

FIELD BULLETIN

Longer-Term Disaster Displaced: A Forgotten Group

Background

Almost all districts across the Far West face losses of lives and property every year due to natural disasters. However, the impact can last well beyond the immediate event. Humanitarian actors have observed that the duration of displacement varies depending on the intensity and type of disaster: displacement following inundation of rivers is generally short term, while displacement resulting from floods and erosion is generally longer term.¹ Kailali and Kancharpur were severely affected by floods in 2008 and 2009 that caused life and property losses as well as displacement in both districts. Determining the exact number of displaced in Kailali and the duration of their displacement is difficult however, as the District Administration Office (DAO) has no concrete figures. The Kailali Red Cross Society (NRCS) estimates that some 950 families are displaced among four different settlements. The Kancharpur DAO reports there are 308 displaced families currently sheltering in four locations.² In Dadeldhura district, NRCS has informed that 26 families were displaced within Sirsha VDC by landslides in 2005 and 59 families were displaced within Jogbuda VDC by floods in 2008. While there are certainly others still displaced from past disasters in other districts, their numbers are thought to be substantially less.

The Situation of the Displaced – Kailali and Kancharpur

District	VDC/ Location		No. of families
Kailali	Khailad	Jhaljhaliya	350
	Tikapur M	Beldanda	150
	Ratanpur	Bhuia Phanta	340
	Malakhet	Attariya	100
Kancharpur	Krishnapur	Krishnapur	100
	Krishnapur	Bandevi	70
	Dekhabhuli	Kalagauri	60
	Dekhabhuli	Dillasaini	80
Dadeldhura	Sirsha	Ward 2	26
	Jogbuda	Ward 3 & 4	59

Kailali and Kancharpur districts are especially prone to water induced disasters, specifically floods and inundation of rivers, resulting in the IDP caseloads noted. In addition, monsoons trigger flash floods and landslides that often cause further displacement. Several humanitarian actors and government agencies interviewed noted that the presence of longer-term IDPs can complicate the assessment and provision of assistance to more recent victims of natural disasters as their needs can be difficult to distinguish.

The disaster displaced in Kailali and Kancharpur have established eight informal settlements, located mostly on government land, including forests.³ In one case (Krishnapur-Bandevi) there has been Government acknowledgement and tacit permission. In Malakhet VDC, the IDPs have reportedly

¹ National Red Cross Society (NRCS) and Nepal National Social Welfare Organization (NNSWA) officials interviewed in Kancharpur, 31 May 2011.

² NNSWA officials interviewed in Kancharpur, 31 May 2011.

³ The UNFCO visited three of the eight settlements, namely Beldanda, Bhuia Phanta (Kailali) and Bandevi (Kancharpur).

encroached onto private land.⁴ The quality of shelters is mixed; most have thatched roofs while some have tin roofs and others only plastic. In Ratnapur, Kailali, an entire village of 340 families resettled into a new village called “Bhuia Phanta” after floods in 2008. They have occupied forest land and distributed one Kattha of land per family. This settlement is more organized than most and with relatively better shelters.



While shelter conditions differ, the lack of basic necessities such as water, sanitation and health services is common across settlements. According to those interviewed in the Bandevi settlement, Kanchanpur, there are only two tube wells serving seventy families and people use the nearby bush for toilets.⁵ Residents interviewed in three settlements visited noted health professionals had not visited since the initial flood. Water and vector born diseases are quite common in all the settlements and people fear epidemics may break out during the rainy season, although none have been reported so far. Like many areas in the Far West, including the broader

communities surrounding these settlements, there are limited livelihood opportunities and many men are compelled to travel to India for casual labor. However, women in the IDP settlements felt this rendered them more vulnerable than others (i.e. within the broader community) because it compounded the vulnerability stemming from their displacement and poor living conditions.

