

Applying HLRN's Eviction Impact Assessment Tool in Lathor, Odisha

On the afternoon of 22 January 2012, the Dalit (Scheduled Caste) colony of Lathor Village in Balangir District in west Odisha was suddenly attacked by a marauding mob of over 500 upper-caste men – drunk and armed with petrol, kerosene, sticks, and sharp weapons. The carnage continued unabated for 12 hours, until police forces arrived; by then 33 houses were gutted to ash and 12 houses were reduced to rubble.

The horrific caste violence attack apparently was sparked by an incident involving a small boy led to in Lathor, Balangir district of Odisha, leaving 50 Dalit families homeless and destitute. At around 3:00 PM on 22 January 2012, Ganesh Suna, a 9th-grade Dalit boy went to a shop to buy a new shirt, which he wore over the shirt he was already wearing. After he left the shop, the shopkeepers Bharat Meher and his brother Daya Meher, called him back and accused him of being a thief and beat him.

When the boy was returning home helplessly, he met an old man, Gouranga Suna, and told him about the shopkeepers' beating. Gouranga Suna went to the shopkeepers and asked "why did you beat the boy? If he has stolen the shirt we can pay the money for that, but you should not have beaten him." The shopkeepers then proceeded to the old man with their shoes. The old man reported to his family members, and then 4–5 youth from the Dalit community went to the shop and fought with the shopkeepers. These events seems to have ignited the hatred of the upper castes (Savarna) against the Dalits (Asavarna).

The marauding mob of over 500 upper-caste men then proceeded to attack the minority Asavarna community. The Dalits tried to save themselves from this brutal violence and ran away from their homes. Some Dalit men went into the forest, while others went to nearby villages, and some women saved themselves in other untouchable Ghasia Vasti (scavenger colonies).

The violent upper-caste mob even looted gold ornaments and expensive materials from the Dalit homes. They burnt all the certificates of the students and other kinds of valuable documents. Meanwhile, they abused all the Dalit women with offensive language. The upper-caste traders such as the Marwadi Agrawals even distributed liquor and petrol freely to burn the Dalit houses.

Some Dalits tried to register an F.I.R., in the Lathor police station, but the police refused to register the case and were unable to manage the situation. The violence became so uncontrollable that no one was able to stop the upper castes; the mob even beat up a local news reporter of Kanak TV and threatened the Dharitri reporter, Bhubaneswar Barik. The upper-caste mob marched on the roads and blocked all traffic. They burnt tyres on the road and dug up the road, blocking all vehicle traffic and communication with Lathor.

The Savarna mob also attacked the fire brigade and burnt their vehicle, so that the fire could not be extinguished until they burnt all the Asavarna houses. Since nobody was able to put out the fires, everything burned to ashes. According to the local reports, no commodities and food grains were left in the village. The police finally reached the site at midnight and tried to protect the Dalit victims.

After the carnage, the police officers housed the 45 affected Dalit families in one corner of a local school, which the administration called a "relief camp," where they were forced to live for more than a year. There, survivors had to wage another struggle to ensure a minimum standard of basic

amenities such as electricity, healthcare, sanitation, and even food supply. Children stopped going to school while their parents were denied any wage work in the village by landlords and contractors. People also lost valuable possessions, including educational certificates and land deeds to the fire.

The Dalits of Lathor lost their homes, property, wealth, clothes, bikes, books and became hopeless and homeless. More than 4 crores (Rs. 40 million) wealth has been lost. The children, women and men were displaced from their homes. The rehabilitation programme undertaken by the government was extremely insufficient.

From TV reports, it was learnt that the Odisha Chief Minister declared a sum of Rs.1 lakh (Rs. 100,000) to each victimized family as compensation. Most victims say that the compensation given to them was not sufficient for building their lives anew.

Quantification Intervention

The Centre for Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR) Bhubaneswar, had worked with HLRN and used HLRN's EvIA Tool to document the losses incurred by the victim-survivors of the Kandhamal violence in Odisha. CSNR shared the EvIA Tool with the youth of the community, who then adapted it to prepare a framework to assess the losses incurred by affected families in Lathor. CSNR provided an orientation for the community volunteers who carried out the survey that covered all affected families. They also collected documentary evidence to justify their claims. The *Palli Sabha* (Village Council) also authenticated the information collected.

