp they were kept for more than ten days, showed weapons and made to watch movies such as the famous Manipuri film called 'WANTED LINTHOL' which is about an innocent girl joining an underground group.

Back home, knowing the incident, the villagers with the help of active civil society organizations organized a massive protest for immediate and safe release of these young children. The protest continued for several days and was well highlighted in local media. Finally bowing down to protests, tremendous public and media pressure, the underground group released them on the promise of not revealing the name of the organizations and their camp.

There are many such cases of forced recruitment by the insurgents in the state of Manipur especially in the researched area.

Case 4: Raman (name changed), 14, forcibly inducted into an insurgent group.

Raman, 14, is an innocent boy who was studying in class VI. Despite being disabled in one hand, he was abducted by some miscreants. His parents claim that he was abducted by Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) an insurgent group fighting for liberation of Manipur. Several days after Raman's abduction, one of the informers of the PLA had told his parents about his safety and recruitment into the group. The parents have been demanding the safe release of their son but the group has been turning a deaf ear. As the word has spread about the child joining the group, the security forces have started keeping a vigil on the family. When the researcher interviewed his parents they were really upset on hearing that their child is being called a soldier, as they feel their son is an unfortunate victim of the insurgency movement and not a participant.

Case 5: Alina (name changed), 14, victim of forced recruitment by an insurgent group

Alina, 14, a girl studying in class IX at Wabgai, Manipur was abducted on March 10, 2013. She was a talented girl. She is said to have won a bronze medal at the 15th International Tribal Archery competition in 2012. Though the armed group claims that Alina and her friend had joined the outfit of their 'free will', her parents claimed that she was abducted. Whether abducted or not, she is a minor, and not supposed to be giving consent to join the underground outfit. The parents disagree with the insurgent group, and have been demanding her safe release, but in vain. While being interviewed, the parents were really upset with the group, and continue to demand her release. They are still in state of shock and not willing to accept that their daughter has become a child insurgent.

In fact the forced recruitment of children into insurgency groups is rampant in Manipur. One of the civil society organizations has documented the cases of 59 children, based on media reports, that are missing and believed to have been abducted by the underground outfits for the purpose of recruitment in the year 2008 alone.³⁹ In the first half of 2008 at least 20 children in the age group of 10 to 16 went missing from various parts of Manipur with a number of other reported cases increasing to nearly 60. Initially, the

³⁹ List of Missing Children/Escaped/released with photographs, CSO, Imphal, 2013

authorities thought some human trafficking rackets or syndicates operating for bonded labour were involved, but later it was found that the children were in the custody of armed insurgency groups.⁴⁰

There are many children who, despite not being mature enough to give consent, had joined insurgency groups mainly representing their ethnic group to serve their community by fighting injustice through the barrel of gun. The following is one of the classic cases interviewed by the researcher.

Case 6: Lily (name changed), 18, volunteered to join an insurgency group at age 16.

After dropping out from school having failed in the class VI examination, Lily had helped her mother in household chores and in agriculture for some years. When life became really monotonous, she contacted a known recruiter of the insurgent group. With just few basic questions as part of the interview she was recruited by the group at the age of 16.

At the time of joining, she was not told about any criteria of age, sex, education, etc. of joining the group. However, before taking oath, she was asked by seniors about her purpose of joining the group. She was repeatedly asked whether she had any problems with family members or boyfriends. When she replied to all those questions confidently, she was allowed to take the oath and became part of the group.

In her posting at a camp, she met people belonging to a range of age groups, some of them were in their early 50s and some of them were even below 15 years of age. But duties remained the same for children as well as adults. However, difficult tasks involving great physical strength were given to the boys and not to the girls. Roles and responsibilities assigned to them were gardening and attending training. In her military training, she was taught to handle all kinds of weapons and explosives. They were given repeated orientation on their demand and the cause that they stand for. They were also clearly taught about rules and regulation, duties, responsibilities etc. In her role as an insurgent for almost two years, she has not been sent for combat and also not been assigned an extortionist role. She was mainly sent in civil dress to keep vigil on enemies and collect information.

She does not have a personal opinion on whether the insurgent groups should recruit children below 18 years or not, because many children such as drug addicts, drop outs,

thieves, habitual fighters, etc. have transformed into disciplined persons after joining the group. But many of the children members of insurgent groups become very barbaric and fearless. Some of them join without knowing much about the group and regret the decision. Many of them try to run away and when they are caught are given harsh punishment including capital punishment.

From time to time Lily was given money to meet her needs and also to send home. They had medical facilities and a church inside the camp itself. She used to go for shopping in the nearby market and sometimes used to roam around with friends in the village after taking permission from their senior.

After one year of her stay in the camp, she realized this was not the kind of work she wanted to do in her life. Hence, with the kind help of one of the seniors, she submitted an application to release her, and thankfully, it was accepted within one year. She did not have to pay any penalty too. She considers herself very lucky as there are many others whose applications are pending for years together. Currently, she is back to doing her household chores with her mother.

As discussed, there are various reasons for children joining the armed groups, and many of them seem to be due to the vicious cycle of conflict being created in the region. On one hand are poverty, hopelessness, despair, frustration, anger and on the other hand an opportunity to express and ventilate through this dangerous means of taking up arms at an early age. But both ways lead to disruption and destruction of childhood. The following is another case where a child has decided consciously to join the group.

Case 7: Joyson, (name changed) 16, volunteered to join insurgency movement

He joined the group at the age of 16 in 2013 to fight for the cause of the Zeliangrong tribe. Joyson knows about his group since its formation and hence joined of his free will. He thinks the group he is working with stands for the cause of protecting the land, identity and pride of his tribe. Besides, he is very attracted to the sophisticated weapons and uniform of the group. He says that most of his colleagues are of his age. According to him, becoming a member of an insurgent group gives power and a platform to serve the community. He is new to the group and feels proud to wear the uniform of the group and carry the fire-arms. When asked about his future, he vowed to fight as a soldier of the community, thereby contribute his bit in protecting the land, culture and identity of his tribe.

40 A Study on Impact of Armed Conflict and Violation of Child Rights, MACR, 2010, Imphal

From the interviews and group discussions it was learnt that in the older days, village elders used to ask the strong young men in the community to join the armed group as it was considered as a matter of honour and pride. In fact, the youth could not join these groups without the recommendation of village elders.

Many of the children have joined the groups out of curiosity to experience the life of an insurgent. These children, seeing others living a luxurious life with the latest gadgets, money and muscle power, get attracted to underground groups. Only after joining they realized that the life of an insurgent always remains under threat. One such case is narrated below.

Case 8: Johnson (name changed) 17, joined one of the insurgency groups out of the curiosity.

He joined the group at the age of 15. During the course of the interview he revealed that there are cadres in his group who are as young as 12 or 13 years. Most of his batch mates in the training were below 18 years. After joining the group he realized that this is not what he had thought it would be. Hence, he has been absconding from the group and hiding at a place where the group does not have presence. He does not know the language of the place and his parents also have told him not to come home as they cannot afford to pay the heavy penalty that the group will impose on his family for absconding. He is aware about the punishment imposed on the absconding member which would be either death or a heavy cash penalty.

In the last three decades or so, the number of insurgency groups has increased so much that it has become difficult especially for the fresh and splinter groups to recruit members. They are virtually being forced to employ agents in the community to brainwash and exploit the momentary frustrations and negative events to lure the young people into their groups. Many of the respondents have mentioned about false promises being given to the potential recruits. On joining they are being forced to commit heinous crimes and as a result they cannot think of returning home for fear of punishment. One such case is narrated below.

Case 9: Nelson, (name changed), 22, lured into joining a large insurgency group

Nelson was 17 years and studying in class XI when he along with his friends was lured into joining one of the large insurgency group. He was the youngest son in the family and hence his parents had sent him to study in one of the best schools in Imphal from Tamenlong. Sometime in 2008 when he was 17, he and his friend of same age and same class ran away from the hostel to join the group. Some of their

childhood friends were already in the group so they easily could enter into the group. But Nelson was totally unaware about the harsh life in difficult terrains. Before joining the group the agent who lured them had promised a luxurious and comfortable life. But now he realized that it was totally the opposite of what he had imagined. They have to live in constant threat to their lives from security forces as well as other rival groups. He wants to run away but because of the strict rules and procedures, he could not do so.

