

Use of the HLRN “Eviction Impact Assessment” Tool in a Post-disaster Situation

An assessment of the loss of property resulting from floods in Bainsiria Village, Bari Block, Jajpur District, Odisha

Background

Bainsiria Village is situated in Bari Block of Jajpur District, at a distance of 100 kilometres from Bhubaneswar, the capital of the east Indian state of Odisha. Of a total population of 4500 in Bainsiria, 2500 people belong to Scheduled Castes (socially and economically discriminated groups) who mostly depend on agriculture and daily wage work for their livelihood.

In September 2011, the state of Odisha was badly affected by floods that submerged about 2,600 villages in 19 districts, impacting over 1.1 million people. According to government data, 61,000 people had to be evacuated and relocated, more than 10,565 houses were damaged, and 19 people lost their lives, as a result of the flood. The floods also resulted in the contamination of drinking water sources and destruction of crops and food supplies, which caused starvation and hunger in several districts.

Given the widespread devastation and the absence of a comprehensive human rights impact assessment to adequately assess losses, including of household goods, houses, livestock, crops, and livelihoods, organizations working in Odisha felt that HLRN’s Eviction Impact Assessment Tool could be used to also assess losses caused by disasters.

Objective of the Impact Assessment Study

Given the abysmally low compensation provided by the Government of Odisha to survivors of the September 2011 flood in Bainsiria Village (Rs 1500 or USD 25 to each family), this study aimed to determine the real value of losses suffered by them, through the use of the HLRN EvIA Tool. It also attempted to offer a duly tested assessment methodology and tool for use in post-disaster contexts, and to introduce it in policy documents.

Methodology

A sample size of 25 Kandara (Scheduled Caste) families of a total of 115 Kandara families living in Bainsiria Village was chosen for the impact assessment survey. This community was selected because it was one of the worst affected given its location close to the river and because it is socially and economically among the most marginalised communities in the state.

The HLRN EvIA Tool was used to develop a questionnaire suited for the local context. Three experts with knowledge of and access to the village conducted interviews with affected families to help frame the questionnaire, which also consisted of an extensive list of personal and household items destroyed during the flood. They were exposed to a detailed orientation and training exercise before they carried out the household surveys. Two village meetings were organised before and after the household surveys to explain the purpose and limitations of the study to the affected families.

The questionnaire contained 265 questions that took an average of two hours per household to administer. The entire survey process for 25 families took three days to complete. In order to verify the accuracy of data provided by families during the interviews, the investigators used a time period of three years to check status of all property and items lost, and also recorded statements of neighbours. They collected and analysed secondary information from government reports, and other documents on the loss of property during the flood. After the investigation, the team compiled and analysed the data to generate the findings.

Findings

Most of the 25 families covered in the survey had thatched houses with mud walls, which were damaged by the flood water.

The survey revealed that families lost over 265 household articles, including gold jewellery, clothes, electrical equipment, agricultural implements, crops, educational material of children, and vital documents such as birth certificates, caste certificates, ration cards, voter cards and other important identity documents. In the aftermath of the flood, affected families also lost access to subsidised food (ration) under the Public Distribution System of the government.

The following table provides a detailed breakdown of the loss.

Table: Distribution of categories of items lost by 25 families in Bainsiria Village

No.	Category of items lost	Number of families that lost this item	Highest loss of a single family for this item (Rs)	Lowest loss of a single family for this item (Rs)	Total loss of 25 families (Rs)	Average loss per family (Rs)
1.	Agricultural implements	25	37,735	255	105,875	4,235
2.	Livelihood linked infrastructure	23	52,200	6,500	310,800	13,513
3.	Utility/services	23	49,200	300	277,100	12,048
4.	Utensils/kitchen appliances	24	10,460	585	88,395	3,683
5.	Clothes	25	68,560	1,600	607,700	24,308
6.	Household articles	14	8,280	70	29,650	2,118
7.	Livestock	18	12,500	1,200	118,200	6,567
8.	Food subsidy /ration	23	1,050	18	12,207	531
9.	Crops in field	15	6,868	60	25,859	1,724
10.	Crops after harvest	17	10,739	36	43,762	2,574
11.	Vital documents	11	1,625	25	4,970	452
12.	Educational material	23	6,571	156	60,939	2,650
13.	Electrical equipment	25	20,804	80	204,997	8,200
14.	Jewellery	16	97,200	3,600	388,100	24,256
	Total				2,278,554	

The HLRN and CSNR study thus reveals that the 25 families lost personal goods and property worth Rs 2,278,554 (USD 37,976) with the average loss per family amounting to Rs 91,142 (USD 1520). The study did not however take into account losses such as housing. It also did not factor other non-monetary losses including loss of workdays, livelihoods, health and education, and psychological trauma. The total value computed is thus still an underestimation of the total loss suffered by each flood-affected family. The compensation paid by the Government of Odisha, to each family was only Rs 1500, one-sixtieth of the average amount lost by the families. This highlights the gross inadequacy in assessment methodologies of the state and the exigent need to develop and adopt a human rights-based assessment framework to address post-disaster response and to determine adequate compensation.

The report of the HLRN and CSNR impact assessment study was sent to the Special Relief Commissioner's office. Unfortunately, there was no visible response, except the usual bureaucratic reply, 'Thanks, We'll look into the matter.'

Current Living Conditions of the Families

After being displaced for a month after the flood, all the affected families returned to their original place of habitation. Initially they created temporary make-shift houses, but with the passage of time, they have rebuilt their houses with the support of the government housing scheme for rural below poverty line families – Indira Awas Yojana – and their own resources. Most families have had to struggle hard to repurchase their household articles. The condition of their livelihoods, however, has not improved as they are dependent on land-based labour work; few families are engaged in share-cropping work. Unfortunately, they also had to suffer another incident of floods in 2013.

Recommendations for the Government of Odisha

- It should accept the findings of the HLRN and CSNR study for the assessment of losses of flood-affected families in Odisha and revisit the compensation provided to them.
- It should develop and adopt a human rights-based assessment framework to address post-disaster response and to determine adequate compensation by adopting and adapting the HLRN EvIA tool and methodology
- It should incorporate a human rights approach to post-disaster response, and commit to protecting the human rights of all disaster-affected persons, groups and communities.¹

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- Civil society organizations should lobby the government to adopt a human rights framework for assessment of losses resulting from natural and human-induced disasters.
- The HLRN EvIA Tool should be made available to the government and also disseminated widely to the media, civil society, academic institutions and others interested in developing human rights-based impact assessment tools.

Limitations of the Study

The questionnaire, in an attempt to be exhaustive, took a long time to administer. This created some irritation among the respondents. Since the study did not take into account nonmaterial losses and long-term impacts, the value is an underestimation. Actual compensation should thus be much higher, if factors such as loss of housing, loss of livelihoods, loss of education and healthcare, and psychological trauma and mental tension are accounted for.

¹ See, *Guidelines for Protecting Human Rights in Post-disaster Relief and Rehabilitation*, Housing and Land Rights Network, Delhi, 2014. Available at: www.hic-sarp.org