

CONFLICT AFFECTED CHILDREN'S SURVIVAL AFTER THE PEACE AGREEMENT: NEED OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

The ten years armed conflict have several consequences for school going children. They are mentally and physically affected even after the armed conflict. Considering this aspect, the present study was proposed with research questions: how are they experiencing their life after the peace agreement? To explore the experience of them, a qualitative research method was carried out in Gorkha district with two males and two female children of aged under 18 during the 10 years armed conflict in Nepal. In depth interview was carried out and the information from in depth interview was analyzed by exploring the themes. The finding of the study assets that after the peace agreement, they were getting some sort of support from the government and different development organizations. However, the participants were not satisfied with the support that they are provided as it is insufficient to them for their sustainable livelihood. Along with the economic, they were also facing economical, mental and social challenges. In addition, they had not been accepted in the society and were still excluded to some extent. The findings also showed that the education after the peace agreement had not been in their priority than that of taking care of their family members and sustainable livelihoods. However, there was a participant who continued his study in a very difficult situation.

This study concluded that there is an urgent need of victim centered and individualized approach rather one door approach to address conflict affected children. This kind of contextual practices directly address the local and individual needs. By this, the needs of the victims can be linked to their vocations for their sustainable future.

Keywords: Victimized excluded, stigmatized, reintegration

1. Introduction

Nepal's Maoists - the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the CPN (M) -launched an armed conflict in Nepal in 1996, which was then called the 'People's War' [1]. It was started by the then revolutionary political party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist). The conflict continued for ten years until the CPN (Maoist) formally get into the peace agreement in 2006 with the political agenda of overthrowing the constitutional monarchy which was despotic and undemocratic that did not focus on the agenda

of diversity and inclusiveness [2]. The ten years long armed conflict was initiated with the help of many youths by the CPN (Maoist) party. The youths have dreamt a beautiful Nepal where there wouldn't be any chaos, discrimination, poverty, domination and have fought with the passion.

After signing a Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) on 21 November 2006 by both parties (State and CPN -Maoist), formally ended the ten years long armed conflict in Nepal. By signing on the CPA, both the signatories agreed to end all resentments, safeguard human rights and start making preparations for assimilating the CPN

(Maoist) fighters into the Nepal Army and to provide some reliefs to the conflict affected. They also agreed to keep the CPN (Maoist) fighters temporarily in cantonment until they were integrated into the national army [3].

On the basis of the CPA, the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 (2007 A.D.) was introduced and implemented. If we see the details about the conflict and its relief, in part 3 it is given as providing proper assistance, recognition and rehabilitation for the families of those who were killed and for those persons being disabled and made helpless through injury caused by the path of the armed conflict [1]. In the same way, the Interim Constitution further made a provision to provide relief to the families of the affected on the basis of the report of the Investigation Commission instituted to explore the cases of persons who were the subject of imposed disappearance during the course of the conflict [4]. Similarly, different I/NGOs and civil society run many other initiatives to socialize and rehabilitate the conflict affected children in their society, rejoin their education and reintegration them in their society.

As mentioned in the CPA, the GoN has adopted a National Plan of Action and various programs for the rehabilitation and reintegration of Children affected by Armed Conflict. The relief programs were self-retirement of the ex-combatants, compensation to families of the deceased ones, scholarship for the children who are under the age of 18 [5]. It yielded somehow positive results; some children were able to continue to be educated on a daily basis [6].

Nevertheless, the significant progress has not been seen in the number of children enrolling in school and higher education after the cease-fire even though the government and some organizations conducted different support programs. According to [7], whatever programs have been initiated, they are still suffering from its effects, thoroughly different; the families of the dead can mourn and gradually rebuild their lives with mangy obstacle, and similarly for the families of the missing there is no end to their pain: sons, husbands, wives and daughters have disappeared, taken away by either party of the conflict, and

their families are still waiting to know their whereabouts.

The school going children were seen mentally and physically affected after the armed conflict in the post conflict situation. In regard to this, [8] also state that especially those conflict affected children are facing difficulty in socializing in their society, because of losing their academic life in conflict, losing their parents and other relatives in conflict, etc. So it is necessary to explore the better relief and assistance package program to those children to address the impact of conflict with a long term vision. [9] also focuses on different stresses and poverty which have been the obstacles to live a normal life. Moreover, [10] also highlights that the conflict affected children are having the problems of aggression and change in the attitudes and have lost hope of life. It seems that the children in the post conflict situation are facing different sociological, physical and mental problems of reintegration in the society.