Issues in the Settlements

Assistance: While IDPs in Bandevi and Tikapur stated some rice and tarpaulins were provided, they felt it was insufficient, while those in Ratnapur responded they had not received any support. No records are available to either verify or support these claims. In contrast, there is consensus that no Government compensation for property loss or damage, or broader rehabilitation support, has been provided to these communities. One humanitarian agency noted that providing rehabilitation assistance is hampered by the fact that IDPs have no legitimate claim to the land where they have resettled.

Conditions in place of origin: According to those interviewed, most are unable to return because their properties were destroyed and, in some cases, the land itself was washed away, swamped or otherwise rendered unusable. However, while people from Bhuia Phanta, Kailali, noted that nearly 25% of their land is still suitable for cultivation, they feel they cannot return due to persisting vulnerability. Some families return to cultivate the land while residing in displacement, while others whose property was less



KAILALI Case Study

Chandrika (44) is living with his five children in the Bhuia Phanta settlement in Ratanpur VDC, established in 2008 after 340 Tharu families were displaced from their nearby village after the Mohana River flooded it completely. His substantial plot of ten Bighas was swamped and more than half can no longer be cultivated. He can no longer make a living from his land or from his work, together with other family members, as agriculture laborer. He was compelled to borrow money which he is now unable to repay. He recalled his past days when he used to make money selling crops and is upset that he cannot provide his children with higher secondary education. The villagers have approached district authorities for assistance and Chandrika is optimistic they will get government support.

⁴ NRCS Kailali officials interviewed in Kailali, 1 June 2011

⁵ Residents in Bandevi settlement, Kanchanpur, interviewed on 31 May 2011.

impacted maintain some sort of presence in both locations.

Land issues: As mentioned, most of the displaced have settled on Government land, mostly forest land. Forest Office officials have repeatedly demanded that the IDPs leave the settlements and relinquish the land, which has been countered with requests for alternative land which the respective district administrations have not been able to provide. DAO officials in Kanchanpur noted that this has led to tensions between the DAO and the forest office.

Human rights concerns: The living conditions among the IDPs are far below the standards set by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) “Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters” and the Sphere standards for disaster response. The Sphere standards outline the basic principles that those affected by disaster or conflict have a right to life with dignity and a right to assistance, and that all possible steps should be taken to alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict.⁶ These are in stark contrast to the reality of the settlements, where the IDPs have no reliable access to adequate food, clothing and housing for a dignified standard of living.

KANCHANPUR Case Study

Tara (35) and Manmati (28) and their two children (6 & 3) are living at a temporary shelter in Bandevi camp. They were displaced from Dekhatkhuli VDC – 3 in 2008 when floods hit the entire village. They lost their husband Padam who was swept away. The district authority usually provides Rs 25,000 compensation in case of death but they stated they received only Rs 2,500 and are struggling hand to mouth as they lost their main bread winner. They do not have regular work and when they are unable to get even casual labor, they are compelled to beg to feed their children. They have received candle making training but no further support to start the business. Still they hope the government will provide land for resettlement and housing reconstruction support.

Initiatives and Campaigns

IDPs in almost all of these settlements have formed committees and approached district authorities collectively to make their problems known and have them addressed. Bhuia Phanta (Kailali) IDPs have not formed a committee but rely on their existing traditional leader (*Bhalmansa*) to deal with authorities regarding their needs. Interestingly, in Tikapaur (Kailali) two different committees were formed but neither has approached district authorities. All those interviewed expressed their desire to have a small piece of land not vulnerable to further natural disaster. In Kanchanpur, displaced groups seem active and have undertaken agitation programs, such as encircling the DAO and blocking the road. Kailali groups have not undertaken agitation activities as such; however, several delegations from different settlements met with district and central authorities, including the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation which pledged to examine their requests.⁷

DAOs have received applications and memorandums seeking support but no assistance beyond immediate relief has been provided to date. DAO officials in both Kailali and Kanchanpur referenced a decision by the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works in 2008 to provide 2 katthas of land and Rs 50,000 grants for housing reconstruction for those displaced by floods in Kailali and Kanchanpur to resettle in Kanchanpur, but this has not been implemented despite budget allocations in 2008/2009. According to Kanchanpur officials, the budget released was insufficient to provide both land allocations and reconstruction grants to all those affected in their district, so no funds were disbursed. Kanchanpur officials have requested additional funds from the ministry but Kailali officials have yet to document the exact number of displaced who would be eligible.

