

## **Environment, Human Security and Livelihood in the Context of North-East India**

**Hiramani Patgiri**

*Research Scholar, Department of Political Science  
Gauhati University, Assam  
E-mail id: patgiri\_hira@gmail.com*

### **Abstract:**

With the launching of the 50, 000 MW hydro-electrical initiatives for the North-East India on 24th May, 2003, the focus of people displacing them internally scheme has been shifted to the region. One list mentions 156 major dams being planned in the region and the another speaks of 248. 13 of them are being finalised and 35 are under active consideration. This development projects have been presented as basic to development and to counter to insurgency in the region. This development initiative raises serious questions about the people's rights to a life with dignity. The North-East India is a major mega-biodiversity zone and a biodiversity hotspot. Biodiversity is also the sustenance of many communities, some of them governed by the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India that recognises community ownership over natural resources (Common Property Resources, CPR). This article will raise some issues on the livelihood perspectives of the project displaced persons. The Constitutional imperative of Article 21 and marginalization of people resulting from the deprivation and environmental degradation will be the prime concern.

**Keywords:** Environment, human security, livelihood, the North-East India, 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule, common property resources, mega dams, development and displacement.

Environment, human security and livelihood are all inter-related terms. They represent the ongoing debate over neo-liberalisation policy adopted by the Government of India. These three issues are very much crucial towards the existence of human beings. This also raises questions on the basic notion of rights guaranteed

by the Constitution of Democratic countries. The capitalist mode of development and the crash for development on the adverse side threatens the very existence of common masses who have very limited scope of livelihood and little existence of their security for life. Therefore, the term paper is the trial to bring to light the relationship among environment, human security and livelihood in the context of North-East India. First of all, a brief introduction of these three concepts has been added.

In our day to day life, environment plays an important role. Environment refers to our surroundings, including our dwelling places, natural objects, people, and places around us. Environment determines our life style, our behavioural pattern and also our relationship with other people. It also determines our livelihood. "Environment Security" in present time, is regarded as important aspect of human security scenario. The rights to health, a decent existence, work and occupational safety; right to an adequate standard of living, freedom from hunger; dignity and harmonious development of the personality; right to security of person and of the family are all rights established by the UN Covenants. All these rights depend upon a healthy environment. Environmental degradation is not a new facet of human survival. The rise and fall of many past societies can be explained in part by the ability to modify the immediate environment. The rapid change in the population, the way of life have caused a redefinition of the notion of environmental constraints.

Human security is the concept closely connected with the human environment. The concept of "Human Security" has been occupying a significant position in the social science discourse. It has evolved as a result of changes in the security environment after the end of the cold war. A combination of many factors led to its formation. A decreased threat of global nuclear war created a cognitive space for non-military threats to be perceived with greater intensity. At the same time, the process of democratization reached a new level as democracy spread to the developing countries. This meant also that individual human life and well-being received more attention and obtained more importance. Consequently, the role of human rights and freedoms and their implementation at the national and international level became much more significant

Human security is a multi-dimensional phenomenon because it involves a number of security dimensions of human life. It can be discussed from the perspectives of human rights, law, humanitarianism, security, development (economic, social, environmental) and many more perspectives or angles. The concept of human security was finally presented to the global public in The Human Development report of 1994. The concept of human security has been deviated from the old concept of traditional security. It is much wider than that of the older one. It has both horizontal and vertical dimensions...horizontal security refers to other security dimensions next to political and military, such as environment, health, social, economic while vertical security refers to other referent objects next to state. In both concepts, human beings become the key referent objects in human security. It is strongly connected with the concept of sustainable human development.

The right to Livelihood has been accepted as one of the significant fundamental rights by all the democratic countries. It has been recognised that it is the duty of the state to ensure the security of livelihood for the people irrespective of any other

consideration. The World Food Conference, 1974 has described the right to be free from hunger as the fundamental right to everyone. The Oxford English Dictionary definition for livelihood is... "Livelihood not only refers to a manner of live but also to the various means of maintenance. All these refer to a way, a style, a habit, or a custom or even to a melody or tunes including food, income, property or inheritance." Livelihood security means when all the people at all the times have physical, social, economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active human life. The concept of livelihood has some basic requirements; these may be discussed as under:

1. Creation of gainful employment is the first and foremost requirement of livelihood.
2. It also requires poverty reduction and enhancement of income with the change in the consumption pattern.
3. Ensuring the well being of the individuals and the communities.
4. Livelihood adoption vulnerabilities and resistance which includes self-esteem, happiness, reduction of stress, empowerment of women etc.
5. Sustainability of natural resource base.