By joining the group, he has lost all that he wanted in life: good education, good job, and all other hope. But there is no one to share his grief. He has lived a life of bloodshed, experienced the worst in life and knows what hardship means. He apologized for not being able to narrate any particular horrific incident but admitted that the interview brought back horrible memories. He holds a firm opinion that no child should fall in this trap. Children should be prevented, as he repeatedly quoted a famous saying “prevention is better than cure”. He has a message for the children: to never ever try to join the groups, because once they join, there is no return. He concluded by saying that “the greatest mistake I have made in life was the day when I ran away from the hostel. Had I not done it, I would have avoided all these hardships. My life has been totally ruined. I should be living a much better life”.

In Manipur while collecting the primary data, the researchers were shocked by the number of instances of child being recruited in the insurgency groups. But this is not to suggest that government forces are lagging behind in this. Both state and central armed forces recruit children without much verification. Most of these children obtain fake age certificates and join in the armed forces at a very young age. One such case has been interviewed by the researcher and is narrated below.

Case 10: James, (name changed), 16, recruited by the Assam Rifles (state armed force) with a fake certificate.

James dropped out of school in class VII. After leaving the school, his family members managed to get a fake HSLC certificate from Nagaland so as to enable him to join the armed forces. The certificate bears some other name belonging to a different tribe with his age shown as 24 years. Before joining the force, he had a fascination for wearing the uniform, carrying a gun and exploring new places. But being too young, no sooner had he joined, he started yearning for retirement. But because of the poor economic condition of his family, he could not resign from the Assam Rifles.

In this regard one of the most familiar faces among the civil society organizations Mr. Nobo Kishore, Convener, Manipur NGO Alliance has said “Both government of India and government of Manipur are not behind in recruiting children. In fact after the incident of indiscriminate firing in Heirok village during Thobat Chongba (Holi) festival 2008, to quell the public protest, the Manipur government came up with the idea of Special Police Officer (SPOs) following in the steps of Chattishgarh state to tackle the Maoist insurgency. But after the post of SPO being struck down by the Supreme Court as illegal, the government of Manipur quietly changed the name of the force to Village Defence Force (VDF). For recruiting VDF personnel the government of Manipur does not have any fixed criteria of age, educational qualification and so on. Hence, many under-age children have joined this force. Besides, this particular force despite performing all the duties of a security force is treated as a second class force. Both Government of India and Government of Manipur are involved with this unconstitutional act. If the law keepers themselves break the law how will the state of Manipur enjoy the fruits of peace”.

Recruitment or involvement of children as soldiers or underground armed insurgents is a gross violation of the Optional Protocol on Child Soldiers adopted by UN General Assembly on 25 May 2000. It is also a serious violation of the UNCRC, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, Child Labour Prohibition Act 1986 and of many such important legislations that ensure children's rights.

The issue of children joining both underground and government armed forces is just one of the innumerable impacts of the armed conflict. There is very shocking and saddening cruelty being meted out to children and it has been possible only because of the intense and protracted conflict in the state. The gun battles between the underground and government armed forces are a common phenomenon in the state of Manipur. In most of these incidents it is the children and women who get caught in the cross fire. The following is one such incident.

Case 11: Muliangbi Gonmei, 10, hit by bullets in crossfire
On one fateful night in 2005, when everyone was deep asleep in her village, a heavy gun battle took place between the underground armed group and the security forces. When the hour-long gun battle was over she was found bullet ridden on her bed. But the villagers could not take her immediately to the hospital, because even after the militants fled, the security forces shot thousands of bullets. After the incident, a loud speaker was used to force the villagers to gather in one place including the aged and infirm. As most

of the villagers could not speak Hindi, when they did not respond they were beaten badly. Every villagers including nursing mothers, the old people, and small children were not spared from parading on the ground for the whole night without food, water and sleep till noon of the next day in the scorching heat. At the request of some women for mercy, small children, sick and aged people were allowed to leave the ground. Some village youth were selected by the Indian Security Force to carry their injured members and the girl who got a bullet shot on her head to Nungba Head Headquarters. At Nungba, the Security forces handed over Rs.5000/- to the victim's father to spend for hiring the vehicle, which was reluctantly accepted. The district authorities promised an assistance of Rs.20, 000/- which the family never received. Luckily, she was treated successfully at RIMS, Imphal and survived her ordeal.

The children are not only caught in gun battles between government and underground armed groups, but gun battles between different rival underground groups are also common in Manipur. In one such incident of a gun battle between NSCN (IM) and Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF), on November 12, 2013 in Tamenglong district, three people were killed; one of them was a child soldier, which was reported by an English daily, The Hindu, on November 13, 2013.

Thousands of children have been orphaned due to the intense armed conflict in the state of Manipur. Though no systematic documentation has been made on the number and cases of children abruptly becoming orphan due to the sudden murder of parents by state forces or insurgency outfits, this has become one of the common phenomena in the state resulting in a severe negative impact on the lives of the children.

There are other gruesome acts carried out by both underground and government armed groups such as molestation, rape and torture of young children. These incidents have become part of the life in Manipur. Despite an active civil society that works against these incidents, things have not improved. Parents of a victim of one such gruesome and inhuman act were interviewed by the researchers and the following is narration of the case.

Case 12: Late N. Sangita Devi, was raped by State Armed Forces and committed suicide at age 17
Sangita was studying in class X at Sorok Atingbi High School, Jiribam, Manipur when she committed suicide on October 4, 2003 due to alleged gang rape by State Armed Forces. Sangita was the second child in the family of three girl children. Her parents works on a rubber farm. On Octo-

ber 4, 2003 at around 8 am when Sangita went alone to the rubber farm (about 400 metres away from the homestead) to deliver food to her father, she was waylaid and gang raped by armed personnel who were on patrolling duty. Following the incident, Sangita committed suicide by consuming poison on the same day at around 10 pm. The victim's family ran from pillar to post, but was denied justice. The cash compensation of Rs. 700,000 promised by government also has not been received as yet.

The presence of state security forces and increasing numbers of insurgency groups which currently stands at 40 in the state of Manipur⁴¹ that is inhabited by just 2,721,756 (Population Census 2011) itself is an indication of the magnitude of the conflict in the state. The cases narrated above are some of the examples of impacts of conflict on the lives of the children.

Another cause of concern in the state has been the fake surrender ceremonies being organized by the armed forces. The state forces organize such fake surrender ceremonies mainly on the eve of some special day like Independence Day, Republic Day, etc. to showcase their success in tackling the insurgency and improving the law and order situation. According to the respondents, these events are also organized to demoralize the active insurgency groups in the state. In these events, many children are being lured to attend. The following is one such case interviewed by the researcher.

Case 13: Johnny, 19, victim of fake surrender organised by the Assam Rifle (State Armed Force) at the age of 17.

Johnny was about 17 years old when along with seven others he was lured for a fake surrender ceremony on the promise of recruitment in the Assam Rifles. A lady from his own village told them that her husband is an army officer in the Assam Rifles and has got good influence on the recruitment process. So on the pretext of helping them to get recruited she even collected Rs.1,000/- each. Johnny and his friends believed her and went to a place where they had been called for recruitment. They were given a paper to sign. The heading of the paper reads "surrender programme of Kanglei Yaoun Kanba Lup - Military Defence Force" (KYKL-MDF)". They were also asked to sign a form which reads "I am a member of KYKL - surrendered to Assam Rifles". He and his friends felt betrayed and did not sign the paper. On returning home, when he revealed everything to the villager, the villagers protested vehemently. For many following days, it had hit the headlines of the local media.

These incidents have really violated the fundamental right to life with dignity for any citizen enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. It is also a serious abuse of children's right to protection which goes against the spirit of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The cases discussed so far are mainly related to the armed insurgency movement in the state. But one of the most prominent features of the conflict in the state is also about ethnic conflict which has really degraded the lives of people in the state. The human tragedies created by such ethnic conflict are enormous.