Thus, it is necessary to identify the special needs of the conflict affected children in the post conflict situation to implement suitable programs for their empowerment and social, mental reintegration in the society. To cite an example, after the peace agreement in Sri Lanka, the children are provided with different education, psychological programs, social awareness programs and facilities for the livelihood (EU, 2010, as cited in [9]). This helped them in reintegration in the society and for the livelihood, so none of the affected was different from the non-affected children in the society. [9] further highlighted different vocational trainings, educations, counseling that were provided to the conflict affected children in Sri Lanka. So it can be learnt that it is necessary to conduct such programs – providing psycho-social counseling, social rehabilitation and social re-integration as well as skill-oriented and self-employment programs keeping in mind their interest, ability, needs and market prospects for rebuilding their lives – in the post conflict situation [11].

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how the armed conflict affected children surviving their life after the peace agreement.

3. Research Questions

The research question is how are conflict affected children experiencing their life after the peace agreement in Nepal?

4. Significance of the Study

As a researcher, I have raised the issue of the armed conflict affected school going children livelihood after the peace agreement in Nepal. Their present situation has a great significance for researcher and for the society which helps to know about the real scenario of conflict affected school going children.

Also this study will be also helpful for the policy makers, who really could add some policies to address the issues of conflict affected school going children in Nepal. It would also be a good lesson to the conflict experts nationally and internationally to know the way of conflict that the conflict affected school going children and the strategies of conflict resolution through the peace agreement in Nepal.

5. Limitation of the study

This study is limited to those children who were under the age of eighteen in the era of ten years armed conflict (1996-2006). Particularly those school going children were the participants who were directly affected by the ten year armed conflict due to the fact that their family members were engaged in it, or were killed by either side (the state security force and the CPN-M of that period). Therefore, the participants of this study confined to those conflict affected children.

6. Literature Review

It is necessary to find out what has already been explored in the related field before starting a research venture. So, I went through some related research works carried out in this field which I have discussed briefly along the following paragraphs.

While searching the literatures regarding the children involvement in the conflict and its effect, I found [12] study on the impact of armed conflict on children, which is taken as the first and the most renowned comprehensive human rights assessment on the conflict affected children. This study has explored the plight of internally displaced children, child soldiers, child affected of sexual violence and landmines, and the psychological impact of war on children from the period of 1986 to 1996. The study concluded that the children who were being affected by war had suffered from deep emotional stress and thus needed psychological counseling.

[10] also focused on the stress that the children were facing after the armed conflict affected children. The study revealed that the conflict had caused depression, changed attitudes and diminished hopes for the future. The study concluded that the children in the post conflict situation were facing several challenges and problems.

Similarly, [13] in a book "Children: The Invisible Soldiers" have focused poverty, disruption of social environment, desire of revenge and power as the main reasons for why the children were participating in wars. In this context, the children were motivated to become part of the armed conflict and their educational achievement had been ended by the war.

In two distinct studies on armed conflict in Sri Lanka, [14] concluded that social, cultural and political issues were the main factors for the participation of the children in conflicts. Also these studies focused that the violence against Tamils, government unaccountability, disruption of education, food insecurity, and displacement had pushed the children to participate in the armed conflict. This situation was similar with the children from the Dalit, marginalized and socially ex-

cluded community in Nepal who faced different kinds of discrimination and as a result participated in the armed conflict.

[9] on “Sri Lanka’s Armed Conflict: Children as Affected and Agents of Peace” focused on children used in armed conflict and its effect on their life in post conflict situation. According to Pradhan, Sri Lanka had faced almost three decades long civil war which affected the lives of millions of civilians. He furthermore reasserted that the six grave violations against children during armed conflicts included killing or maiming of children, recruitment or use of child soldiers, rape and sexual violence, abduction of children, attacks against schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access to children. Based on this study, it can be said that children were highly affected by the three decade long armed conflict in Sri Lanka. This study highlighted the importance of children’s involvement in peace building efforts such as the reconciliation, recovery, and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes, in order to achieve long-term stability and durable peace.