⁶ The Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response* (2011), p. 4

⁷ *Kantipur Daily*, 16 June 2011

Humanitarian agencies contend that none of these settlements has been given priority or attention by either authorities or non-governmental agencies.⁸ The IDPs have demanded identity cards so that they will not be left out of the above-mentioned aid or future rehabilitation assistance. These identity cards have not been issued and district officials acknowledge that those who leave the settlements are unlikely to receive assistance thereafter.⁹

Possible Implications – The example of Tikapur

These camps are transitional in nature as most of the IDPs hope to return or resettle. However, barring support for this they are likely to persist indefinitely. In the Tikapur settlement, the population has increased over the years, rather than decreased either as a result of government interventions or individual coping mechanisms. A representative of a victims' organization said the initial number displaced by floods was some 340 families, whereas NRCS Kailali noted it was around 160 families. Residents put the current population at 650 families, while the Coordinator of the Land Rights Forum noted there are around



1,000 families in the camp, almost fifty percent of which are displaced. The actual figures, past or present, are unclear. The growth in numbers may indicate that the settlements are entry points for other interest groups. Landlessness is a predominant social issue in Kailali district and there are many undertaking social campaigns for their land rights. Slogans demanding land rights were observed on the walls in Tikapur, along with many empty and apparently deserted shelters, the latter possibly indicating that

squatters are not residing there but may be establishing presence in the hope of securing future land rights.

Such complexity not only confuses the scope of actual needs and thereby efforts to address them, but could potentially lead to conflict between those residing in the settlement should rehabilitation assistance become available for some and not others. There is also a chance of tension between squatters and government agencies. Some displaced interviewed in Tikapur recalled an incident in Dudejhari, Kailali, in December 2009, when an attempt to occupy forest land resulted in a clash between squatters and security forces, killing seven squatters. This sparked protests by the United Communist Party of Nepal that led to the closure of government offices and traffic across Nepal.¹⁰

Conclusion

Potentially hundreds of families remain displaced and vulnerable years after natural disasters struck them. District authorities have yet to grasp the full extent of the needs; only Kanchanpur district has made concrete progress to systematically assess and record the number and location of disaster displaced. No districts have developed concrete rehabilitation strategies to date. The 2008 Government decision is yet to be implemented and there are questions about the determination and capacity of local officials to do so. In addition, the basic needs of these displaced groups become increasingly blurred with broader issues of acute poverty or landlessness shared by many communities. This complicates both needs assessment and



⁸ Interview with NRCS and NNSWA officials in Kanchanpur, 31 May 2011

⁹ Interview with Kanchanpur DAO in Kanchanpur, 31 May 2011

¹⁰ <http://hubpages.com/hub/Kailali-Incident-Causing-major-disrupt>, accessed 17 June 2011

assistance provision, and creates an atmosphere of confusion that can easily be taken advantage of.

All districts are developing Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans to reduce the risk of natural disasters and improve response across humanitarian clusters. However, these plans are focused on future disasters and do not necessarily examine the needs of those displaced previously. District Disaster Response Committees can be encouraged to and assisted in assessing the rehabilitation needs of already affected groups. Such assessments are important not only to advocate for rehabilitation support but also to draw a line between those directly impacted by disaster and other groups seeking support, thereby reducing confusion. Further advocacy is also needed to increase the resources available for rehabilitation assistance generally. While real progress is being made in disaster prevention, the need to assist those already impacted cannot be forgotten.

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