Thus, the concept of livelihood may be regarded as a complex phenomenon, without a descent livelihood pattern people at the grass root levels become vulnerable to diseases, male nutrition and a unbearable circle of human poverty. That is why, ensuring the livelihood for the people has become the prime responsibility of the government.

### **The Relationship between Environment, Human Security and Livelihood**

There is a close relationship that can be observed among the three concepts of environment, human security and livelihood. Environment plays significant role in the life of the individuals. Generally, the rural people and the tribal population, Adivasis are dependent upon the forest lands and collects their livelihood from the forest areas. There is a close relationship between the forest and the people. This relationship is also indicative of the citizenship rights enjoyed by the forest-dwellers which are being enjoyed by them since the time immemorial. The people worship their 'nature' as the mother God and thus, protect and preserve the forest resources. Their life and livelihood are totally dependent upon the forest. From, this point of view, environment plays significant role in the determination of livelihood among the people. Environment not only determines livelihood pattern of the individuals; but also determines the every aspects of family life in certain societal forms.

The relationship between environment and livelihood security of the individual has been questioned in the present development discourse. The development initiatives adopted by the government to bring about development for people have some negative impacts. People are forcefully removed from their places in the name of development, forest lands are using for making place for further development. Forest resources are being used for industrial projects. As a result, the traditional

livelihood pattern of the individuals has to suffer. They not only lose their dwelling place, but also the sources of earning livelihood. This leads to further deterioration of the economic conditions of such families; which is responsible for hunger, malnutrition and an unended circle of poverty that occurs in the family.

All these phenomena are closely related to the concept of human security. Human security covers a wide range of issues i.e. adequate dwelling place, insurance of proper livelihood pattern, making people capable of secured life by their own efforts by providing them education and training for further developments. It implies various concepts like, economic security, health security, food security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security and so on. "Freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" constitutes the main components of human security (UNDP Report, 1994). Therefore, the environmental security should also be included under human security. Safe and conducive environment can be regarded as fundamental rights. Human security also includes food security i.e. livelihood security. Therefore, the entire concepts of environment, human security and livelihood are interconnected. The change in one concept may at the same time effects the other two. Therefore, all the three concepts should be well-addressed keeping in mind their inter-relationship.

The relationship between human security and environment are certainly close and complex. A great deal of human security is tied to people's access to natural resources and vulnerabilities to environmental change—and a great deal of environmental change is directly and indirectly influenced by human activities and conflicts. Sanjeev khagram, William C. Clark and Dena Firaas Raad in their article "From The Environment and Human Security to Sustainable Security and Development" published in the *Journal of Human Development*, Vol.4, July, 2003 mentioned that "Human security offers much to the field of sustainable development. Human security highlights the social dimension of sustainable development's three pillars i.e. environment, economy and society". Environmental threats have their overall impact on human survival. Environment changes have a variety of impacts ranging from health to economic productivity, to political instability and so on. Environmental challenges can also threaten a wide diversity of subjects ranging from individuals, families, communities, various identity groups, like women, children, ethnic groups etc. Environmental impacts significantly contribute to the life of the individual in present time. These changes may also extend into the future and may influence the generations to come.

### **The Inter-Relationship of Environment, Human Security and Livelihood in the Context of North-East India**

Environment, human security and livelihood have much of their impacts on the North-Eastern part of India. The North-Eastern part of India consists of seven states i.e. Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland. These states are strategically occupying significant position in the security system of India. In the post-independent era, the area was not much successful to draw the attention of the central government. Therefore, the north-eastern part

remains highly under-development. On the other hand, the part is rich in cultural diversity possessing different castes, tribes, folk cultures, religion, customs etc. The region has abundance of natural resources. When the centre came to acquire the knowledge of natural resources, different strategies and plans were adopted by the central government to utilize the resources of the part and to collect heavy revenue from the states. The gain motive of the government, on the other hand, threatens the very existence of the people at the grass root levels.

To talk about the environment, it affects the whole of the north-eastern states. Environmental degradation is itself is a new facet of human survival. Humanity is struggling to survive in the face of growing deserts, declining forests, poisoned food/air/water; floods, hurricanes, drought and other environmental crises. These environmental problems can be seen frequently emerging in North-East India, making people vulnerable to their existence. The north-eastern states are prone to environmental disasters and because of this reason a large number on “environmentally displaced persons” can be seen in this region. They have to leave their home place and have to take shelter in government provided refugee camps. Assam being one of the important states in north-eastern era has to suffer a lot in the floods that occurs every year.