In a study on the armed conflict and children’s experiences and situation in Afghanistan, Aittokoski (2013) focused on the hardships of the conflict affected children in the post conflict situation. The affected did not have adequate resources to cope with the situation. Aittokoski also talked about the support provided to the affected in the post conflict situation which was not sufficient. In addition, the material and emotive necessity were not being satisfied. Also the community around them was not supporting the affected and acceptance had been a problem which resulted in post-traumatic situation where the physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing were the major risks for the affected children.

[15] conducted a case study on the impact of armed conflict on sexual violence against minor in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. Sbovodova has highlighted the sexual violence of the women, girls and children during the armed conflict. There were several cases of the rape and sexual harassment to the family members which resulted in the post-traumatic stress disorder on the affected children, girls and women. In this

study, the military officials were found to be involved in the rape cases.

[16] has also conducted a study entitled “Nepal: Gender view of the armed conflict and the peace agreement”. This study has highlighted how women suffer the sexual violence and how they perceive it. Both the state security forces and the CPN (Maoist) exploited women sexually, ignoring the strict codes of conduct in the armed group in order to prevent misbehavior, including that of a sexual nature. The state security force has mainly targeted the women combatants and their family for the sexual violence. So they were facing real challenges in the rehabilitation in the society after the peace agreement.

Similarly, in a report of ICRC (2011) on children affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence has focused on the acceptance of the armed conflict children in the society and family. Mutual acceptance is the major weapon for the reintegration of the affected in the society and community. The children are still not accepted in the society because of the fear of being rejected. So the impact of conflict has resulted in high risks of the adverse reactions.

The study conducted by [1] on the impact of armed conflict on children focused on the impact of the conflict in various ways like, sexual violence, maiming, abduction, disappearance. The study showed that those acts were done by both the state security forces and the CPN (Maoist). The school going children were tortured. The security forces had charged the children being involved in CPN (Maoist) activities. The cases of re-arrest of the children had significantly led the psychological problems to the children. They are blamed by both the parties of spying against them. So the school going children were facing several effects then, and similar emotional and psychological effects in the post conflict situation as well.

7. Research Method

Qualitative research method is the best approach to study the phenomenon of the participants as it enables researchers to see the patterns and purpose of each participant’s behavior and

perspectives. [17] stated that “qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right which is a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions” (p. 3). So I designed this study to explore the complexities and realities of the school going children after the ten years armed conflict. In my study qualitative case study method has been applied as it aims to collect their life experiences [18]. In doing so, I have adapted [19] essential features of qualitative research in which I have looked for appropriateness of methods and theories, incorporated perspectives of the participants and their diversity along with reflectivity of the researcher and the research. Many daily communications with conflict affected rely on such shared experiences [20] in my study.

7.1. Research Site and Selection of Participants

This research was carried in Gorkha district as it is highly conflict affected district [21]. This study is carried with four participants of the Gorkha district (two participants were victimized by state security force and two were victimized by Maoist party) as the small size is useful for analyzing the data properly in a qualitative research [22]. Even though the sample size was somewhat trivial, the selected number permitted me to generate sufficient variety and depth of data.

The participants were selected on the basis of purposive sampling, which focuses more on criterion purposive sampling that involves searching for cases or individuals who meet a certain criterion.

7.2. Tools and Technique of Data Collection

Data collection tools help for the deeper understanding and exploration of the study. As [23] aid, I used multiple sources of information (evidences) for my research to gather the information to fulfill my purpose and it also helped me to gain information from different sources. The primary sources are interview. The data gathering tools of my study is in depth interview with the participants which allowed the participants to change the course of conversation and bring up new issues that I had no preconceived.

7.3. Cross case Analysis and Data Interpretation

Even though it was agreed in the CPA that the peace agreement would be concluded within six months and would introduce long term programs to support and enhance the livelihood of the conflict affected children, it took more than thirteen years to complete the peace agreement which largely met its objective but failed to address some major concerns of the conflict affected till now. From the beginning of the process, there appeared distinct differences and contradictions of perception of the government of Nepal, political parties and other stakeholders on the affected especially on the education and livelihood of those conflict affected children.