One of the major such inter-ethnic conflicts in Manipur was the famous Naga and Kuki conflict. Though people from all walks of life and all demographic profile were affected, the children were the worst victims of this conflict. The impact was so acute that while a village called Mukti in Tamenglong district was burnt, reportedly a child was thrown into the burning house. All the service delivery mechanisms were affected such as school, immunization, food supply and so on. In the aftermath of the conflict, the children were also socializing only along their own ethnic lines. Both the estranged communities have left a very poisonous impression among the children of their ethnicity for times to come. Manipur has witnessed substantial internal displacement and ethnic relocation in the wake of Naga-Kuki and the Kuki-Paite feuds in the 1990s that led to nearly 1700 deaths and destruction of property worth millions of rupees.⁴²

Impact of civil conflict in the state on children

Bandhs (protest shut-downs) and blockades due to civil conflict are a frequent phenomenon in Manipur which have an adverse impact on children. The year 2011 witnessed the longest ever economic blockade in Manipur with the state remaining crippled for 123 days even as another 20 days were wasted on account of bandhs. Perhaps no other place in the country has experienced such long 'bandhs' and 'road blockades'. Such a situation creates problems in the public service delivery system of food, water, medical and supplies of other essential commodities. During 2009, for almost half of the year, all the educational institutions had declared a boycott over the alleged fake encounters. As a result of curfews and boycotts, more than 80 % schools with more than 300,000 school students across the state were severely affected. At least five schools which had reopened were set on fire and vandalised. When the basic right to education of

⁴¹ www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/terrorist_outfits/index.html (sighted on June 12, 2014)

⁴² A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, Manirul Hussain and Pradip Panjoubam, 2007

the children is lost, the hope of a better future itself is diminished

Child Trafficking

Trafficking is seen as a manifestation of conflict for impoverished people in Manipur. The situation has reached such a level that parents feel insecure about their children in their own state. Many of the parents and guardians are lured easily by people who come promising to provide a dignified living to their children. In recent years, hundreds of children have been trafficked from Manipur on false promises of providing good food, quality education or lucrative job. Children have been trafficked and sent away to brothels in Mumbai, Delhi or other cities and even outside India. Many of them are not even traceable. ACHR states that Manipur is a major source of child trafficking to places like Goa, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Maharashtra. According to Department of Social Welfare, Government of Manipur, the number of children being trafficked in Manipur from the year 2008-2012 was 379.⁴³ Available studies have shown that some of those rescued have severe physical deformities. Their blood samples showed a contraband drug notoriously known as date rape pills. Many of the respondents were of the view that this figure is well below even the conservative reporting culture in the state and if actual figures are investigated, it will be much higher.

Total disregard for the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 in the name of dealing with conflict

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 aims to help and support juveniles in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection, by providing for proper care, protection and treatment catering to their development needs, and by adopting a child-friendly approach in the adjudication and disposition of matters in the best interest of children and for their ultimate rehabilitation through various institutions established under this enactment. Manipur is said to be one of the first states to have framed and notified the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Manipur Rules on 11 October 2002. Children in Manipur however, have been denied justice. The report of the ACHR, which was released on October 22, 2012, also claimed that there is a clear violation of the JJ(C&PC) Act in Manipur as children have been regularly apprehended, detained and subjected to torture while many were killed in fake encounters. This is due to the enforcement of AFSPA where army and para-military forces have

been deployed across the state and have applied their power⁴⁴ without knowledge about JJ(C&PC). And beside the primary data being discussed above, the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur in its Memorandum to the Special Rapporteur on Extra Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Mr. Christ of Heyns documented that from 1979 to 2012 out of the total reported 1528 extra judicial killings in the state of Manipur 98 were children.⁴⁵

This is a glaring example of creating more problems in the name of resolving one. The custodians of the law of the land cannot afford to violate one law in order to protect another law. It is more important that children of Manipur are ensured justice under the Juvenile Justice Act 2000 so that the citizens of tomorrow do not feel alienated from the justice system of this country. In an effort to mitigate the crisis emerging from the conflict, one cannot create further crisis. Besides the number of children being killed, the cases of child insurgents, who should be considered as victims of insurgency rather than perpetrators, should be brought under the ambit of appropriate provisions of the law and give the opportunity to reform and contribute towards a better future for the state.

Gross violation of the UNCRC

The United Nation Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has mandated that its signatory nations ensure the four major rights of a child: survival, development, participation and protection. But from both primary and secondary sources of data, it is found that all these rights are grossly violated in the state. In its report on child rights violation, Manipur Alliance for Child Rights has reported 22 cases of sexual assault, 63 cases of trafficking, 3 cases of murder, 6 cases of abandonment and death due to clashes, 4 cases of suicide, 6 cases of child soldiers and 11 cases of molestation, torture, bomb blast related injury etc.⁴⁶ It also states the NSSO data of 1237 child labourers in the state. The above discussed grim scenario of children's existence and gross violation of their rights is one way or the other linked to the protracted armed conflict in the state. Though many of the issues can be addressed and resolved even in the existence of the conflict, none of the stakeholders are sensitive to this cause, which has pushed children to the

⁴³ A Brief Report on Human Trafficking in Manipur from the Year 2008 to 2012, DSW, Govt. Of Manipur, 2013

⁴⁴ The power to arrest, search and seize and fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death under section 4 of AFSPA 1958

⁴⁵ A Memorandum on Extrajudicial Killing, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, CSCHRM, 2012

⁴⁶ Child Rights to Protection Scenario in Manipur, September 2012 to September 2013, MACR, Imphal, 2013

periphery, which in turn is producing detrimental results for the future of the state and the nation as a whole.

Findings in the State of Assam

The situation in Manipur often gets highlighted in the national and international forums because of the presence of a proactive civil society in the state. But the state of affairs in the state of Assam hardly gets such attention due to several factors, one of them perhaps is the vast ethnic divide in all walks of life.

The following are some of the findings from the primary and secondary data collected for the purpose of the current study, mainly in Chirang and Kokrajhar district of Assam.

Children have been joining armed groups in large numbers in the state of Assam

The children are forced to join armed groups due to different circumstances such as economic condition of the family, breakdown of law and order, fast changing social order, destitution, hopelessness, false notion of power and position, etc. The children in the researched area of Assam are being drawn to insurgency groups at a very early age. Many of the key respondents have said that though this is a recent phenomenon as newer and newer factions break away from the original groups, the fresh groups are forced to recruit cadres irrespective of their age and sex.

One of the key informants, a surrendered member of an insurgent group who is now 40 and who had joined at the age of 25, on the promise of anonymity, had said that at the time of his joining, rules and regulation for recruitment were very strict. He had served the group for 12 years but did not see a single child in the group. Everyone was mature enough to understand the main goal of the group. He regretfully says that all these rules and regulations are broken and even minor children are inducted in the group which he feels is detrimental for the society and also for the group. According to him, there are several reasons for children joining the armed group such as poverty, to take revenge, to gain money, muscle power and some to fight for the cause of the society. According to him, girls are also joining armed groups in good numbers. He feels that many of the minor cadres of insurgency groups want to surrender but there are no government and non-government initiatives to facilitate the process of coming out of hiding and helping them re-integrate in the family and community. He and his friends have surrendered in 2004, but most of his friends are currently facing a very tough economic situation. Seeing the adversities faced by the surrenderees, even cadres willing to shun the path of violence prefer to live the life of an insurgent.

Most of the key respondents while being asked about the reason for increasing number of children being recruited, stated that if any group does not recruit children they will be left behind in the race of maintaining their organizational strength as well as territorial control.

Researchers interviewed many of the children who have joined the armed groups at an early age. Some of them have in fact become adult but nevertheless they have been interviewed on the promise of maintaining their confidentiality. The following are some of the narratives of the child members of armed groups.

Case 14: Sushil (name changed), 19, lured into insurgency group at age 16.

Born in a poor family with four sisters, he grew up in very difficult circumstances. The only source of income was from daily wage of both his parents. He was good in studies but after passing class X with good marks he could not continue. All his batch mates joined college but he could not afford admission. In such a tragic situation one of the known members of an insurgency group approached him. The person briefed him about the mission of the group and lured him on the prospect of earning. He instantly decided to join the group at the age of 16. Since then, he has become one of the popular combatants in the group. He says "In the initial two months I was assigned to assist seniors, followed by rigorous training. After that I was assigned to a combat role. I am happy with the current position, but my family is facing trouble. The security forces keep visiting our house. My father has been assaulted many times. They have even molested my elder sister. My father asked me to surrender, but I do not want to surrender, as I am fighting for the cause of the society."

The following is another tragic case where the mother herself forced the minor daughter to join an insurgent group.

Case 15: Purnima (name changed), 19, forced by her mother to join an insurgency group at age 15 to pay a debt

Poornima says, "I am 19 years old now. I was only 15 years and studying in class IX, when I joined an insurgent group demanding a sovereign nation. In my family we are five siblings, I am the eldest with one sister and three brothers. My father is a poor farmer and mother is a housewife."

I did not want to join the group, but my mother forced me. My father and mother always used to fight for some reasons. My father told us that in the initial five years after marriage everything was going well but after five years, my mother

started behaving in a suspicious manner leading to bitter fights between both parents.