One of the major environmental issues in North-Eastern states is the present hydro-electric projects that are now announced in the north-eastern states by the central government of India. With the announcement of Prime Minister on 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2003, the focus of the people displacing schemes have shifted to the North-East. 156 major dams were announced to construct in this region. A picture is presented that the dams are basic to development and to counter insurgency. In addition, there is a plan to interlink the rivers including the Brahmaputra with its fragile ecology. All these raises question people’s rights to life with dignity. The North-East is the mega bio-diversity zone. Biodiversity is also the sustenance of many of the communities living in the region, which is again included in the Six Schedule of Indian Constitution that recognises Community Ownership or Common Property Resources (CPRs). Here, we can discuss about the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. The policy was adopted by the British Government in India during pre-independent period. This Act made provision for the acquisition of land belonging to the people to carry out development activities, like infrastructure development, making provisions for transport and communication, urbanisation, industrialisation etc. Since the time of independence, the central government took the path of development to determine county’s future. The development paradigm of India also includes the north-eastern region. The adoption of different development programmes, strategies and policies though help in bringing about development, but at the same time affects the people adversely. The people are forcefully removed from their places of residence. As a result, the livelihood pattern adopted by the people at the grass root levels gets changed. The years’ long livelihood system changes due to the changes of places in which they are living since time immemorial. And the north east India manifests all these characteristics. Mega dams projects of Assam, (like Pagaladiya Dam Project, Lower Subansiri Dam Project); Manipur (Tipaimukh Hydro-electric Project) and Arunachal Pradesh (Dihang Project) and many more projects threaten the human life belonging to the dam sites. The dams

have both merits and demerits of their own. The dams are major sources of power; it can easily fill up the deficiency of power. However, the dams are not eco- friendly, they possess major challenge for biodiversity belonging to the area, they are earthquake prone etc. Most significantly, the population of such areas are displaced. The phenomenon is common in North-East India. People are not only displaced from their places, they also lose their years' long livelihood in such situations. This constitutes violation of basic human rights, like right to live, right to earn livelihood etc. Most importantly, the community life of the people breaks down as a result of such displacement, which again violates the provisions of human security guaranteed by the government. In addition to insecurity of livelihood, the notion of displacement is also responsible for food insecurity, male nutrition, environmental insecurity and above all psychological insecurity which discourage two important notions of human security i.e. "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want". This circle continues to the next generation and they also become victims of this unchanging situation.

There are a large number of persons displaced (DPs) and also otherwise deprived by different projects (PAPs) in North-East India. This have impact on the communities alienated from their livelihood and their marginalisation as a result of deprivation and environmental degradation is a deviation from Constitutional imperatives of rights to life with dignity guaranteed under Article 21. In North-East, environment and livelihood has close relationship. Deprivation mainly because of project planning ignores the importance of environment in the lives of the poor people, particularly the CPR dependents. According to Walter Fernandez, "That is the reality in the Northeast where people's dependent on environment understood as land, forests, biodiversity, water resources and knowledge system is very high, so is their level of education but investment in employment generation in the secondary sector is very low. In 1996, there are all total 214 major and medium industries in the seven states; 166 of them were in Assam. Some of them have been closed since then and no new units are opened. It results in the pre-dominance of primary and tertiary sectors. In 1996, 75.26% of Nagaland's workforce, 74.81% Of Meghalaya, 73.99% of Assam and 70% of Manipur was in this sector against an all India average of 67.53%. The secondary sector employed persons 4% of the workforce in five states and 8% of the remaining two states against an all India average of 11.97%. The tertiary sector employed around 24% of Arunachal Pradesh, 20.45% of Assam, 21.46% of Meghalaya against an all India Average of 20.5%. These sectors are saturated and cannot employ many more." These conditions are crucial to understand the development in this region. The high dependence on lands laid the foundation of conflicts between Bodo-Adivasis and Bodo-Assamese and tensions with the Muslims. The Chakma and Hajong refugees migrated to Arunachal Pradesh after being displaced by the Kaptai Dam have deprived the locals of their sustenance. The link between immigration and Assam movement is well known.

The shortage of natural resources in the hardening of ethnic identities and exclusive claims to livelihood to the exclusion of all others. The conflicts have caused more internal displacement in Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura where the tribal populations have declined. The issue of alienation of livelihood is the cause behind migration. The environment i.e. land, water, biodiversity around which they have built

up their culture economy and identity face challenge.

