

Poverty Among Internally Displaced Persons

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Developing nations are constantly facing the challenge of eradicating poverty. Several decades of effort have yielded positive results, but a globe devoid of poverty remains a distant dream. Natural disasters, economic mismanagement, Unfavourable terms of trade, lack of infrastructure and institutional support systems etc. contribute to the challenge. In recent years conflict has affected thousands of people in different countries. War and internal strife has caused many people to be displaced from their normal habitats, adding to the problem of poverty. These people are particularly vulnerable and are a special group. Displacement has contributed to the increase of poverty in countries where there is internal conflicts.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are individuals or group of persons who have been forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence suddenly or unexpectedly as a result of internal armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state boarder (Korn, 1999).

The phenomenon of internally displaced persons has emerged after the cold war. At the time of the "cold war" number of persons had been forced to leave their habitual residence but was unable to leave the country. Persons who cross the national boarder are recognized as refugees and were supported and protected by the international community. Persons who remained in their own country were then named as internally displaced persons. Since then the number of internally displaced persons has increased. The refugees and the internally displaced persons have many common characteristics, but the refu-

gees who cross the national boarder get assistance and protection from the international community, whereas the internally displaced persons who remain within the boarder lack protection and support from the international community.

In 1998 the United Nations introduced the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to draw attention to the needs of internally displaced persons and to ensure protection. (UNHCR, 2000)

According to the US council for Refugees, at least 21.1 million people are internally displaced worldwide; according to them the number of internally displaced increased by nearly 25 percent during the year 1999. Four million more people were internally displaced when the year ended than when it began. At present the world's internally displaced population is larger than it was in the past five years. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of countries with significant internal displacement grew from 32 to 40. During 1999, the number of countries with a half-million or more displaced have increased from 12 to 18. The problem is greatest in seven countries that together account for half the world's internally displaced, they are Sudan, Colombia, Angola, Iraq, Bosnia, Brundi, and Congo-Kinshara. Among them four are in the African continent.

The phenomenon of internally displaced, gives rise to many social and political problems, such as spread of diseases, social outbursts, political instability and internal insecurity (Kane, 1995)

In Sri Lanka the on going internal armed conflict for the past seventeen years has caused as many as one million to become displaced from their homes. This has initiated the setting-up of government run welfare centers for them in many parts of the country. The govern-

ment spends millions of rupees for the protection, relief and rehabilitation of these persons. A recent estimate shows that there are 682,827 persons have been internally displaced who receive assistance from the government at the end of the year 1999. Among them 172,693 persons are living in the welfare centers maintained by the Commissioner General of Essential Services (CGES) in 14 districts (Table -I). Since the actual statistics are difficult to obtain the total number of internally displaced may be much higher.

Table -I: IDPs as at end Sep 1999
Welfare centers maintained by CGES in 14 districts

District	No. of Welfare Centers	No. of persons in Welfare Centers
Jaffna	56	6191
Mannar	15	22,757
Kilinochchi	40	24,868
Vavunia	14	18,337
Tricomalee	16	3,953
Batticaloa	02	1,540
Amparai	09	4,020
Mullaitivu	79	32,642
Colombo	01	450
Kurunegala	13	1,154
Anuradapuraya	44	9,244
Pollonnaruwa	07	2,879
Matale	01	46
Puttalam	113	44,612
Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies - year book 2000		

The internal armed conflict has not only caused displacement but also made people to lose their possessions and their kith and kin. It has made them to lead a life in the places, where the resources are very limited. Life conditions and opportunities vary from place to place. The general nature of this social problem can be listed as follows:

- Displacement leads to lack of food, water, shelter and proper sanitation
- It drives people to live in a congested condition

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- Living in congestion give rise to stress and diseases
- Lack of opportunities to earn a living
- Competition with local communities for opportunities lead to conflict between them
- Lack of freedom to move or constant fear of insecurity
- Conditioned to be dependent on the relief and rehabilitation agencies
- Sequential displacement leads to helplessness
- Children lack access to education
- Increased number of widows
- Lack of alternate employment and lack of skills for available employment; and so on .

