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Threatened Life of Weaker Section of People on Border Areas of Assam:

Report of A Case Study

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Abstract:

Poverty is a facet of developing nations like India and it is quite common in fringe areas in border districts of states like Assam. At the same time these areas are disturbed with illegal infiltration and other unlawful activities. An attempt to discuss poverty and economic status of weaker section of people especially women along the International border areas in Assam in the light of contemporary migration is made through field studies. The study emphasized on quality and support of life of weaker section of people in study area. Emphasis was also given to push and pull factors of historic and contemporary migration along with factors associated with border trade and extra national interest. Three case studies are reported with recommendations to policy makers.

Key words: Poverty, border areas, Assam, recommendations

Introduction

Poverty is considered as a reality of journey of human life though it of the developed world, developing nations and even true when it concerns even in case of Assam. At the initial period of the present century, number of people living below the World Bank's Poverty line (of \$1 per day) is about 1,200 million, while at present; around 2,700 million people lived below \$2 per day poverty line. Current position of world poverty is notably shaped by the era of invasion in economic activities, migration and colonization, including coercion, dependence to the more developed nation and to some extent genocide. During 2015-16 to 2020-21, in respect to multidimensional poverty index, India declines its position significantly from 24.85% to 14.96% with a decrease in 9.89 percentage points; and in this decline, rural areas witnessed fastest decline in poverty during the years, from 32.59% to 19.28%(UNDP, 2023). Assam is situated in the middle of Northeastern region of India between 24°3'N to 28°N lat. & 89°51'E to 96°1'E long, bordering seven States of India and with International border of two countries namely Bangladesh and Bhutan. Though recent census data is not available for Assam, population density during 2001 to 2011 has gone up to 397 as against 382 which is density of Indian population in 2011 where as it was 340 in 2001 (Saikia, 2023). As per Economic Survey, the state of Assam lags behind the rest of India as Assam stood at 28th position in GDP per

capita rank within India (PRS LR, 2023). This report also showed that International border districts are poorer in comparative to other districts of Assam (Saikia, 2015). As per report of International Monetary Fund, spatial distribution of poverty in Bangladesh shows that most of the border areas are poorer than the rest of Bangladesh and the case is also similar with Bhutan (IMF, 2022). Historically, the trend of rural poverty in Assam shows an increasing incidence continuously (PIB, 2013). Border areas have peculiar problems which are not similar to other regions of the state (Saikia, 2015). These areas are generally not commonly accessible where basic facilities of life are costly and not easy to achieve. Border areas are more prone to illegal and undocumented infiltration adding pressure on their environmental and economic resources (Saikia, 2019). Moreover, passage through border becomes easy for insurgents and criminals including drug pedlars, animal, cattle and human traffickers are facilitated by porous nature of the borders (Saikia, 2015). Therefore, the government administration of the border states like Assam with considerable and important international border are required to stand with liability and heavier burden of providing infrastructure and basic facilities to the population living in fringe areas and at the same time, liable for the border security as a broader national agenda.

A sincere attempt is made to discuss poverty and economic status of weaker section of people specially women along the International border areas in Assam in the light of contemporary migration. The study was aimed to take a firm look at quality and support of life of weaker section of people specially women in border areas. Emphasis was given to push and pull factors of historic and contemporary migration along with factors associated with border trade and extra national interest.

Methodology

Case studies are conducted in International border villages of three border districts viz, Dhubri, Cachar and Karimganj districts of Assam during 2019-2020. Personal interviews were taken with local inhabitants who are migrated to this present land in their ancestral time for their livelihood, socio-economic status etc. General overview on issues related to International border was also collected to draw and analyse many metaphor and ground reality. Review of literature was also conducted in the relevant theme and information gathered are analysed. Key factors of migration were highlighted and remarks drawn from the study. Finally, some recommendations are forwarded to mitigate the situation.

RESULTS

Results of the present study are enumerated below:

<u>Case study areas</u>	<u>Facts found</u>	<u>Remarks on ground of migration</u>
CS1: Dhubri dist. 3 families interviewed	Majority of people are inter-exchangeable in their views and common factor working their livelihood found is economic situation. No formal economic aspect is available, have to visit nearby town areas for work.	*Deprivation of economic opportunity *Lack of quality livelihood measures

CS2: Cachar dist. 4 families interviewed	Several people are conservative in their views and common factor working their livelihood found is labour market associated with social stability. Few industrial works can be accessed through middleman in nearby towns	*Demand for worker/industrial worker *Social similarity for cultural exchange
CS3: Karimganj dist. 3 families interviewed	Almost all the people of the study area are agricultural labour and their wage for livelihood is always a concern of importance as well as other political and social opportunities. They are keen to the people beyond borders due to family old relations	*Agricultural wage is higher than native *Higher socio-economic opportunity

N.B.: Interview schedule was a semi-structured questionnaire used for the study

Discussion

Migration through international border is a process now a day, considered being rich in potentials and economic opportunities, but the process is also in political contradictions and problems like security and threat to the nation. This is factual for any governments, associated societies, and the migratory population in both target countries and native countries. Unavailability and lack of efficient cooperation at international level in migration flow management results in malfunction of the administrative machinery for counter illegal process of in and out migration; finally, affecting economic development in the region as a whole. Growth of extra national interest also affects the socio-economic development in the areas.

a) Shocking information

- In respect to male and female numbers, if considered total outflows from Bangladesh to India, 35% of the emigrant women migrated against 11% of the men to India (Blanchet 2005)
- In an estimate during 1998, The Centre for Women and Children Studies estimated that 27,000 Bangladeshis have been forced through various means into prostitution in India (Sikder 2008) and they may be routed through the border.
- In the last decade of 21st century, 2 lakh Bangladeshi women and children have been taken out of the country by the traffickers.

b) Key factors of migration

- **Push factors:** lack of economic opportunities for development and lack of access to resources for quality livelihood
- **Pull factors:** available employability and demand for workers, higher wage than own country, access to resources for livelihood
- **Factors of importance:** family or social networks and economic as well as social, religious and cultural exchange between similar individuals

c) Remarks drawn from the study

- Overall situational analysis of the areas and review on the reported articles finally points only to poverty of the people living in the border areas without proper economic opportunity for a quality livelihood.

d) Important recommendations forwarded

- The Govt. of India should employ a special National Immigration Commission to strengthen 'National Migration Policy' and a 'National Refugee Policy' who will in turn examine ways of strengthening all legal frameworks including the Foreigners Act, 1946, and its feasibility of issuing separate Identity Cards for citizens and non-citizens residing in such areas and issuance of 'Work Permits' for migrant workers.
- Preventive and deterrent measures should be taken immediately to restrain further illegal migration. The present posts of Border Security Force and especially the 'water wing' of BSF to be strengthened and border fencing, lighting and patrolling should be improved with modern and cyber technologies.
- Important urgent decisions should be made by both the Bordering Governments upon the deportation issue in the light of Human rights issues and possible trans-border mechanism should be developed for the deportees.
- Policy makers should find opportunity to skill the manpower of the border areas focusing to young generation so that within a short time they become much skilled in various sectors for production of quality material for the whole country which will in turn change the economic picture of the border people.
- Strengthening all citizen issues including NRC will empower both Govt. and people for overall development of the area and government machinery will get more opportunity to implement schemes for the benefit of stakeholders.

Conclusion

The study is specific to some sample of study only but put light on few important issues related to poverty beyond borders. These socio-legal opinions may be helpful to improve the threatened life of weaker section of people to generate productive human resources in today's world of Global sustainable development.

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