From the interview with the participants, it was known that the community had not accepted Sarada as an ordinary member because of her background of the CPN (Maoist) party. She chose the option of voluntary retirement from the CPN (Maoist) cantonment and wanted to invest the money provided at the time of retirement. But there were several hurdles in the society to accept her as a member in the society as she was blamed that she came back after killing several people which was a sinful act. She was excluded in several programs and trainings provided by the development organizations only for being the cadre of the CPN (Maoist) party.

Mahadev was another affected of the CPN (Maoist) party. He was provided some relief for the survival but it was not enough. He could not get the scholarship from the government as mentioned in the CPA as he was above 18 years. He thought the study of his small brother and sister was better than his own, so he held a job. He even didn't get help, loan from his relatives and other people of society for his education. His brothers and sisters also did not get enough money to pay the fee on time and were often excluded from the class. Recently, he was also doing private B.Ed. as a part time student and helping his family with his job. Also sometimes he faced several difficulties in the college for not paying the college fee as he was not getting good salary, and not on time. Though he was not getting appropriate job as per his qualification as he had no one to help for the

Table 1: Livelihood after Peace agreement

Participants	Support (Gov. and development Organization)	Social Acceptance	Need and Demand
Sarada	Got first installment of Golden handshake package -Tailoring training	-Community people afraid -Excluded from social work -Not trusted in partnership	-Societal awareness - Some skill related training for livelihood
Mahadev	-Got first installment as Maoist affected -Got scholarship by Shanti samiti for the brothers and sisters	-Nobody trust to give loan after the death of father	-Justice and punishment -Educational loan -Job -Future sustainability
Khim Bahadur	- Got first installment of Golden handshake package -Got basic medical treatment subsidy	- Community people afraid -Excluded from social work -Nobody trust to give loan for medical treatment	- Societal awareness - Financial support for his recuperation - Some skill related training for livelihood -Job guarantee
Radhika	- Got some amount of money as a CPN (Maoist) affected - Got scholarship by which is provided by Gov. for the brothers and sisters	- Nobody trust to give loan for her grandmother and mother medical treatment - Nobody trust to give loan for her brother and sister education	- Justice and punishment - Financial support for her grandmother and mother recuperation -Suggest to the government for find the real affected and provide relief program -Life related skill based training -Job guarantee

career opportunity. His demanded some educational loan for the affected like him who wished to continue their study. And the government should be responsible in providing education to the affected children until they wish to study and also provide them with a secured job. He was also seeking justice to punish the murderer of his father.

Khim Bahadur was another affected of the conflict. He got the voluntary retirement from the CPN (Maoist) party as he was wounded in the war and his arm had some problems. He got one third amount of the money by the government for the retirement and with that money, he tried medical treatment for his injury but the amount was

insufficient. He even asked for loan but couldn't receive it as his treatment was costly and would take some years for recovery. His mother was also treated as a widow in the society and was not treated well in different social programs, festivals, rituals. Khim Bahadur was also treated in the same way. His disappeared brother is still unknown; whether he is dead or alive even after 10 years of the CPA. With the social exclusion and bad treatment of the society, he would sometimes think of going abroad or migrating but his mother did not want so. Also he did not have enough money to invest to go abroad. For further career development, he did not have adequate qualification so he was unable to apply to different vacan-

cies. He even could not study as his age did not support him to join the small brothers and sisters in school. Besides, he had the responsibility to take care of his mother and small kids of his big brother. So he was seeking some help and support for income generating activities.

Radhika, an innocent girl was affected by the job of her father in the security force of the nation. After the murder of her father by the CPN (Maoist) party, she has been struggling for the justice of her father and to punish the criminals. Her voices were however not heard by the authentic bodies of the government as she did not have anyone in that field. The people who have killed her father are still at large but no one would bother to care about her sufferings. The situation after her father's death could not help her to continue the study so she left school and started to advocate for justice. Her grandmother and mother were still not fully recovered by the traumatic event. So she needed to take care of them and help in other household activities. The money provided as the compensation was not enough for their survival. But she had seen that the fake affected of the armed conflict were getting a lot of money by using the political power. She was feeling guilty of seeing those acts and raised question whether there was the government or not. She was neither able to continue her study nor help the family members fully. So she demanded the nation to fulfill the basic needs of the affected. She even did not have money to buy a cetamol for her grandmother and mother treatment was far away for her. So she was facing a pitiful situation and seeking help for the sustainable livelihood by involving her in some income generating activities.

