

## **Women and the Crisis of War**

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The absence of human security whether through war, environmental calamities or political maneuverings is interpreted as disaster in my paper. Perhaps nowhere is disaster and its impact more visible in the world today than in wars where violence is the means to power. Armed conflicts spare no lives. Not only the lives of those at war but lives of innocent members of the civil society who get caught in the web of mutual hate of the warring factions are taken. And the development enterprise has become an issue as a failed instrument for alleviating poverty and social exclusion which have been the main causes of conflict worldwide. We have come a long way since the 1990s when UNDP began publishing the Human Development Report. At that time, development was interpreted as allowing people to have more choices. Since 1996, the definition of human development has included other elements, such as, empowerment, cooperation, equity, sustainability and security.

In the words of Robert Chambers (1995) who synthesized many years of development work, working with grass roots communities throughout the world, the condition of “deprivation ” goes beyond the lack of income and cannot be solved by economic growth alone. According to him “social deprivation, powerlessness, and humiliation” are characteristics of deprivation and disaster. The systematic absence of certain population subgroups in the population, such as, women, children, ethnic minorities etc. can be called structural violence.

Amongst various problems of environmental and political disasters facing Nepal during its democratic transition, the Maoist Insurgency has become the most difficult for the government to manage, indicating that development itself cannot ensure people’s security. As a matter of fact, insecurity reverses developmental gains.

In Nepal, the failure of the political parties to play a decisive role in the 1990’s movement for democracy allowed the Maoists to capitalize on the people’s disillusionment to fuel armed uprising.

In Nepal, grassroots and poor rural women have been pushed into prostitution in areas occupied by both the Army and the Maoists. Women have witnessed their husbands being dragged out of their homes and killed. Widespread extra judicial

killings of both women and men, “disappearances” and torture are common due to atrocities committed by both sides involved in the conflict.

So far more than 12,000 people have been killed, hundreds are missing and thousands (mostly women and children) have been displaced. Most young able-bodied men have fled either to India across the border or to the safer market towns leaving women and children behind. Often it is families that force children and men to flee for the fear of being forcefully recruited into the Maoist ranks. Child soldiers have become a common phenomena. With a bulging and fast growing population in which women account for 50 per cent of total population and where 42 per cent of the population is under 15 years of age, the future looks bleak. Recently the government itself has recognized its shortcomings in policy for good governance.

Social inclusion and social justice to address issues of the poor and specific issues of women caught in war has become an imperative for mainstreaming women in conflict mitigation. In addition, Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women Peace and Security, which reflects the spirit of the MDG, calls for consultations with women to ensure that women become part of all aspects of conflict prevention, peace keeping and post conflict reconstruction. However, when will this become a reality? During the conflict in Nepal, we can still see

- the killing of civilians (mainly women and children) by both sides
- raiding, raping and extortion as common weapons
- conflict generating profit making for some elites
- foreign aid, that the country has relied on since 1950, not trickling down to the poor and socially excluded
- accountability of donors to the recipient country is becoming increasingly questionable

One aspect of the use of foreign aid, that is presently under criticism in Nepal, is a growing number of workshops and meetings on conflict resolution through training which does not involve the participation of socially excluded groups such as women. Although the concept of “training”, as a project in itself, has gained acceptance amongst donors, these groups can not participate due to heavy daily workloads and need to earn wages for survival etc. Only the elite can take advantage of this kind of training activity.

Measures to meet the goals of the Millennium Development Goals will need thousands of effective local organizations to provide more voice in local government as

well as services at the local level as well as financial resources. Development itself cannot ensure security to people and communities. Security needs to be a part of the development discourse.