

INTER AGENCY GROUP

Situation Report on Violence 10.10.2008, 12 P.M

OVERALL SITUATION

Violent clashes between religious groups of Hindus and Christians have left 35 dead in Kandhamal Districts in India's eastern state of Orissa. The frightened Christian population, apprehending more trouble, have left their villages for secure, yet crowded, relief camps. Many have left for other cities. The tribals have fled the few Christian-dominated villages in the region.

The peace in the hills of the state has been shattered since, and there is little in sight that may suggest that the peace is close to being restored.

The pressure of the affected population is telling on the relief camps, mostly school buildings functioning in a make-shift manner to serve an emergency situation. The issue of security of aid workers seeking to serve the people in the camps is a big concern, besides access to the camps they would like to reach their aid to.

The Inter Agency Group (IAG) convened a team of four to visit the camps and carry out an assessment for the situation prevailing in the camp and to come up with a strategy for an intervention on the behalf of its 18 members in Orissa.

The team members were:

Mr Rabiratna Das, Chairperson, IAG – Orissa

Bijoy Basant Patro, Coordinator, IAG – Orissa

Dr Antony Gnanamuthu, Disaster Preparedness Delegate, German Red Cross in Orissa

Ms Mamta Sahu, Emergency Programme Officer, Concern International

FLOOD HIGHLIGHTS

After a range of interviews with the District Collector who also heads the District Red Cross Society, and also the affected people, the assessment team came to categorise the needs in the given situation as follows:

Food: The government set up kitchens to feed the affected people residing in the camps. These kitchens have provided rice and *dal* (lentils) for all these days. Understandably, the government's own resources are stretched and it is not possible to go beyond these very basic needs the camp kitchens serve. Yet, in some camps, it was obvious (and also voiced) that the very basic meal at the camp needed supplementing with vegetables – supplying potatoes, onions and chillies, for example. Oil as the cooking medium will also be needed. In Nuagoan, for instance, residents said that a pouch of a litre of oil is provided to the entire camp for cooking food for five days. This, however, was not mentioned by the District Collector during our meeting.

There are exceptions though, in Nuagoan and Raikia, there is vegetables are being supplied for food.

Sanitation: The District Collector rightly pointed to sanitation as an important area of intervention. Latrines were mostly temporary except for schools where there were a handful of permanent latrines that clearly could not meet the needs of the big population at the camp.

There is another view as well on the matter of providing latrines: Culturally, the camp residents are not used to using latrines even in normal times and defecating in open spaces is an accepted practice. For this very reason, there is little use for the latrines, especially given that inmates have easy access to secure open spaces and nearby streams.

The district administration also mentioned of the need for soap and detergents for the people in the camps. This need has also been voiced by the people at the camp we spoke to. The single cake of

soap, a sachet of detergent powder and a sachet of hair oil provided for each family was inadequate. The District Collector emphasised that hygiene kits will be a recurring need.

Women complained that only adolescent girls were receiving sanitary napkins as part of the government-run Integrated Child Development Scheme. However, the needs of other women has not been considered.

There was a putrefying odour in the Hathisala Camp No 2 in G Udayagiri, from the un-drained cooking waste-water. This needs a simple drainage arrangement. It will also be important to attend to the solid waste management aspect of camps management.

Health: while the district administration felt that the issue of medical provisions following the riots was met adequately, there were some issues that the assessment team came across during their visits to the camps.

Maternal health: The escape to the jungle was not easy for pregnant women, more so, the two days without food or water. In the Hathisala Camp, home to over 800 people, there were seven pregnant women and all of whom spoke of the difficult time they had when chased and while they were in the jungle and the post-violence stress they were undergoing. One woman, Balmina Nayak, gave birth to a still-born baby. She was taken to the G Udayagiri PHC on a bicycle pillion by an anganwadi worker, Jhulita Nayak. Women at the camp spoke of another woman too having delivered a still born baby at an adjacent camp.

There is a number of lactating mothers in the camp as well and their special need may not be met by the diet of dal and rice. The team heard of distribution of biscuits for children and pregenant women. But these supplies stopped after September 17 Tikabali. In Nuagaon Raikia, there was evidence of baby food being prepared and supplied for infants and children.

Mental Health: Addressing psychological trauma and the mental health needs of the people at the camp seems to be an urgent need. People spoke of their experience as if no time had lapsed between the violence and their meeting with the assessment team. The wounds of the violent August still seemed fresh in their minds.

Rabindra Nath Pradhan accosted the assessment team with his tale: he was just returning less than an hour after giving his younger brother, Rasananda Pradhan, a funeral, 45 days after his death.