Later, we came to know that my mother had close links with some cadres of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) and they used to visit our home frequently which my father did not like. As a result, both my parents used to fight bitterly. Further, we came to know that my mother had borrowed some money from the insurgents which she could not repay. Instead, she kept forcing me to join the group so that she does not have to repay the money. Initially, I refused but when she kept forcing me, I had no choice but join the group against my will.

Immediately after joining the group, I was sent for three months training. After the training I have been placed in Chirang. Very often I am being assigned to carry bombs from one place to another and hand over extortion notes. As the security force hardly suspects the women, I can do this job easily.

Subsequently, my sister also has been driven to the same fate by my mother two years after me. She is just 14 years of age. She has not been sent for training as yet. Currently, she just goes around with the senior cadres of the group assisting them in cooking, washing and doing other chores.

I am not happy with what I am doing. My life is at risk both from the security forces and my colleagues. Though there are some girls in the group, in my battalion I am the only girl. I am afraid of being exploited by male colleagues though it has not happened so far. If it happens, there won't be anyone who can help me.

My mother has done great injustice to both of us. I feel really sad when I see my friends living a free life. I get frustrated remembering my school days as I really wanted to study further. I really want to lead a free and normal life at home. But my mother does not allow me to return. I badly miss the festivals like Bwisagu and Christmas."

This case portrays how difficult the situation is now for children. Despite not being willing to join the armed group both the girls have been forced to do so. In the course of primary data collection, especially during focus group discussions many respondents have mentioned cases in which children are forced to join the groups.

Of course there are instances where children have deliberately decided to join the armed groups despite not being mature enough to give informed consent. Their family

members also did not stop them from joining the group. In fact some of them clearly know why they have joined. The following is one such case.

Case 16: Aryan (name changed) 18, joined an insurgent group at age 16.

Aryan says, "I am 18 years old and member of an insurgent group. I joined the group when I was 16 in 2011. I have three important reasons for joining the group (1) Poor economic conditions of the family, (2) I got inspired by my elder brother and his friends and (3) I was not allowed to write the High School Leaving Certificate examination by the headmaster of the school.

Initially, I was inducted as a messenger and also used to cook food for seniors. After a few months I was sent for training. While I was undergoing the rigorous training I was told that the Indian army is frequently visiting our house in search of my elder brother who is also an insurgent. Gradually, the army started carrying out search operations in the entire village. Life is becoming miserable for my family members and villagers because of the search operations. One day, in the early hours of the morning the Indian army surrounded our village and picked up around 20 village youths. They interrogated those youths to find the whereabouts of the cadres of my groups especially about my brother. Since those youths did not know the locations of our camps and colleagues, the army released them on the promise of cooperating with them.

After the training, I was placed near our village. But I cannot go home due to the presence of security forces. Due to increased search operation our life is at stake now. I am a bit scared. Now, I am confused about whether to continue with the group or to surrender. My parents keep asking me to return home but due to poor financial conditions, I do not feel like returning."

The following is the narrative of another case of a child who had joined the group at an early age and surrendered to the security forces.

Case 17: Bijon (name changed), 24, a former child soldier of an insurgent group who had surrendered to the police in 2010.

Bijon joined one of the oldest and biggest insurgency groups at the age of 16 in 2004. At the time of joining he was completely unaware about the roles, responsibilities, goal and ideologies of the group. His only motivation was to earn money. But soon after receiving training, he started facing threats from the armed forces. In fact he faced several

attacks from the armed forces where many of his friends died in front of his eyes. Due to increased search operations, they had to hide in jungles where they faced shortage of food, shelter and the most acute crisis was lack of healthcare facilities. Even with a serious sickness they had to survive on bare minimum first aid. For months together he could not visit his family. So he was very depressed and finally managed to escape from the group and surrendered in 2010.

Many of the respondents were of the opinion that conflict itself refuels conflict, thereby making it a vicious cycle. The following is an interesting and classic case where a child has joined due to frustration generated out of armed conflict.

Case 18: Dinesh (Name Changed) 14, who joined an insurgent group in 2012

Dinesh says, "I grew up in abundance. My family had been living a happy life. All my sisters being married, I am the only son in the family now. But when the riot between Bodos and Muslims broke out in 2012, all the schools in our area were occupied by displaced people. Our school was shut for several months. Besides, the conflict also lasted for several months. The situation was not returning to normalcy. As a result the studies of many of my friends were disrupted. I also stopped studying for several months and as a consequence when the school was reopened I did not feel like going to school. Thereafter, I decided to join the group. During my childhood, people used to talk about insurgent groups earning lots of money. Besides, I saw the cadres of the group leading a prosperous life. Hence, I also thought of joining the group to lead such a life. Before approaching the senior cadres of the group, I was a bit apprehensive about the possibility of my recruitment as I was only 13 years but they didn't ask me anything.

After induction, all my batch mates have been sent for training except me. I felt really insulted by this. I am really confused now whether to continue or to discontinue with the group. Since the day I joined the group, I have been just cooking for the senior cadres and working as a messenger. So I am not satisfied with what I have been doing so far. I wanted to return home but the police have already got the information about my involvement with the group and started searching for me. My parents are really worried about me as I am the only son. There is no one to look after my parents now. Hence, nowadays I keep wondering how to get back home.

The above case proves the point of one conflict fuelling another conflict thereby creating a vicious cycle. In fact many of the respondents have cited this as one of common reason

for increasing numbers of armed groups in the region. Mr. Zebrius Xaxa, Chairman, Cobra Military of Assam, while being interviewed said in this regard, "Our group was formed to protect our people on 7th July 1996 after the terrible ethnic conflict in between Bodos and Santhals. Besides protecting our community from enemies we had vowed to fight for emancipation of our fellow community members through armed struggle. We accepted the invitation of talks by Government of India and Government of Assam by entering into a ceasefire agreement on September 15, 2001. As you are aware in the relief camps our people were starving because the government was giving just 10 days of bare rice ration. For the rest of the 20 days our people were surviving by eating herbs, tapioca, and other forest products. During those days I have seen children joining the groups to take revenge against the rival community. But we have not allowed a single child to join in our group."

This claim of a self-styled Commander-In-Chief and the Chairman of such a large militant outfit in the area is very crucial. This shows that in the aftermath of ethnic conflict or communal riot, no adequate measures are undertaken to reconcile and rehabilitate the affected people. As a result, affected populations are forced to take up arms to promote their interest or to raise their voice. In this, children become most vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. Mr. Moniram Narzary, Headmaster of Koila Moila High School in Chirang district while being asked about the phenomenon of child insurgents said "It has become a common phenomenon due to the unending cycle of violence in the region. One conflict itself is creating another conflict. Children not being able to cope with anger, frustration and fear, find the platform of insurgency groups appropriate to express their emotions and take revenge".

Mr. Jayanta Roy, Officer-In-Charge of Kachugaon Police Station while being interviewed has said that during his tenure itself 4 cases of child members of armed groups have been registered. The children were caught with explosives, or extortion notes, or during combing operations. All these four children have been sent to a Juvenile Home in Guwahati.

Mr. Nileswar Shewakare, Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Gossaigaon Sub-Division while being interviewed said that, though he has personally not come across any cases of child joining armed groups due to his being quite fresh in the service, he feels that children are prone to different kinds of vulnerability mainly because of persisting conflict.

One of the active development activists working in the researched area, with the agency called **the action northeast**

trust (the ant), Mr Stephen Narzary, says, “In our locality many children have joined insurgency groups, especially factions that have split from larger groups, and becoming targets of the armed forces. Some of the reasons for children joining the armed groups are illiteracy, school drop-out, extreme poverty and lack of hope for a better future.”

Mr. Preetam Brahma Choudhury, a senior journalist working in the conflict-affected areas for more than a decade, shares his experience, by saying that children bear the brunt of the conflict more than anybody else. They are orphaned, displaced, trafficked, forced into labour, raped, molested and even murdered. Seeing the violence, children get traumatized, emotionally disturbed and even face severe mental illness. There are instances where children have joined an armed group to take revenge for losing their parents due to violence. Both the civil society and government have lots to do, but there is hardly any initiative from both sides. All the victims of conflict must be given adequate attention. There are enough schemes in the government departments but none of them are implemented properly. According to him the conflict is also one of the major excuses of government officials for non-functioning of these schemes and programmes.