All these conditions have driven the internally displaced persons to a state of poverty. Poverty is defined as a state where an individual is in deprivation of adequate food, shelter and clothing, education and health. Deprivation that keeps them from leading the kind of life that everyone values. Persons in poverty face extreme vulnerability ill-health, economic displacement, and natural disasters.

According to the UNDP/ Human Development Report 2000 the following situations indicate the prevalence of human poverty in a population.

- The percentage of people born today not expected to survive to age 40.
- The adult illiteracy rate and
- The percentage of people lacking access to health services and safe water and the percentage of children under five who are moderately or severely underweight.

Poverty as such is multi dimensional. Different aspects of poverty interact and reinforces one another in important ways. For instance, improvement in health services will improve the living standards of an individual which in-turn will improve productivity and ultimately the economic condition of

the individual and contribute to eradication of poverty. At times of displacement multi deprivation is intense.

Among the internally displaced community, the symptoms of poverty, such as inadequacy of food and shelter, lack of proper education for children, lack of access to health services and water, lack of employment opportunity etc.; are widely seen. As this group of people have limited access to health services, and are deprived with adequate food, shelter and proper sanitary facilities, they are vulnerable to diseases, which in turn reinforce poverty.

The government of Sri Lanka takes efforts to fulfill the basic needs of the internally displaced persons by providing food assistance, health services, shelter and sanitation, However due to structural constraints the people living in welfare centers remain without much improvement as the provisions are just for survival. Hence, Prevalence of poverty is high among the internally displaced persons living in the welfare centers as they live in controlled set-up. Eliminating poverty in them is a challenging job for the nation. In Sri Lanka, since most of them are displaced for a period longer than one year they are conditioned to an unproductive life where they have no work to do. To eliminate poverty among this people one has to adopt a multi dimensional approach where they can address all the factors that are contributing to poverty among them.

When addressing elimination of poverty among the internally displaced persons one has to consider several possible options; such as :

Reduce dependency by return and relocation

Can encourage the internally displaced persons to return to their home or make necessary arrangements to settle them in other parts of the country. Re-settling them will enable them to lead a normal life as a citizen of the country. It will also motivate them to seek appropriate livelihood and employment. The dependency nature will also wade away from them in time to come.

Development through relief

Relief assistance could be continued with an emphasis on self-sustainability within a specific period. In order to that one has to identify the real potential of these people in the welfare centers and provide skills to embark upon profit making enterprises of their own to eliminate their economic poverty. As the economic poverty is the main cause of all other kinds of poverty, elimination of economic poverty will enable them to overcome the other kinds of poverty.

Government and non-governmental sector - coordination

Government and Non-government sectors that work for the internally displaced persons shall develop a better coordinating system between them to enable the gradual improvement in the living condition of the internally displaced persons.

These are some of the long term strategies that could be applied; but when we speak about short term the following strategies could be adopted, they are:

Work for money Program

Under this program the work done by migrant workers and hired labourers could be done by the internally displaced persons and pay for the work done. This will enable them to seek progress for them self and try to fulfill their needs without depending on other agencies to support them, it will also improve their self image and will make them be productive while being displaced.

Location of Industries

Can encourage setting up of industries and factories in places where there are many internally displaced persons and preferences be given to these persons in providing employment or provide employment for at least one person in each displaced family.

Introduce activities to get people to be socially engaged

As these people have hardly any work to do, they tend to idle and be unproductive and may lead to frustrations and social problems. If they were encouraged to participate in various social activities time would be spent more productively. They could be involved in sports, creative and performing arts, vocational skills training, education, handicrafts, etc. The children could be given education and play activities.

By adopting strategies as mentioned above the poverty among the internally displaced persons could be minimized and the dependency on the assistance provided by the relief and rehabilitation agencies could be reduced. Thereby restoring greater dignity to those affected.

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women who shoulder the added burden. Among them female-headed households are globally recognised as a vulnerable group in poverty. On the other hand social exclusion of poor women also takes place adversely affecting the social capital of the society. In Sri Lanka, patriarchal family law as well as social expectations limit women inheriting property. Further women's poor access to recourses had made it clear that it influence women's bargaining power in the household. Migration and conflict situations are other factors that affect the feminisation of poverty.

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