

# Conflict and Disaster Risk Reduction

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## ABOUT RIKA

RIKA is a social entrepreneurship startup (DIPP-29629) with an aim of bringing research into the core of disaster management activities in India and other parts of South Asia. Resonating the Sendai declaration in relation to the need for widening the scope of Science and Technology in the disaster management, we at RIKA envision to act as a bridge connecting academic research, policy makers and field practitioners to make informed decisions and use of new technologies

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**The** term conflict for the purpose of this article would be understood as any sort of violence or disruption amongst community resulting in riots, agitations, mob violence etc. creating a major law and order problem. The idea of India as a nation was formed against the conventional definitions of a nation. It defied homogeneity: there are so many racial and ethnic groups with their cultural traditions who collectively make up this nation. In addition to, the political environment has always played upon the identity politics thereby creating rifts and strife in the community. The narrow self-interest in terms of race, class, religion, gender or tradition often compromises the holistic development of India as a nation.

When we think about Disaster Risk Reduction, we consider hazards like flood, earthquake, cyclones, tsunami or other geo-physical phenomena. The 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction highlights the importance of disaster risk management by preventing new risks and reducing the existing ones. Our National Disaster Management Plan, 2016 prepared by NDMA factors in all possible hazards and lists their prevention as well as mitigation measures. However, both at the global as well as national level, conflict per se does not feature in the discussions of DRR.

India has very recently faced violent agitations at Bhima-Koregaon, Maharashtra, Jat agitation in Haryana, Patidar agitation in Gujarat, Sabarimala conflict in Kerala, adding to our already on-going tensions in the North East, Kashmir as well as the Naxalism. The conflict in North East traces its roots to resource distribution fight between hill tribes vs. plain area people. The same is the cause of strife between migrants and the locals. Considering the volatility, such conflicts can very well induce a disaster, which, may go beyond the coping capacity of the society.

Sometimes, disasters can also induce conflict within the community. The existing power structures are often uprooted and there is a vacuum. In the implementation of relief & rehabilitation phase, if wise social engineering is not followed, the divisions in the community may come upfront leading to violence or strife in the society. One very important ingredient of conflict management plan is strong morality and values of neutrality. While NGOs can work at local level to promote harmony, it is the willpower of institutions, which is tested during such times.

### **Case Study of Kokrajhar, Assam**

Kokrajhar district of Assam is a hotbed of conflict often escalating to violence. The region is largely inhabited by Bodo tribe with a constant demand for a separate Bodoland state. The Bodo tribe is presently of Christian faith. The conflict ensues due to presence of large scale migrants from Bangladesh. The migrants are generally of Muslim or Hindu faith with major cultural difference in terms of their dress, food habits as well as language spoken. The porous river border along the state of Assam has led to influx of migrants without proper legal ways and documents. These migrations are often not by choice but forced due to lack of resources and poverty in the neighbouring country. The conflict in Kokrajhar started out as a fight for limited agrarian resources and food but soon it took communal colors owing to differences in culture and nationality too.

In this type of conflict, it is important to understand the root cause of conflict being scarcity of resources and not get carried away by the media reports terming it as mere communal clashes. The district administration, which was already distrusted by the Bodos due to their demand of separate state failed to contain the violence and required flag march by Armed forces as well as presence of NGOs on ground to ensure neutrality in providing aid to those, pushed towards camps to their safety.

In such a scenario, a conflict resolution/management plan must be well thought out in advance and preventive measures be carried out to avoid hostility taking a violent turn.

Conflict as a situation generally gathers attention only when it becomes violent, we are not yet trained to read the subtle signs of hostility so as to begin the preventive work. All the important stakeholders mainly government agencies, NGOs, media, armed forces need to be involved in training and then devising a local customised strategy suitable to each region. An administrator's independence, impartiality and integrity are the values, which may decide the conflict resolution strategy either making it more violent or leading towards lasting peace.

### **The way forward:**

#### *A Prevention based strategy:*

Considering conflict, as a mere law and order problem would often lead to a reaction based response only. What we need is more preparation in terms of prevention and mitigation strategies for a conflict like situation.

#### *Conflict and community based DRR:*

Conflict not only disrupts the normal functioning of a society but also weakens the capacity of the community. Community is considered as the first responder in any disaster and an organised community saves lives in the golden hour of a disaster.

#### *Strengthening local institutions of governance:*

Other than that, a conflict questions the authority of the institutions and weakens them as legitimate governing bodies. This would stand against our commitment to strengthen the local bodies so as to implement DRR strategies under SFDRR.

#### *Sustainable Development Goals:*

Conflict resolution and peace is a major goal to be realized as a cross cutting theme for SDGs. Achieving sustainable development is both the path and result of conflict resolution as the conflict first germinates due to limited resources and their distribution.

### **References:**

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2. Varshanev, A. (1983) Ethnic and Religious conflicts in India, Retrieved from <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/ethnic-and-religious-conflicts-india>