Forced Displacement of Children Due to Conflict

Kokrajhar, one of the two researched district in the state of Assam, has faced ethnic conflict in 1993, 1996, 1998 and in 2012. According to Government of Assam in 1993 some 18,000 people were rendered homeless, in 1996 and subsequently in 1998 one of the biggest internal displacements in the history of country took place in a single district of Kokrajhar that forced about 314,342 people to take shelter in relief camps for at least three years.⁴⁷ More than 126,263 persons including 19,036 children were forced to live in the relief camps for more than 15 long years in suffocating and sub-human living conditions. The recent ethnic clash that engulfed four western Assam districts of Bongaigaon, Chirang, Dhubri and Kokrajhar has reportedly displaced 485,921 people belonging to different communities, according to the Government of Assam. In the district of Kokrajhar alone, reportedly a total of 107,730 have taken shelter in the relief camps.

The following are some of the cases interviewed who are affected by the 2012 violence in the districts of Chirang and Kokrajhar.

⁴⁷ Action Plan for Rehabilitation of the Refugees, 1993, 1996 & 1998 Ethnic Violence, Government of Assam, Office of The Deputy Commissioner, Kokrajhar

Case 19: Md. Muskan Ali, 10, affected by ethnic violence and displaced at the age of 8

Muskan Ali hails from Bhobanipur village in Chirang. He is the son of a daily wage earner in Bhobanipur village under Borobazar Block of Chirang District. His father supports a family of 12. He narrates, “In the month of July 2012 all of a sudden there was a tense situation. There was a hue and cry in the village about attack and counter attack between Bodos and Muslims. We heard that all our neighbouring Muslim villages have been burnt by rioters; hence we fled from our village to take shelter in Amguri Higher Secondary School which is a Muslim dominated location. In the relief camp, we were surviving with just rice and millet. All from our village stayed in the same relief camp for eight months. The relief camp was so crowded that in each of the rooms 50 to 60 people were sleeping on the floor. There was no privacy. Drinking water, toilet and clothes and everything was scarce. The relief residents were fighting with each other due to suffocating living condition.

While I was in the relief camp, I have heard a lot about people being killed, tortured, raped and looting of properties. Every passing moment I was feeling more and more insecure. We were not venturing out from the surroundings of the relief camp for many months.

For eight months our school was used as a relief camp. After eight months when the schools were reopened I was very uncomfortable as in the same school the children from estranged communities were also studying. I could not get along with my classmates. All the time I would think of the injustice being meted out to us by the other community. I could not concentrate on studies also at home. Moreover, some of the teachers were also from the rival community so I could not take lessons from them. After having a gap of 8 long months there were no special measures being taken to make up our learning gaps. Besides, the teachers were themselves leaving early due to the uncertain and unpredictable situation.

The pre-conflict relationship between my community and the estranged community was really good. We used to mingle and mix a lot. But after the conflict, students of our school are divided on the lines of community and caste. Even though they are talking to each other, the mistrust and suspicion exist.

I am afraid that the violence will again break out in our area because of lack of trust between us. We keep hearing about the other community preparing to chase us out from our village. If it really happens, I do not know where I will go and

what will I do. The last conflict itself has devastated our family badly and if it occurs again we will become destitute.”

This case proves the point that the different rights of the children were totally disregarded after the ethnic conflict and consequent internal displacement. The right to education has been grossly violated. Besides, the basic fundamental right to life with dignity provisioned under Article 21 of the Indian constitution also has been violated as the children were facing extreme threat to their life continuously.

In the event of high intensity and sudden nature of the conflict, children also face temporary and permanent separations from their families. This forced separation from the families has negative consequences on the life of the child. In the researched area, this phenomenon is very common due to the never-ending incidents of violence and conflicts. The following respondent represents such a case.

Case 20: Nerswn Basumatary, 16, displaced and separated from his family due to ethnic violence at the age of 14.

Nerswn narrates, “I am a native of Porbotjhora village. In my family, we are six of us, my parents, three brothers and one sister. I have witnessed the riot between our community and Muslims. Before this I have only heard about it. When our village was being attacked by the rioters, all of us fled in different directions to save our lives. My family was separated; all of us were living in different camps, only after a month we could come together in one camp. It was a very terrifying time for me.

For many followings months, we were hearing about attacks and counter attacks. It was very risky to venture out from the relief camp. On one hand there was nothing to do in the camp and on the other we could not roam around, those days were very frustrating.

Being a class 10 student, I found my studies hampered as the school had been closed down for more than a month. Besides, I could not concentrate on my studies to the fullest extent, due to hearing news of incidents of violence on a daily basis.

We did not have money and no income was forthcoming. To make the matter worse prices of all the essential items had risen up suddenly. We were told that because of the blockades and strikes, the traders could not import goods from outside and the prices of all essential items became very high. The government has supplied only rice, millet, salt and a bit of mustard oil to the relief camp residents. We

could not imagine surviving in such a situation but we had no other choice also.

In the aftermath of the conflict, all my friends were scattered in different places, some of the friends were in other relief camps, some had gone to guard the village, some had started living in the town to pursue education, hence, I was feeling really isolated.

After being in such an uncertain situation for several months my parents shifted me to Darjeeling to pursue education. With limited income, pursuing education outside is difficult but there was no option left for my parents.

The following case is another evidence of children facing acute trauma and psycho-social adjustment problems due to conflict and displacement.

Case 21: Dwimalu, 13, traumatised by conflict and displaced with his family

Dwimalu studies in class VII. He along with his family was forced to stay in a relief camp for seven months. During the course of the interview he said “After being in the relief camp for so long, I could not concentrate on my studies. Despite pressure from parents I did not feel like going to school. I was really angry with the people who turned our house into ashes. More than anything else I have become so suspicious of people and I was never like this.”

The following is another such case, where a child is being forced to live in extreme fear and uncertainty. Many of the respondents have mentioned about children not being able to cope with the traumatic experience of conflict.

Case 22: Md. Hafijul Rahman, 14, traumatised by displacement

Last year in the month of July, I have seen the, ethnic clash between Bodos and my community. We were displaced for 7 months. I was playing with my siblings when some fellow villagers came rushing to tell us that people from neighbouring villages have started fleeing since some Muslim villages have been burned and there is high possibility of our village being attacked, so it is better to leave the village. We were not ready and my parents just took a few important documents, and we rushed to the relief camp. The camp was not that crowded in the beginning but gradually it became very crowded. My parents could not bring clothes and so we were wearing the same cloths for days together. The camp was not hygienic and people having come from different places were only thinking about their own interest. This also had created internal conflict within the camp. It

was very difficult for me to cope, whole day we had to stay in the relief camp, without any leisure time, proper food and clothing and in an unhealthy environment.

During my stay in the camp, I could not concentrate on studies, the camp was crowded and noisy, and food was in a common kitchen, where nearly four hundred people used to dine, it was really difficult for me to adjust with that kind of situation. I never felt secure, all the time; I was worried about my future, as I heard that our houses had totally been burnt. We lost all our belongings, important assets, cattle, etc. On top of it my family don't have a fixed income. My farming parents did not even know whether we would be able to return to our native village.

But, when we finally returned to our village after living in the relief camp for seven months, I couldn't live in peace; I felt really insecure all the time and thought only about violence and used to get really scared during the night. My parents were also not allowing me to venture out from home. It was totally different and a new life altogether.

The tragedy is that none of respondents have cited adequate psycho-social intervention with the children. The state, while supplying basic relief materials hardly attended to the psycho-social needs of the relief camp residents. The non-governmental initiatives too remained sporadic and only for a brief period. As a result children had to bear the brunt of insensitivity and irresponsibility.

The women, especially girls face more acute problems in the camp. In an already patriarchal society, and with the added crisis, women and girls were left to their destiny to survive. The following is a case of a young girl who was interviewed.

Case 23: Rekha, 13, displaced and rendered homeless by the conflict.

Rekha is the eldest among 3 siblings of farming parents. She says "I do not know the reason for us becoming homeless but we spent four long months in the relief camp. On top of the displacement, our fellow relief camp residents were fighting with each other almost every day for one or the other silly reason. Most of the adults would remain drunk and idle. I did not have enough clothes. The camp also did not have separate bathing space for women. The whole camp was stinking as relief residents were defecating in and around the camp every night due to fear. It was too suffocating for me".

In this regard, Mr. Dino Dwimary, a project coordinator of Action North East Trust, said "We have seen many children

discontinuing their schooling for short periods and many of them permanently. In the aftermath of the 2012 riot children were also severely deprived of nutritious food as they were surviving on just rice and millet for months together. The girls were suffering the most."

