

Impact of Ethnic Conflict on Occupational Pattern and Standard of living of the Conflict Affected Victims in Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam

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Abstract

Ethnic Conflict has been a recurring problem in BTAD region of Assam. Community life had been severely disrupted due to violence and instability during conflict. Majority of the cultivable land are abandoned by farmers due to forced migration during conflict. Many of the business establishments had been destroyed and burnt during conflict. Conflict had led to disruption of markets. Lack of markets for the agricultural produce had compelled many farmers to abandon farming. This had led to change in occupational pattern of the people in conflict affected areas. Many of the conflict affected victims had experienced reduction in monthly household income after the conflict. All these factors have led to increase in unemployment rate and reduction in standard of living of the people in conflict affected areas. In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the impact of Ethnic Conflict on occupational pattern and standard of living of people in Kokrajhar District of BTAD region of Assam. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data had been collected through direct interview method from 500 respondents of the ten surveyed villages in Kokrajhar district.

Key Words: Ethnic Conflict, Negative Impact, Occupational Pattern, BTAD, Assam

Introduction

The word "ethnic" has roots to Greek word "ethnikos" which means race or large groups of people having common traits and customs or groups "in an exotic primitive culture. But the term ethnic or ethnicity entered the lexicon of social science studies only in 1953. Ethnic Group in general refers to groups of people both small as well as large communities having common traits, customs and culture and aboriginal of a land. The aspiration and cultural dominance of one ethnic group to carve out an exclusive territorial and political space based on being indigenous to the land excluding the other community as the 'other' or 'outsider' who has historically been part of the same territorial and political space has resulted in creating strife in the society. Racial and ethnic conflicts among ethnic groups in the present era have become a global feature. Conflicts are deeply rooted in rapid socio-economic changes taking place in the society and unequal access to available resources. Diverse ethnic groups sharing a similar resource base are unequally placed in terms of their control of the resource base, particularly land. This unequal power relations between and among the several ethnic groups, if goes out of control, results in conflicts that take the shape of an ethnic conflict.

Assam being a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural region has always been subjected to various types of ethnic conflicts. Assam is a complex ethnic mosaic. The large presence of Bengalis, together with their relatively easy socialization into the native language, has culturally threatened the Assamese and made them insecure in the face of continuous Bengali immigration across the international border with Bangladesh. The larger tribal groups, the Bodos in particular, have similarly felt culturally, economically and politically

marginalized and due to perceived fear of loss of their land, culture and identity, they have often engaged in violence against other groups specially Muslims and Adivasi's settled in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. Major Ethnic conflict took place between the Bodo's and Muslim's as well as Bodo and Adivasi's in the years 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2012 and 2014.

Reoccurring Ethnic conflicts in Bodoland have profoundly affected agricultural development in the area. Most of the people are engaged in agricultural work and the land is sown more than once in a year with HYV seeds thus, contributing a large amount to GDP of Assam. But repeated conflict has led to temporary displacement of people from their villages for months which have resulted in reduction in agricultural production as well as change in occupation of many victimized villagers.

In this paper an attempt has been made to study the impact of 2012 conflict on occupational pattern and standard of living of people in Kokrajhar district of BTAD in Assam.

Objectives

Study the impact of 2012 ethnic conflict on Occupational Pattern and standard of living of people in Kokrajhar district of Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam.

Data and Methodology

The present study is based on both primary data and secondary data. Secondary data is collected from research articles, books, newspapers. Secondary data is used to study the various ethnic conflicts which took place in BTAD area of Assam. Primary information is collected from 10 villages in Kokrajhar district of Assam. Among the ten sample villages, five villages were directly affected by conflict and other five villages are neighboring villages of the conflict affected areas. Information collected from ten villages are used to study the impact of 2012 Ethnic conflict on changes in Occupational Pattern of conflict affected people in Kokrajhar district. Information's were collected through direct interview method with the help of a questionnaire from 500 households of the ten surveyed villages. From the information collected through primary data, the present study is analyzed and concluded.

Profile of the Study area

BTAD region in Assam also known as Bodoland is the gateway to the North-Eastern India. Bodoland is in the extreme west of Assam on the northern bank of Brahmaputra River in the state of Assam in Northeast India. The region has both National and International boundaries. Bodoland was created very recently in 2003 under the Bodoland Territorial Council Accord by curving out some area of eight districts of Assam namely Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darang and Sonitpur within the state of Assam. It is an autonomous administrative unit constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India covering an area of 8795 Sq. km (2011 Census Report).

Bodoland is administered by Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). BTAD consist of four districts namely Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang and Baksha. At present, Kokrajhar serves as the capital of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). Bodoland is the home of "Bodos", an ethnic and linguistic aboriginal plain tribal group in Assam. Along with the Bodo's, other ethnic communities like Adivasi, Bihari, Marwari, which have migrated from Central India, Bengali Muslim who have migrated from Bangladesh, Nepali's who have

migrated from Nepal, and some indigenous communities of Assam like Koch Rajbonshi and Rabha live in Bodoland along with the Bodo's.