As he narrated how his brother was burnt in front of his eyes, there were wailing in the crowd. There was also anger for a friend who could not get a dignified farewell. Elsewhere, other young men spoke of joining the Maoists (an ultra-left violent movement that affects parts of India). But what was very visible was that the stress that people were undergoing and the situation in the camp, its enclosed living with its state of sanitation and very basic food, was not doing their traumatised minds any good. Tales like these and the human yearn for a dignified life with their right to practice their religion freely was not doing the state of their mental health any good either.

Esso Nayak is a luck man. So are others from his village.

When the rioters came to the Christian-dominated village of Petamaha, the 50 Christians just about had time to shift their valuables to their four Hindu neighbours. "I kept my belongings in the house of Dusmant Pradhan," said Esso, "before fleeing to the forest."

Ten days later, Dusmant asked him to come and collect his belongings because he in turn was being threatened by the very same rioters that if he and others in the village continued helping the Christians, their houses would be burnt.

Esso returned to his village, saw his charred home and returned with his belongings. In the camp, his life, as also the lives of the others from his village, is a little better, given a degree of restoration of their belongings.

While it may be a good idea to have a follow-up by a specialist for a psycho-social intervention, the idea did not seem to be appreciated by the district administration who felt that the term counselling could have many connotations and turn into a contentious issue.

However, some people with previous ailments also need treatment while at the camp. For example, a TB patient in Tent No 8 at the relief camp in the Tikabali Government School was administered blood but was said to need more treatment and this was not possible in the camp.

There are also other ailments that come from time to time. Malaria is endemic in the region and complaints of cough and cold are common complaints.

Though new-borns are provided a small mosquito net, there is no cloth to cover them. In a tent with say, 40 adults around them, the new-borns are susceptible to infections under the circumstance. There is little cloth for napkins etc that the mothers can provide, given the fact that all inmates came here with just a shirt on their backs.

Security: People still feel insecure. The presence of armed uniformed men throughout the district has not exactly reassured them. They mentioned a number of episodes in the recent past that made them doubly insecure:

- People going back to their villages were undergoing conversion to Hinduism, an idea that seemed to the inmates of the camps to erase their identity.
- There were instances of people who went to fetch some rations with the aid of their BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards being deprived of their cards, their money and their rations.
- The threat of undergoing forcible conversion to Hinduism was intimidating.
- Sarat Chandra Digal Brekam in the Tikabali School relief camp said that villagers sent their cattle to graze his groundnut crop before his very eyes when he revisited the village.
- Pabitra Nayak of Pasara Panchayat said that the condition the villagers put to them was to convert to Hinduism or else he would be killed just as his brother Abhimanyu Nayak did – he was tied to a tree and burnt.
- Inmates in Raikia spoke of weapons and guns in the hands of the ‘other party’.
- In K Nuagoan, the camp’s residents spoke of the iron from the broken churches were being used to prepare swords.
- In K Nuagoan, residents produced written threats they had received.

Clothes: Woollens, especially for children and blankets are an urgent need. This was also stated by the District Collector during his meeting with the assessment team. The DC proposes to get help from some families of Tibetan origins domiciled at Taptapani to knit and provide knitted garments for the affected people. As for blankets, most family has been provided two blankets so far. But with winter not far away, it is not going to be easy for a family to manage with just two blankets out in the open in Orissa’s coldest district where winter temperatures dip close to 5 degrees Celsius.

Similarly, young people, mostly adolescents, have been left out in the process of cloth distribution. This is a big gap waiting to be bridged.

New born infants too need clothes. This is especially the case with those born after in the camps the riots began. Please refer the section under health as well.

Schooling: It may sound ironical, but the camps run out of schools, and yet, the children in the camps do not have any access to schooling. 300 school going children in the relief camp in the Tikabali Government School, for instance, are not having any access to schooling while at the camp – the school has been turned into a camp and the young inmates in the camps cannot go to school. Parents also mentioned that children were too traumatised to attend school in their original villages in case they went back.

Non-food relief: The District Collector also spoke of the requirement of kitchen kits that would enable families to cook their own meals with ration support once they returned to their villages. However, in the field, it was observed that buckets, floor mats, lanterns besides other non-food relief were an urgent need. People were not comfortable with the distribution of one bucket and a mug for every tent that housed at-least three families. This could also mean providing kerosene stoves. On average, each tent houses 25 to 30 people. This, certainly, does not fit in with Sphere.

Peace and Normalcy: This is the big need of the hour and some residents of the camp also realise this. Hereunder, are the thoughts of two people the assessment team spoke to in the Hathisala Camp Number 2 in G Udayagiri.