Mr. Jaithun Narzary, local student union leader, says "Children suffer the most when the conflict occurs as they do not develop the capacity to deal with conflict. Because of the unending conflict of various sorts children have been at the receiving end. There have been many instances where the children who are not even involved directly with insurgency groups are being killed, tortured, arrested and put behind bars for years together. Both government and civil society organizations should support the children victims of conflict so that they can come out and get re-integrated with the family and community".

Subashree T, District Social Welfare Officer says "Girls are the worst victims of conflict. During the relief work after the recent conflict in the district of Chirang, I have come across rape cases in Bengtal and in Samthaibari but those cases were not reported and action was not taken against the culprits. The government's response especially to children's needs was almost nil; it was the NGOs who took the lead."

Children have been orphaned due to conflict

One of the most devastating impacts of conflict was children suddenly becoming orphaned. At the age when they hardly understand the nitty-gritty of world around them, they are forced to handle their own life. The reported cases of children becoming orphaned due to armed conflict itself are glaring and there are unreported cases. According to Assam Police 259 children became orphaned due to the insurgency between 1994 and 2010 in Kokrajhar.

Besides the insurgency, the ethnic conflict also has taken away the parents of children in large numbers driving them to destitution. The following case is one such story.

Case 24: Arun Narzary, 14, orphaned by the conflict.

His father had expired earlier and he was living with his mother. But during the intense conflict in July 2012, his mother also was killed. Now he is living with one of his aunts. "I had lost my father early in life. My mother was partially blind and still she was taking care of me. One day all of a sudden my village was attacked by rioters and villagers fled for safety. I too ran. Only when we reached the relief camp, we found that my mother was missing. I cried for help. But there was no one who could bring my mother back. Next day, I heard that rioters had killed her. I was

totally broken. After having stayed in the camp for almost a year, when I returned to the village, I did not have much choice but take shelter in my relative's house"

Children Being Executed due to Protracted Conflict

On 11 December 2013, two children were killed and one injured in an extrajudicial execution in Raidangbari village, under the jurisdiction of Runikhata Police Station. Reportedly, in the spate of killings by a suspected underground outfit in NK Khagrabari village of Baksa district and Balapara village of Kokrajhar district a total of 45 people have been killed out of which 26 were minors. There are many such incidents where children are brutally murdered by both security forces and insurgency groups.

Forced Migration and Trafficking due to Conflict

In the state of Assam, of the 17,721 persons who have gone missing since 1998 till date, only about 6,000 could be traced showing a success rate of just around 35%. What is even more significant is the fact that the number of missing children during the period is shockingly high. From the year 2007 till 2009 (up to March), while 2,485 adults were reported missing from various parts of the state, the figure for missing children stood at 1,734.

The Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR) reports that 4,234 children out of whom 2,819 are girls have been reported to be missing since 2011 and are still untraced.

Mr. Digambar Narzary, Director, NEDAN FOUNDATION, in this regard says, "One of the major impacts of conflict is displacement and destitution of children. This in turn had led to rampant cases of trafficking and force migration in children and women. In most of the instances of trafficking police have filed the case as missing, so it has become really difficult to figure out the exact number of children who are victims of trafficking".

Gross Violation of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000

During group discussions and interviews, many respondents have cited several such cases where children are just put behind bars without even applying appropriate provisions of the Juvenile Justice Law. In many instances even the minors are shown as adult and jailed. The following are two such recent cases.

Case 25: Cilvious Buskey, 14, kept in Lock-Up for 3 days.

His family was rendered homeless due to ethnic conflict in 1998. He was born and brought up in Sapkata Relief Camp of Kokrajhar district. In his own words "On July 28, 2013, I woke up to the thundering sound of gun fire. After a while a group of armed police personnel broke open the door of my room and asked me to come out. When I came out I saw a dead body lying in the courtyard of our neighbour. The police personnel asked me whether I knew the person or not. Since I do not know the person, I answered in the negative. But they did not believe me. The armed police personnel took us to Gossaigaon police station and kept us there in the lock up for three days. They released us only when an NGO person persuaded the police on our behalf."

Case 26: Mr. Jorin (name changed), was imprisoned by the Indian Army at the age of 13 to remain in jail for next four years

Mr. Jorin and his parents were living in a village under Kachugaon Police Station of Kokrajhar district. One fine day in 2009, he was going to school in school uniform when he was picked up by Army patrolling team and taken to Kachugaon Army Camp. On the following day he was being forcefully photographed with weapon in Army fatigue then being handed over to the police station. The parents and locals were totally taken a back when a local daily news paper carried the news of him being a member of insurgent outfit and being apprehended by Indian Army. Mr. Jorin's parents ran pillar to post to get him out on bail and finally after three years he was being released on bail only to be re-arrested after three months. In 2012, the social workers of NERSWN came to know about the incident and pursued with the local court with all evidence including school certificate, he was being released under the relevant provisions of Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection) Act 2000.

Atrocities by the Armed State Forces

One of the participants of Focus Group Discussion said in this regard, "Because of the insurgency movement army personnel have been carrying out operations in the villages. The children have heard of a lot of atrocities by the armed forces. Hence, children especially girls in our village remains fearful all the time".

Conflict Leads to Violation of Children's Fundamental Right to Education under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution

The NCPCR in its final survey abstract in 2011 has stated drop-out figures for Chirang district at 6-8 years as 299, (male 152 and female 147), 9-14 years 1647 (male 877 and female 770) and 15-18 years 2274 (male 1338 and female 936).

In most of the focus group discussions and interviews, respondents have talked about children dropping out from schools and engaging in earning activities to support their families.

Mr. H. Roy, District Labour Officer, Kokrajhar, during the course of an interview has said that large numbers of children belonging to displaced families have been forced to work. He admits the inability of his department to rescue the children due to lack of proper policy initiative to compensate for the earnings out of child labour and absence of a rehabilitation package for the family.

Narrating the experience of facing the ethnic conflict one of the participants of a Focus Group Discussion said “With regards to rescue, relief and rehabilitation, hardly anything was done by government. Food was given only for 5 days, only we know how we survived and we have not got anything from the government. The NGOs or other organizations were also not forthcoming. The medical facilities were totally nil and many children and elderly were ill. There was no water, and the camps were congested and unhygienic. After being in the camp for so many years, in the name of rehabilitation, the government gave us just Rs. 10,000. Can you imagine rebuilding a collapsed life with this amount of money?”

Such is the tragic and tough situation faced by the inhabitants of the conflict affected areas. As discussed, the researched area has been completely devastated by unending episodes of ethnic conflict and by protracted armed conflict for many decades now. The consequences have been far reaching and there has not been a comprehensive and systematic response to deal with the crisis. As a result, it is the children who have been suffering the most. The innocent children who are yet to comprehend the nature of the politics are forced to fall prey to it. By the time they realize they are being victimized by the politics of hatred and violence, for many of them, it is too late. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the researcher would like to make some recommendation for the future course of action in order to prevent and respond to the violation of rights of the children. It is hoped that a congenial and conducive atmosphere can be created where children would grow fully and explore to the fullest limit of their life and potential.

Chapter V – Conclusion and Recommendations

The discussions in the previous chapters have highlighted the gravity of the impact of armed conflict on children in the states of Assam and Manipur. A small study such as the present one in fact is only able to expose a drop in the mighty ocean. Nevertheless, the researchers have made the best of efforts to find out the magnitude of impact on children due to conflict.

The study so far has exposed the multiple deprivations of children due to conflict. Children are killed, hurt and maimed as a direct result of violence. Access to food, water, sanitation, health care and schooling deteriorates. Children are pushed into situations that can circumscribe the remainder of their lives. Many of them are forced to participate directly in the vicious cycle of conflict as soldiers. Armed conflict disrupts families and social networks that support children's physical, emotional and social development. It also renders children vulnerable to trafficking and sexual abuse.

Major causes for concern

1. One of the major causes of concern in the study area is children themselves becoming participants in armed conflict. But it has also been discussed how in other parts of the country and the world, a child participating in the armed struggle has been considered a victim of conflict rather than a perpetrator. The relevant legislations such as Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000 and India's obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict UNCRC, give enough of scope to rescue, rehabilitate and re-integrate the children associated with armed groups.
2. The second cause for concern that emerges from the findings is children being killed as soft targets in the zones of conflict. The findings have shown how children have been brutally targeted by both state forces and underground armed groups.
3. The forced displacement and long term residence of children in the relief camps are matters of grave concern.
4. The issue of trafficking in children especially in girl children is a real reason for worry.
5. The high incidence of out of school children, which also is one of the major causes of all the above-discussed child protection related challenges, is a major violation of the children's rights.

