

Situation Of Women And Children In Baina After Demolitions In Baina

To a larger population, displacement has been understood as an act of “change of location”. But, social activists and scientists have gone few steps further to define it as *a process of eternal deprivation of families from their natural resources and environment*. The process of displacement results either through natural calamities or man-made tragedies. Despite tremendous improvements in the area of science and technology, humans hardly have control over natural calamities. But man-made disasters like demolitions, arm-conflicts, major constructions, etc that cause displacement, are preventable at the hands of human beings.

As a consequence of man-made tragedies, thousands of hundreds of families are displaced every year worldwide. More than half of an estimated 20 million displaced persons around the world today are children. Whether natural disaster or man-made tragedy, children remain the most affected segment among all. Children turn out to be the most neglected population of the entire course of happenings. Wherever it occurs, displacement has a profound, physical, psycho-social, emotional and developmental impact on children. In the following paper emphasis is laid over impact of man-made disaster on children that occurred in Baina, Goa in July, 2005.

I. Baina & Displacement:

In the month of October 2003, Goa Bench of High Court in the case of Savera Vs State gave its final Judgment in relation to Baina red light district, Vasco, Goa, INDIA. The directions of the High Court to the state were to control trafficking and to rehabilitate the victims of trafficking. The state instead of following the direction in the right spirit since December, 2003 created a situation of terror and mistrust among the residents of the area.

State was unable to evolve a rehabilitation programme acceptable to the victims of prostitution. State rehabilitation of keeping victims and perpetrators at the ‘Ribander Home’ did not attract the women in prostitution, as it lacked a process of involving the effected people and also that of taking care of all their needs.

On 14th June 2004 the Goa State Government under the pretext of implementing the High Court order demolished half of the red light district. The demolition resulted in not only demolishing the cubicles, being used for prostitution but it also demolished a large number of family rooms (residential rooms) which was being used by the prostituted women and other persons not connected with prostitution as shelter. An estimate of 750 rooms was demolished and approximately 3000 people affected.



After the demolition of Baina, thousands of families became shelter less and suffered serious gross human rights violations. It was a nightmare for most of the children who witnessed the demolition. Children in their school dress had no clue to understand what kind of whirlwind had hit their houses.

Major Hardships during Displacement:

1. Food-shortage:

Majority of families being poor in their economical status, the immediate impact of displacement forced thousands of children foodless for first 24-48 hours. Among the women with small children and children under 18 years, the problem of malnourishment can be seen even after 2 years of displacement. After the demolition, instead of helping the homeless families, the state authorities took measures to prevent the distribution of any kind of food items to the victims of demolition. The police personnel had a close watch all over the demolition site to impede any support to displaced families and their children. The most starved groups remained children. There was an acute scarcity of milk for infants. The non-governmental organizations and local groups were harassed while providing support to the displaced families. Displaced families had no option but to beg on the streets to fulfill their most common need i.e. hunger. Children became vulnerable to anti-social activities including stealing.

2. Health & Sanitation:

In order to evict people from Baina, the state government began demolition in the midst of monsoon to ensure that the people do not stay back. Before the demolition, state government made people suffer in order to achieve a sound eviction. Most basic amenities were put to an end including supply of electricity and water lanes of the whole area. The public toilets were also locked by state authorities. In the entire process, the children suffered the most. Due to the state government action of demolition and lack of services before and after the demolition, children were left to suffer from physical (including frequent severe fever, water-borne diseases, and vitamin deficiencies) and mental health problems (such as shock, anxiety, depression, insomnia etc.). There are possibilities that these experiences could lead to long term impact on the educational and intellectual development of children.

3. Insufficient sheltering:

In the absence of arrangements for housing the displaced families by the state authorities, thousands of families remained clueless about where to move after demolition. Some of the families who wanted to take rented places found it extremely difficult because people in surrounding communities were instructed by police and local political leaders not to rent houses to displaced families of Baina. It was extremely painful to see many children on the road sides without any clothes in the middle of monsoon season. Voluntary organizations found it difficult to provide temporary shelter because of the large number of victims (more than 3000) of displacement and lack of enough resources. On the other side, the state government who had the resources exhibited a hostile attitude towards these displaced families. Till date a large number of the displaced families are without proper shelter and those having shelter are not sure for how long they have the shelter.

4. Vulnerability towards sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation:

During the last two years of work of Arz with the displaced families has revealed that displacement makes families vulnerable to varied nature of exploitation especially sexual and commercial sexual exploitation. And perpetrators rarely miss such situation to identify and lure vulnerable groups especially children. Experiences with adolescent girls belonging to displaced families of Baina reveal that girls face sexual abuse in day-to-day situations. Baina being a known red-light area of the past attracts customers and perpetrators. They target the girls and women of poor and displaced families.