The assessment enabled a detailed enumeration and calculation of losses related to livestock, household articles, agricultural implements, crops, vital documents including certificates, educational material, cooking utensils, clothes, books, food items, jewellery, and electronics. The HLRN framework helped the families monetise their losses, which amounted to an average loss of about Rs. 500,000 per family.

The state survey had grossly underestimated the value of loss and was rejected by the affected families.

After the completion of the survey and an analysis of the findings, the affected families filed a complaint (First Information Report – FIR) at the local police station with the findings. The FIR with the detailed lists of damage/loss and documentary evidence to support the claims compelled the police to register the case. On the basis of police station records, the affected families submitted the findings of the impact assessment and their demands to the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the District Collector. Based on the comprehensive report submitted, the administration accepted the families' claims for house damage and other losses. As a result, they were provided with reconstructed houses costing Rs. 2,10,000 and paid Rs. 50,000 in cash as compensation for loss of other personal items. This amount, however, is only a fraction of the loss suffered and the affected families are still struggling for adequate compensation that is due to them as per their own assessment using the HLRN Eviction Impact Assessment (EvIA) Tool.

The idea of assessing one's own property loss was unique in the case of Lathor and should be replicated. The process however needs to follow a systematic and structured format – such as the HLRN EvIA Tool. Various international and national human rights laws and guidelines also need to be invoked to put pressure on the State to meet its obligations and fulfil due demands. In the case of Lathor, even though the victim-survivors were provided with the format of the EvIA Tool, there was

no specific planning as to how to advocate for compensation as per their self-assessment. This experience should be viewed as an important lesson in carrying out human rights-based impact assessments and advocating for one's human rights.

The following list of victims is preliminary. Subsequent investigation may reveal further victims of the sectarian violence.

SL NO	Name of the Victims	Male No	Female No	Boy Age under 14	Girl Age under 14
1	Gouranga Suna	2	3	1	1
2	Byasa Suna	1	2	2	
3	Milanchala Suna	3	2	-	
4	Rajharsa Suna	2	1	1	
5	Sim anchal Suna	1	2	4	-
6	Trimatha Tandi	4	4	-	-
7	Dolamani Tandi	1	1	-	1
8	Sikun Bag	1	2	3	
9	Mahendra Suna	6	3	1	-
10	Lakhsman Suna	3	3	-	-
11	Mukhiaru Suna	1	2	1	-
12	Karunakar Suna	1	2	2	-
13	Bhadra Suna	2	2	-	-
14	Sankritan Suna	2	3	-	-
15	Akrura Suna	1	2		1
16	Madan Suna	1	1	1	-
17	Pradeep Suna	3	3	-	-
18	Delaganjan Suna	1	2	3	-
19	Turu Suna	1	2	3	-
20	Kadam Sagadia	1	1	4	-
21	Kangres Sagadia	2	2	2	-
22	Shankar Sagdia	3	5	-	-
23	Ram eshwar Tandi	2	2	-	-
24	Kalindri Suna	1	2	-	2
25	Tine Suna	2	1	-	-
26	Dharu Suna	3	2	1	1
27	Biranchi Suna	3	2	2	-
28	Jaganath Tandi	1	1	1	-
29	Pati Sagadia	2	2	2	4
30	Dinesh Suna	2	1	-	-
31	Kanhu Suna	3	1	1	-
32	Pancha Suna	1	2	1	1
33	Kialash Suna	1	1	2	-
34	Gulpi Suna	-	2	1	2
35	Firoj Suna	1	1	2	-
	TOTAL	65	70	41	13

Related articles

- [Satara: Dalit woman stripped, beaten \(kractivist.wordpress.com\)](http://kractivist.wordpress.com)
- [Brutal Attack and Sexual Abuse on six Dalit women \(kractivist.wordpress.com\)](http://kractivist.wordpress.com)
- [Police beats up Dalit officer for doing his work, No FIR yet! \(kractivist.wordpress.com\)](http://kractivist.wordpress.com)
- ['Would they have tortured me the same way had I not been a Dalit?' \(kractivist.wordpress.com\)](http://kractivist.wordpress.com)