The debate over CPRs is also an important issue in North-East. With the power projects implemented since the 1960s, such as the Umiam Hydro-electric dam near Shillong, thermal plants at Bongaigaon, Chandrapur and Namrup in Assam and the Dumbur dam in Tripura that have displaced several thousand families. Also the oil sector, industries and urbanisation have caused displacement. Besides, the real number of DP/PAP may be hidden because most land acquired is CPRs. Many dams are being planned in areas falling under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution or its equivalent customary law that recognises community ownership (Barooah 2002: 99-100) thus contradicting the colonial principle of eminent domain on which land laws in India are based. According to this principle, all natural resources such as forests are State property, so is all land without individual titles. Only the individual *patta* is recognised. Among the laws enacted under it is the LAQ (Ramanathan 1999). The schedule that recognizes community assets challenges its concepts of individual compensation and the environment as a commodity. That has caused conflicts between the State and their communities in areas where they are aware of their rights under the schedule and where nature is their sustenance. For example, oil and coal are the only known explorations for minerals in the region and in recent years, uranium in Meghalaya where the Government has begun the initial survey. Land in Meghalaya comes under the Sixth Schedule. Thus their social norms contradict the eminent domain. While the State sees uranium as a vital component of its "scientific nuclear project", it cannot begin mining it because land belongs to the indigenous communities. For four years, the government and the people have been locked in an impossible battle.

That will also be the case in Arunachal Pradesh where the British administration rules continue to function but the Sixth Schedule, consequently community ownership, is not recognised though it is its social reality. As a result, according to its Detailed Project Report, the proposed 500 MW Lower Subansiri dam will displace only 58 families (NHPC 2001). It ignores some thousands of families that will lose their livelihood to it. Also the proposed Tipaimukh dam in Manipur has raised several key questions around compensation for traditional land. To the indigenous communities the land they lose has not merely an economic but also a symbolic value. Also the manner in which they have been denied a part in the planning process of 'national projects', is a recurring concern of the indigenous peoples. Similarly, the Bairabi Hydro-electric dam to be built in the Kolasil district of Mizoram is expected to generate 80 MW at 30% load factor. The North Eastern Electric Power Corporation had abandoned it as uneconomical but the Mizoram Power and Electricity Department is proposing to build it at a cost of Rs. 600 cores. 7, 721 of the 9, 294 ha are requires are forest and 3, 047 ha private land from 6 villages with a population of 6, 500. It includes 137 ha of human settlement, 872 ha of grazing and horticulture and 3, 000 ha of *jhum* land. As this hill State has very little flat cultivable land, its huge submergence area is a cause of concern (Walter Fernandez, Social Action).

The Rehabilitation issue is the another concept associated with the Livelihood system. The project planners do not properly address the issue of economic base lost. The project planners should first make provisions for the Resettlement and

Rehabilitation for the people who will be deprived of construction of project. Employment generation given as a justification can be an alternative to the livelihood lost. However, very few projects give jobs to the DPs/PAPs. Moreover, most jobs given to the tribals, particularly women, are unskilled, often on daily.

While employment generation is given as justification, no project in the Northeast gives data jobs they will create. Their thrust is commercial, to produce power for sale outside the region. By ignoring people's livelihood, they will deprive several lakhs of their sustenance and add to the number the unemployed. Based on the past record, the planning of the future schemes does not create much hope. For example, the Reliance Gas Cracker Project proposed to be built at Lapekatta near Dibrugarh district of Assam, will affect several thousands of mostly tribal families. Tea garden labourers once displaced from the tea gardens will be displaced again. They are ready to move out if they get proper compensation and rehabilitation. But that has not been settled till now.

Such neglect begins a vicious circle. The communities being deprived of livelihood had developed a symbiotic relationship with their environment and had evolved a culture, customs, practices and social control mechanism meant to ensure their sustainable use. Deprivation of their livelihood begins the vicious circle of a transition from constructive to destructive dependence on the same resource. Once deprived of their livelihood, for sheer survival they abandon both their sustainable culture and the value system of class and gender equity.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the above analysis indicates the close relationship among environment, human security and livelihood. The North-Eastern region manifests the vivid picture of the inter-relationship between all these three phenomena. Being the important part of India, the north-eastern region is neglected in many spheres. However, in the development paradigm, the environment, human security and the livelihood of the people have to suffer. Therefore, demands can be raised to implement more people-friendly developments in this region.

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