6. Having parents killed due to insurgency-related activities, by armed forces or due to ethnic conflict, hundreds of children have become orphaned at an early age. The deprivation from parental care in turn threatens to cause other concerns for children.

These are only the most glaring issues, and others have been discussed too in the forgoing chapter. Based on the findings, the research team would like to suggest the following recommendations to mitigate the crisis faced by children due to conflict.

Recommendations

1. To the State Government of Assam and Manipur

- 1.1 Implement the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection) Act 2000 with utmost sincerity in areas affected by armed conflict.
- 1.2 Formulate and implement an effective and uniform Relief and Rehabilitation Policy that adequately addresses the need of the conflict affected families.
- 1.3 The Department of Home and Women and Child Development together should develop guidelines to rescue, rehabilitate and re-integrate the child participants of insurgency movements. They should be treated as victims rather than perpetrators.
- 1.4 Identify the individuals and organizations involved with recruiting the children into insurgency groups and take tough action against them to prevent further recruitment. Immediate criminal proceedings should be initiated against the persons involve with such heinous crimes and exemplary punishment should be given, so that no one dares to repeat a similar crime in future.
- 1.5 Ensure proper implementation of Right to Education Act 2009, ICDS, NRHM and other child related schemes and programmes in armed conflict affected areas.
- 1.6 Regularly monitor and support the district authorities in trafficking cases. Each and every child victim of trafficking and forced migration should be given proper counselling, skill training, rehabilitation and re-integration with families and communities.
- 1.7 Partner with Non-Government Organizations to extend psycho-social support to the children victims of armed conflict.

1.8 Involve district authorities to build capacities of PRIs, Village Development Councils and frontline service providers to prevent and respond to the violation of child rights.

2. To the State Government of Manipur

2.1 Follow national and international standards while recruiting Special Police Officers (SPOs)/Village Defence Force and take all possible measures to prevent children from joining these forces.

2.2 The State Government of Manipur should appropriately utilize the presence of highly professional civil society organizations in the state to deliver child related services in the inaccessible conflict affected areas. It can also be utilized for support and monitoring of flagship programmes meant for children so that the intended purposes of those schemes and programmes can be realized.

3. To the Government of India

3.1 Initiate criminal proceedings against perpetrators of the crime of involving children in armed conflict

3.2 Stop and prevent the recruitment of children by State Armed Forces, like the Assam Rifle, and by non-state armed groups wherever it exists

3.3 Take concrete steps to stop the recruitment of children with false age documents

3.4 Stop and prevent the detention of children and secure that children always get access to legal procedures in line with the Juvenile Justice Act

3.5 Suspend the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, especially the regulations guaranteeing impunity to army members and the regulations that suspend basic civil rights, for example giving the army the right to arbitrarily arrest citizens, including children, without regular legal procedure.

3.6 Formulate and implement a comprehensive and overarching policy for children in conflict affected areas. The same has also been suggested by National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).⁴⁸

3.7 Formulate and implement a comprehensive policy to ensure the rights of the IDPs and address their needs holistically. This needs to be in accordance with Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.⁴⁹

3.8 Designate a nodal department for monitoring and oversight of the proper implementation of child-related schemes, programmes, policies and legislation with effective coordination and convergence of all the departments.

3.9 Develop a standard protocol and make it mandatory for the Human Rights Division under Ministry of Home Affairs to conduct public hearings on each and every complaint of extra judicial killings of children.

3.10 While entering into ceasefire and peace dialogue with insurgency groups the government should make it mandatory for the groups to release the child members and make provisions for adequate support to rescue, rehabilitate and re-integrate those victim children.

4. To the United Nations

4.1 Start support programmes for conflict-affected children and youth, focussing especially on education and psychosocial support, and continuously monitor their situation.

4.2 Advocate to all conflict parties to stop the violations of children's rights and to implement prevention measures.

5. To Non-Government Organization /Civil Society Organization

5.1 Advocate and Lobby for special policies and legislation for the children affected by armed conflict.

5.2 Support Government in effective implementation of RTE Act 2009, ICDS, NRHM, JJ Act 2000 and other progressive legislation, schemes and programmes meant for children.

5.3 Advocate and Lobby with different stakeholders to release the child participants of insurgency movement and other armed groups, initiate a process to give relief, rehabilitation and re-integration of these children to secure a healthy future for them.

⁴⁸ Protection of Children's Rights in Areas of Civil Strife, NCPCR, 2010, pp.04

⁴⁹ Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, OCHA, www.ifrc.org/Docs/idrl/I266EN.pdf

5.4 Create awareness and sensitization to prevent further recruitment of children into the insurgency movement or into other armed groups.

5.5 Implement innovative projects to create a protective environment for displaced children.

5.6 Get involved with knowledge building and dissemination about the children's plight due to armed conflict at local, national and international level.

6. To the Academia

6.1 Conduct research on issues and challenges of children in conflict affected areas and disseminate widely.

6.2 Include the issues of children in conflict affected areas in its teaching and training curriculums.

6.3 Support the NGOs and government organizations in effective policy formulation and innovative ideas for small scale projects with scope for scale up.

7. To the Media

7.1 Regularly highlight the issue of children's victimization due to armed conflict with good ethical standards so that different stakeholders, especially government's, attention can be drawn for effective systemic measures to prevent and respond to safeguard the interests of the children.

7.2 Expose the individuals and groups involved with victimization of children in the conflict affected areas, so that destructive elements can be brought to book, shamed and discarded by the society in general.

7.3 Highlight the constructive initiatives undertaken by both government and non-government organizations so that word can be spread for replication.

The list of recommendations is not exhaustive, but surely, if these initiatives are immediately undertaken keeping in view the urgency of the situation, it can go a long way in reducing the crisis faced by children in conflict affected areas in North East India. Hence, the researchers have decided to limit themselves on the above stated recommendations. The research team remains open to feedback, constructive criticism, suggestion, and correction of omissions.

Annex

Cases in the Study

Case No.	Name	Age	District, State	Child Rights Violation	Page No.
1	Mr. Hopeson	12	Tamenglong, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	17
2	Mr. Rinku	16	Imphal West, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents & Imprisoned by the State	17
3	Mr. Suraj	15	Imphal West, Manipur	Abducted to be a Child Soldier by Insurgents	18
4	Mr. Raman	14	Imphal West, Manipur	Abducted to be a Child Soldier by Insurgents	18
5	Ms. Alina	14	Tamenglong, Manipur	Abducted to be a Child Soldier by Insurgents	18
6	Ms. Lily	18	Tamenglong, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	19
7	Mr. Joyson	16	Tamenglong, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	19
8	Mr. Johnson	17	Imphal West, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	20
9	Mr. Nelson	22	Imphal West, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	20
10	Mr. James	16	Tamenglong, Manipur	Recruited as Child Soldier by Assam Rifle, a State Paramilitary Force	20
11	Ms. Muliangbi Gonmei	10	Tamenglong, Manipur	Seriously Wounded by Bullets in Crossfire	21
12	Late N. Sangita Devi	17	Imphal West, Manipur	Committed Suicide after being Raped by State Armed Force Personnel	21
13	Mr. Johny	17	Imphal West, Manipur	Victim of Fake Surrender organised by the Assam Rifle, a State Armed Force	22
14	Mr. Sushil	19	Chirang, Assam	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents at the age of 16	24
15	Ms. Purnima	19	Chirang, Assam	Forced by her mother to join an Insurgency Group at the age of 15	24
16	Mr. Aryan	18	Chirang, Assam	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	25
17	Mr. Bijon	24	Kokrajhar, Assam	Surrendered former Child Soldier of an Insurgent Group	25
18	Mr. Dinesh	14	Chirang, Assam	Recruited as Child Soldier by Insurgents	26
19	Md. Muskan Ali	8	Chirang, Assam	Affected by Ethnic Violence and Displaced	27
20	Mr. Nerswn Basumtary	16	Chirang, Assam	Displaced and separated from his family due to Ethnic Violence	28
21	Mr. Dwimalu	13	Chirang, Assam	Traumatized by Ethnic Violence & Displacement	28
22	Mr. Hafijul, Rahman	14	Kokrajhar, Assam	Traumatized by Ethnic Violence & Displacement	28
23	Ms. Rekha	13	Chirang, Assam	Displaced and rendered homeless by the Conflict	29
24	Mr. Arun Narzary	14	Kokrajhar, Assam	Orphaned by Conflict	29
25	Mr. Cilvious Buskey	14	Kokrajhar, Assam	A child imprisoned for 3 days	30
26	Mr. Jorin	17	Kokrajhar, Assam	A child imprisoned for four years at the age of 13	30