32-year-old Joseph Nayak, a small-time village healer who provided elementary medical help for malaria, diarrhoea, cough and cold to earn a modest living by the standards of his village. He has served his villagers for many years and know them very well to be able to say that they would not have turned violent against their own neighbours unless they were provoked by outsiders. When asked what he felt was the way out, Joseph mentioned the following:

- Representatives of the tribals should sign a bond to the effect that there would be no more atrocities on the Christians.
 - This bond should be signed in the presence of the police.
 - They would take responsibility of the well-being of the Christians and any future violence against the community would be their liability.
 - The perpetrators of the violence in August should take responsibility for their actions.
 - Those who brought harm to the Christians must be booked under the law.
 - The Christians would never be coerced into conversion to give up their religion – in short, they should be free to practice Christianity.
 - They need a home to go back to – all their homes have been broken or burnt or both and their belongings looted – and so, they needed help to make their own homes.
 - Till such time as these conditions were not met, they would not return to their home.
- Dominic Digal in the Raikia camp repeated the same issues and during the discussions. Young men in the camp held contrasting views. However, it was also clear that this was just their opinion and that the elders’ opinion would hold eventually.
 - Young men spoke of joining the Maoists (an ultra-left violent movement that affects parts of India).
 - The situation can get exasperated unless the administration tightens its control on a communal campaign. Outside the Raikia camp, for instance, there were posters that have the potential to surcharge the atmosphere.
 - In K Nuagaon, the Block Development Office staff showed how a peace committee formed under the aegis of the government could work. Some residents of the Kanjamatia have returned to the village. When the assessment team went there, it was obvious that this return was possible because of the proximity of the village to the rest of the administration in the block as well as the police station. While none in the hundred-odd Christian families in the village died in the rioting, their houses were torched and the people were back to repair their houses. More is mentioned under the part on government action below. However, it was clear that the residents were too scared to speak openly.
 - In Kanjamatia, the non-Christian families mentioned how they tried to keep the rioters away from the village, at real risk to their own lives. This feeling for their neighbours can be said to prevail in other villages as well. But they were also scared of the harm that could be brought if they insisted on their resistance.

- Manuel Digal in Raikia had his reservations on the peace process. He said that the peace process was initiated from the state's capital, Bhubaneswar and came to their villages through the district and the block level offices of the state. He felt that this top-down approach would not work and instead, it may be a good idea to have a bottom-up approach that began from the villages itself. This approach could be initiated by modulators from the Red Cross. To buttress his point on the counter-productivity of this approach, he mentioned how, a peace committee was formed in Phulbani and yet, within 24 hours, riots broke out in the district headquarters.
- There is a growing feeling in the camps that the violence by their neighbours was an instigated affair. The camp inmates questioned where the fuel to burn homes and people came from given that even the three litres of kerosene oil they got every month was not enough for families to light a lamp.

PRESENT PREDICAMENT

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GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

Government action for addressing the needs of the needs of the camps varies from very good management of the camps to camps which could have more and better managed. The initiation of dialogue promotion committees and peace committees has been discussed above. This is a good initiative, but heavily dominated by officials of the state machinery and does not involve civil society.

Incidence of unemployment is very high in the region and can hamper any peace process and therefore, employment generation initiated by the government can help. This is especially true in the light of Maoists/ Naxalites being active in the region and an potential attraction for frustrated youth.

CURRENT NEED

- Dry /cooked food/baby food
- Cloths
- Tarpaulin / tents
- Drinking water: Facilitation of distribution of halogen tabs
- Volunteer support to PHCs for distribution of halogen tablets and ORS packets
- Volunteer support for dissemination of information on WATSAN

IAG INTERVENTION

Inter Agency Group (IAG) is a network of international humanitarian organizations that respond to emergent situations like disasters and work in close collaboration with the governments to streamline the process of relief and rehabilitation following emergency situations. In Orissa the group includes organizations like

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| Red Cross | Save the Children |
| Catholic Relief Services (CRS) | UNFPA |
| Caritas India | UNICEF |
| Action Aid | Water Aid India |
| Care India | TROCAIRE |
| Lutheran World Service | World Vision |
| Church Auxiliary for Social Action | Oxfam GB |
| Concern World Wide | EFFICOR |
| United Nations Development Programme | Helpage India |

IAG Orissa has set up a control room at its Disaster Management Unit to facilitate the co-ordination process.

- Regular coordination meeting among the partners
- Sharing of updated Situation Report among all the partners on a daily basis
- Coordination among the assessment teams

CONTACT DETAIL

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