Among the four districts of BTAD region, the present study is conducted in Kokrajhar district. Kokrajhar is selected as it is the headquarter of BTAD region and Kokrajhar district covers majority of the area i.e 3165.44 sq. km in Bodoland and the region is also the hub of ethnic conflict in Western Assam. According to 2011 Census, Kokrajhar has a total population of 886,999 persons. It has a population density of 280 per square kilometer. Kokrajhar has 3 sub-divisions, 11 Community Development Blocks, 5 Revenue Circles and 1068 villages. The present study is conducted in ten villages of Kokrajhar district.

Discussion and Results

Ethnic Conflict and Changes in Occupational Pattern

Ethnic conflict had led to change in occupation among some of the directly conflict affected people during 2012 riot. Due to violence and displacement, some people were compelled to change their employment activities even after rehabilitation back to their village from relief camps. Table 1 portrays the change in different categories of occupation of respondents in the ten surveyed villages based on ethnic community after the 2012 conflict.

Table 1: Occupation of Respondents based on Ethnic Communities Before and After 2012 Conflict

Sl. No	Occupation of Respondents	Before 2012 Conflict			After 2012 Conflict			Changes in Occupation of Various Ethnic Groups from before to after Conflict (%)			Overall Change
		Muslim	Bodo	OMC	Muslim	Bodo	OMC	Muslim	Bodo	OMC	
1	Daily Wage Laborer	31 (20)	0 (0)	10 (6)	37 (23)	0 (0)	12 (8)	3	0	2	8 (19.5)
2	Farmers	72 (46)	50 (28)	0 (0)	65 (41)	54 (30)	0 (0)	-5	2	0	-3 (-2.5)
3	Informal Sector	34 (22)	13 (7)	46 (29)	39 (25)	15 (8)	45 (27)	3	1	-2	6 (6.5)
4	Businessman	2 (1)	57 (31)	74 (46)	0 (0)	53 (29)	73 (46)	-1	-2	0	7 (-5.3)
5	Private Job	2 (1)	15 (8)	7 (4)	0 (0)	13 (7)	7 (4)	-1	-1	0	4 (-16.7)
6	Government Job	17 (11)	47 (26)	23 (14)	17 (11)	47 (26)	23 (14)	0	0	0	0 (0)
Total		158	182	160	158	182	160				

Source: Data has been collected through field survey conducted during December 2018 to February 2019; **Note:** Percentage value in parenthesis; OMC - Other Minority Community

Before the 2012 conflict, among the Bengali speaking Muslim community, most of the respondents (46 per cent) were engaged in farming and animal rearing. About 22 per cent were engaged in informal sector activities as small vendors, construction workers, drivers, Thella Wala (local cart), rickshaw puller, household help and minor forest-product gatherer. 20 per cent of the respondents were daily wage laborers working in neighboring villages before the conflict, 11 per cent also had government jobs and very few respondents (merely 1 per cent each) were engaged in private job and in small scale businesses. Significant change in occupation can be noticed among the Muslim community after the conflict. During conflict, most of the agricultural equipment as well as livestock which were used for farming and animal rearing were stolen.

Following conflict, since most of the people were not in a stable financial condition to purchase all the required livestock and agriculture related equipment required for farming and animal rearing; there was reduction in number of farmers by 5 per cent, which indicates that some people had completely changed their main source of livelihood from farming to other occupations. One per cent of respondents engaged in business or in private job have also changed their occupation after the conflict, as people who had lost their business establishments during conflict were not able to resume their businesses due to poor economic condition in the post-violence period. It was also difficult for people who lost their private jobs during violence and displacement to get jobs after conflict, which compelled them to get engaged in other occupation. However, people engaged in informal sector or as daily wage laborers has increased by 3 per cent each which indicates that, respondents who were engaged in farming, private jobs and in business before the 2012 conflict had switched over to informal sector or became daily wage laborers after the conflict. After the conflict, with changes in occupation the household earning of the respondents were reduced significantly, which had worsened the standard of living of those conflict affected people, mostly belonging to the Bengali speaking Muslim community.

Change in occupation can also be noticed among the Bodo community after the conflict. Before the conflict, 57 per cent of the respondents from Bodo community were small scale businessman. They were engaged in small scale businesses related to weaving and handicraft. They used to run small handloom centers where Bodo traditional attires were produced using cotton and silk. Bodo people were also engaged in production of handicraft items made of bamboo and wood. However as many of the handloom centers were set ablaze during the year of conflict. Hence, after the 2012 conflict, 2 per cent of the businessman engaged in weaving in the handloom centers had shifted to other occupation like farming as they were not able to repurchase the handloom machines for financial constraint. For these 2 per cent increase in farmers among the Bodo community after the conflict had no other profitable alternative at that time. Many of the Bengali speaking Muslims who were previously engaged in agricultural activities had to sell a portion of their land after the conflict. Several Muslim farmers reported that they were not able to purchase agricultural machinery, materials etc. and cattle required for farming, which compelled them to change their occupation. Due to reduction in number of farmers from Bengali speaking Muslim community, several Bodo people had filled that gap by adopting farming in the post-conflict scenario, which seemed to become a relatively profitable source of livelihood.