The children who had lost the house during demolition are often seen to be roaming whole day and getting into sexual relationships with peers and adults from the area. It has also been found that due to lack of enough sources of earning parents allow sexual abuse of children in return of monetary or other favors. Children have also been trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in exchange of money.

5. Education at halt:

In India, government as well non-governmental organizations are striving hard to convenience the general population especially the illiterate parents, with poor socio-economic states, the importance of education for children. But, displacement in Baina brought an immediate halt and even permanent discontinuation of schools for numerous children. More than education, no body realizes that children of displaced families did loose their school friends and an environment that shape them into a meaningful citizen of the nation. After a significant time of absence from school the certain children were denied re-admission due to loss of important documents during displacement. On the other hand, those who managed re-admission, faced difficulties for school fees, uniforms, textbook and exercise books. As a result of increase in expenditures at home (rent, electricity, water) children have discontinued education and have been working in hazardous sites.

6. Economical pressure to earn:

The erstwhile history of poor economical status of families and devastating effects of displacement, forced children to work to help supplement their families' earnings. The nature of occupations adopted further placed children in exploitative situations. Majority of children from displaced families at Baina go for rag-picking. Children are lacking cultural and recreational activities necessary for their overall development due to economical pressures.

7. Break-downs in relationships and support systems:

Before the demolition, children were living in an environment full of relationships, friends and support systems for care and protection. While the adults of family were out for work, children were being supervised and taken care of by other adult members of the family and neighbors. The process of displacement has broken the joint family systems in most families mainly due to space limited and expensive rented houses undertaken by most families. The ultimate impact came on child who is now being denied the supervision, protection and care by elder members of the family and needs to support family economically. The peer group relationships have also

been totally lost. There are instances where children have run away from houses due to adjustment problems at new locations.

It has been strongly observed that displacement do results in the separation of children from their parents. Due to certain reasons including insufficient means of earning and limited physical space at home, the number of children have been either put in boarding schools or sent to native villages where they lack basic facilities.

8. Hostile nature of the State:

The state adopted a violent and aggressive approach in order to displace the residents of Baina and the entire process generated lot of fear, anger and stress among the displaced families especially children. The children witnessed presence of huge police personnel with sophisticated arms and ammunitions, use of heavy bulldozers and machines to demolish property and houses, and lathi-charges on families, relatives and friends. These experiences have adverse effects on the minds of young children. Few of the children had mentioned that “they want to blast the police station”. Children belonging to a particular religion felt that they had been targeted due to their religion. The people expressed that deep rooted abhorrence against state particularly individuals who were holding responsible positions. The situations since then have been only deteriorating primarily due to lack of proper intervention (no suitable rehabilitation has been provided yet).

Further deterioration of family economic situations and passage of two years of displacement without any assistance, has made children very aggressive, violent, abusive and at times extreme loneliness. There is constant fear of police personnel among the children.

II. Baina Displacement: Legal provisions and Child’s rights violation:

Convention on the right of the child adopted by general assembly at UN in 1989 intends to protect and promote the wellbeing of the children in society. The UN conventions provides for right to survival, right to protection, right to development and right to participation.

Article 3 of the UN Convention provide that all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of laws, administrative authorities or legislative bodies the interest of the child shall be prime consideration.

Article 6 of UN Convention Clause (2) clearly states that state parties shall ensure the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Article 27 (1) state parties recognize the right of every children to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Constitution of India, under article 39 (f) provides that the state shall direct its policy towards securing that children are given opportunity and facilities to develop in a healthy manner in conditions of freedom and dignity and that children and youth are protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment.

The international and state laws exclaims that children have right to a family environment conducive to proper physical and mental development, to go to school, to play, to get health care and adequate nutrition, but reality seems quite far. There was gross violation of child rights not only during the entire process of displacement at Baina but even today children don't have access to sanitary facilities, schools, playground and health care services. The children do encounter exploitations in day-to-day life. They are not being protected from anti-social elements prevailing in the community where they reside. Children are being used for gambling, begging, stealing and other criminal activities. For the girls, the situation is worse. One section of the girls finds themselves socially isolated and mainly confined to home in order to perform domestic tasks. Other section, suffers verbal, physical and sexual abuse while at work primarily due to lack of protection of children. The children of Baina get easily identified and therefore suffer various forms of discrimination. Certain government institutions also have hostile attitude towards these children.

Following to provision provided in the UN convention and constitution of India, the state has been provided through the enactment of various legislations and policies to protect the rights of the child. But displacement of families from Baina seems to be an extraordinary example of how the legal provisions are blatantly violated by those who are supposed to ensure the protection of the people especially vulnerable groups including women and children.