Details of all Interviewees

Sl.	Name	Age	District, State	Occupation / Situation	Remarks
1	Ms. Lily	18	Tamenglong, Manipur	Child Soldier	Name changed
2	Mr. Rocky	17	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Mr. James	16	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Mr. Hopeson	12	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Ms. Alina	14	-do-	-do-	-do-
6	Mr. Joyson	16	-do-	-do-	-do-
7	Mr. Rinku	16	Imphal West, Manipur	-do-	-do-
8	Mr. Suraj	15	-do-	-do-	-do-
9	Mr. Raman	14	-do-	-do-	-do-
10	Mr. Jonson	17	-do-	-do-	-do-
11	Mr. Nelson	22	-do-	Former Child Soldier	-do-
12	Mr. N. Kishore	--	Imphal, Manipur	Social Activist	
13	Family Members of Ms. Ms. Muliangbi Gonmei	--	Tamenglong, Manipur	Victim of Armed Conflict	Victim was 10 y. old
14	Relative of Mr. Abel	---	Tamenglong, Manipur	Victim of Insurgency	Victim was 7 y. old
15	Parents of Lt. N. Sangita Devi	-	Imphal West, Manipur	Rape Victim and Abetment of Suicide	Victim was 17 y. old
16	Mr. Johny	17	Imphal West, Manipur	Victim of Fake Surrender	
17	Mr. T. Lalboi Haokip	---	Thaobal District, Manipur	Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Manipur Police	
18	Mr. Th. Radhesyam	---	Bishnupur District, Manipur	Superintendent of Police	
19	Kh. Dedraulla Singh	--	Imphal, Manipur	Advocate, Guwahati High Court	
20	Ms. Sushila	38	Imphal, Manipur	Business	Husband got killed & she is being forced to look after four children alone.
21	Mr. Tomba	45	Imphal West, Manipur	Truck Driver	Victim of drugs smuggling
22	Mr. Karbabam, I.	70	-do-	Farmer	Granddaughter committed suicide after being raped
23	Ms. Sarnalata, L.	25	-do-	Student	Close Friend of a victim of Conflict
24	Mr. Daplang, N.	40	Kokrajhar, Assam	Former Member of Armed Group.	
25	Mr. Sushil	19	Chirang, Assam	Joined Armed Group at the age of 16	Name changed
26	Ms. Purnima	19	Chirang, Assam	Joined Armed Group at the age of 15	-do-
27	Mr. Aryan	18	Chirang, Assam	Child Soldier	-do-
28	Mr. Bijon	24	Kokrajhar, Assam	Former Child Soldier	-do-
29	Mr. Dinesh	14	Chirang, Assam	Child Soldier	-do-
30	Mr. Xaxa, Z.	--	Kokrajhar, Assam	Chairman of an Armed Group	
31	Mr. Moniram, N.	---	Chirang, Kokrajhar	Head Master of a High School	
32	Mr. Jayanta, R.	--	Kokrajhar, Assam	District Labour Officer	
33	Mr. Nilesware, S.	--	Kokrajhar, Assam	Sub-Divisional Police Officer	
34	Mr. Stephen, N.	---	Chirang, Assam	Social Activist	

35	Mr. Chaudhuri, P.	---	Kokrajhar, Assam	Journalist	
36	Mr. Muskan, A.	10	Kokrajhar, Assam	Displaced due to Conflict	
37	Mr. Nerswn, B.	16	Kokrajhar, Assam	-do-	
38	Mr. Dwimalu,	13	Chirang, Assam	-do-	
39	Mr. Hafijul, R.	14	Kokrajhar, Assam	-do-	
40	Ms. Rekha	13	Chirang, Assam	-do-	
41	Mr. Dino, D.	29	Chiranga, Assam	Social Activist	
42	Mr. Jaithun N.	--	-do-	Student Activist	
43	Ms. Subashree	---	-do-	Social Welfare Officer	
44	Mr. Arun N.	14	Kokrajhar, Assam	Orphaned by Conflict	
45	Mr. Digambar, N	---	-do-	Social Activist	
46	Mr. Cilvious, B	14	-do-	An imprisoned child	
47	Mr. Jorin	17	Kokrajhar, Assam	An imprisoned child	Name changed
48	Mr. Sekh, S.	16	-do-	Displaced due to Conflict.	
49	Ms. Purnima,	15	-do-	-do-	
50	Mr. Alom, S.	13	-do-	-do-	
51	Ms. Kujur, J.	25	-do-	Violence Survivor	
52	Mr. Jayanta, R	---	-do-	Inspector of Police	
53	Mr. Sharma, D.	---	Imphal, Manipur	Social Activist	
54	Mr. Laishram, M.	---	Imphal, Manipur	Social Activist	
55	Mr. Boro, P.	---	Kokrajhar, Assam	Student Leader	
56	Mr. Kishku, P	27	Kokrajhar, Assam	Social Worker	
57	Ms. Brahma, P.	--	Kokrajhar, Assam	Social Activist	
58	Mr. George, H.	---	Tamenglong, Manipur	NGO Leader	
59	Mr. Guite, J.	---	Tamenglong, Manipur	Self Styled Lieutenant, Armed Group	
60	Ms. Panti	---	Tamenglong, Manipur	Social Activist	

Profile of the Focus Group Discussion Participants

Sl	FGD Participants Details	Occupation of the Group Member	Total Participants
1	Tamenlong Research Scholars Association, Assam University	Research Scholars	5
2	Village Defence Force, Jiribam Police Station, Manipur	Police	8
3	Teaching Staff of Jiri College, Manipur	Teaching	6
4	Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Hilghat, Imphal West, Manipur	Health Workers	10
5	Women Society, Dugailong Baptist Church	Member of Church	8
6	Medical Staff, Tamenglong Civil Hospital	Doctors and Nurses	4
7	Members of Zelianrong Student Union, Nungba Area	Student Activist	6
8	Women Group, Chirang, Assam	Women IDPs	12
9	Men Group, Chirang, Assam	Men IDPs	10
10	Children's Group, Chirang, Assam	Children IDPs	12
11	Children Group, Simultapu, Kokrajhar	Children IDPs	10
12	Children Group, Besorkona, Kokrajhar	Children IDPs	10
12	Men Group, Kumtola, Kokrajhar	Men IDPs	10
13	Men Group, Simoltapu, Kokrajhar	Men IDPs	08
14	Women Group, Simoltapu, Kokrajhar, Assam	Women, IDPs	06



terre des hommes Deutschland e.V. was founded in 1967 by dedicated members of the public to help children seriously injured in the Vietnam War. terre des hommes is independent of governments, economy, religious communities and political parties and supports about 400 projects for children in need in 33 project countries. The target is a »terre des hommes«, an »Earth of Humanity«.

terre des hommes helps street children, abandoned and working children, looks after children who have become victims of war and violence and ensures their education. terre des hommes supports boys and girls whose families have died of AIDS, supports the cause of maintaining biological and cultural diversity and of protecting the rights of discriminated population groups.

terre des hommes consistently stands up for children's rights. The project partners, native local initiatives, take care of ill or war wounded children, organise education programmes for children and adolescents and support families in growing food and securing their water supply. Together with its partners, terre des hommes strives for a fairer policy towards Third World countries.

In Germany, people in 140 locations are voluntarily involved in achieving the terre des homes aims.



The North East Research & Social Work Networking (NERSWN) (www.nerswn.org) is a secular, not-for-profit, gender-just; non-political organization set up in 2004 and registered in 2005 under the Societies Registration Act 1860 which is based out of Kokrajhar. The NERSWN is one of the responsive voluntary institutions conceived, led and managed by a bunch of committed & dynamic young people from the region, for working towards sustainable & holistic change mainly in the north east India.

The NERSWN seeks to reach out with social endeavour at the doorsteps of people to realize development & rights of the marginalized through building capacities of communities and strengthening knowledge technology & networks. To realize this ultimate end, of many other programme NERSWN engages itself with small and systematic research in order to facilitate deliberate policy formulation and programming action. Current study is an endeavour towards the similar direction.