In conclusion, the situation of the conflict affected children in the post conflict situation is also miserable. In the conflict era they were out of the mainstream of education and in the post conflict situation they are in the stage of fulfilling the needs of their family so education is not the major agenda for them. Only Mahadev is able to continue the education even though he is also facing several problems and challenges. On the other hand, the government is not providing adequate help and facilities for the affected of the conflict.

The participants have faced several hindrances in the society just being the affected of the armed conflict. In absence of the main person of the home, they are not getting loan and help from the people of the society as there is no one to pay the loan back. They even do not have a capsule when they and their family members fall ill. To add to their plight, their relatives captured their land and property after the death of the children's parents. Sometimes, the subsidy is also taken by the relatives in their name. Also the real affected are not getting enough help as the fake affected are taking the relief amount by using the political power. The compensation amount is also not used in the proper way as no one is helping and trusting them for doing some income generating activities. Their academic qualification and lack of political power are the problems for not getting a proper job. During the war, they are being affected of the conflict mentally but in the present situation they are more affected by the poverty and the behavior of the people around them. So the major choice of the affected children is getting help for the sustainable livelihood to take care of their family rather than getting formal education.

8. Conclusion

After the peace agreement, the participant got self-retirement who was engaged in the CPN (Maoist) party and other was waiting for justice. They have registered the case and were waiting for justice and peace by providing punishment for the criminals who killed their parents.

The social acceptance of the affected in the society was the major challenge and still it existed. The society had not accepted the CPN (Maoist) combatants after the peace agreement as they were considered to be the sinful persons coming back by killing people. Likewise, those who were affected by the CPN (Maoist) were not getting help and security from the members of their society.

So for various reasons, the conflict affected children are facing miserable situation at present as well. The disappearance, imprisonment and the death of the family members affect the post con-

flict situation. It is because of poverty, lack of education for suitable job, loss of their parents, caring for the old parents, brothers and sisters.

All participants had become the main breadwinner in their families. All the participants' cases seemed that it was their compulsion to engage in other household activities. Except one participant, all other three were not continuing formal education because fulfilling the basic needs was the major priority for them.

The supports were like the fire bridge – short term solutions. Ex combatants have got 6 lakhs as provision of the self-retirement from the CPN (Maoist) combatants whereas the one got 1 lakh and the other one got 10 lakhs as the compensation of the loss of their father. It was not the exact solution to the real affected ones. Without conducting the need analysis, the support was provided. Some had a very panic situation whereas some had a normal situation. So the same support was not suitable for all the affected. "One size doesn't fit all" exactly suits the situation of the conflict affected.

The present situation of the conflict affected children was taking care of their old parents, brothers, sisters so they were unable to continue education except one participant. All of the other had left the formal education and were in the need of some income generating activities through trainings, loans and job.

Getting education was not the prior need of the conflict affected, but the sustainable livelihood was the prior need. Likewise, the help provided by the state and other development organizations were not sufficient. The affected raise their voices on the long term programs for the affected. For this, they have raised the voices for getting some skill based training so that they could do something on their own. The need of different training and skill base programs is more appropriate for conflict affected people. Access to training for the conflict affected is especially important in countries with advanced economies, where the inconsistency between the skills that ex-combatants possess and the skills that are in demand on the labor market is the greatest.

If we see the participant's story, then the train-

ings and help were not demand driven but were laden as compulsion without any options. So the need based analysis and market studies have often been lacking in many reintegration efforts sponsored by donors. The participants have an urgent need of income generating activities. They are calling the government and concerning stakeholder for providing them vocational training, enough financial assistance to support their self-help schemes. So for this, they demanded to get market demanded vocational training and help for their sustainability.

In conclusion, school going children are particularly vulnerable in the post conflict situation in Nepal. Although the short term supports and remedies have tried to reduce the present suffering somehow but there are worries about future. So it is essential to take necessary steps to address their agenda as soon as possible.

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