Only, 1 per cent of private jobholders who had lost their job during violence and due to displacement had also changed their occupation after conflict to either farming or informal sector like vending, household helpers, construction workers. Change in occupation can also be observed in case of other minority communities where about 2 per cent of the respondents, who were engaged in informal sector before the conflict has changed to daily wage laborer after the conflict.

Table 2: *Distribution of Respondents as per Occupation (Ethnic Community-wise) Before and After the Conflict*

Ethnic Community	Occupation of Respondents Before Conflict	Main Household Occupation of Ethnic Communities after Conflict					Total
		Daily Wage Laborer	Farmer	Informal Sector	Business	Private Govt. Job	
Bengali speaking Muslims	Daily Wage Laborer	20	3	8	0	0	31
	Farmer	13	38	21	0	0	72
	Informal Sector	4	24	6	0	0	34
	Business	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Private Job	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Government Job	0	0	0	0	0	17
	Total	37	65	39	0	0	158
Bodo	Farmer	0	48	2	0	0	50
	Informal Sector	0	6	6	0	1	13
	Business	0	0	5	49	3	57
	Private Job	0	0	2	2	9	15
	Government Job	0	0	0	2	0	45
	Total	0	54	15	53	13	182
OMC	Daily Wage Laborer	3	0	7	0	0	10
	Informal Sector	5	0	34	3	1	46
	Business	0	0	4	70	0	74
	Private Job	0	0	0	0	4	7
	Government Job	4	0	0	0	2	17
	Total	12	0	45	73	7	23
Total	Daily Wage Laborer	23	3	15	0	0	41
	Farmer	13	86	6	17	0	122
	Informal Sector	4	17	0	70	1	93
	Business	9	11	68	27	0	133
	Private Job	0	1	0	9	14	24
	Government Job	0	1	10	3	5	68
	Total	49	119	99	126	20	87
Ethnic Community		Chi-Square Tests		Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
Bengali speaking Muslims		McNemar-Bowker Test	29.644	9	.002		
		N of Valid Cases	158				
Bodo		McNemar-Bowker Test	28.833	9	.001		
		N of Valid Cases	182				
Other Minority Communities		McNemar-Bowker Test	18.000	5	.003		
		N of Valid Cases	160				
Total		McNemar-Bowker Test	51.973	11	.000		
		N of Valid Cases	500				

Source: *Authors calculation from Primary Survey. Note: OMC refers to Other Minority Communities*

After the conflict, number of daily wage laborers have increased by around 19 per cent in all the surveyed villages. Around 7 per cent respondents have also switched over to various

informal sector activities. 16 per cent people had left private jobs and about 5 per cent of them had shifted from business to other occupation.

Thus, after 2012 conflict, some respondents from all communities had to change their occupation for the damage of their resources or instruments of former activities due to violence, and that was compounded with the displacement as well as degenerated financial condition. Bengali speaking Muslim community was mostly affected as many of them had changed their sources of earning after the conflict due to degraded financial condition and loss of their assets including livestock, granary and other physical assets.

Table 2 depicts McNemar-Bowker Test results conducted for testing significance of difference (variation) in occupational distribution of respondents in the surveyed villages before and after conflict, which is computed for major ethnic communities and for overall sample. It is found that, the p-value in case of Bengali speaking Muslim community is <0.05 , which validates the significant difference in the main occupation before and after the conflict. Also, in case of respondents of Bodo community and other minority community, the p-value is <0.05 , which indicates that there is a significant variation in occupation of respondents before and after the conflict among those groups. It is therefore observed that, the main occupation of all the communities were affected as a result of 2012 conflict and violence.

The number of respondents engaged in farming have decreased from 122 to 119; number of respondents engaged in business have also decreased from 133 to 126 and number of respondents engaged in private job have been reduced from 24 to 20 after the conflict. For the case of a small sample, the number is not too less and found to be statistically significant. However, there was increase in number of respondents engaged as daily wage laborers, farmers and in petty informal sector activities, that shows an adoption of inferior activities.

Ethnic Conflict and Changes in Household Income

As observed from Table 1, 2012 conflict had led to change in occupation of some respondents after the conflict. Due to change in occupation after conflict, household income of those respondents has been reduced. During the riot, all the victims were forcefully taken away from their village. The internally displaced people had to take shelter in government relief camps for several months, where they were mostly unemployed. The inmates in relief camp had to survive with basic facilities provided by the government along with the utilization of their past savings, whatever they could carry with them. Even after returning to their villages, conflict affected victims had to rehabilitate themselves by reconstructing their damaged houses and buying all the essential household items required for restarting livelihood. Victims also did not have enough resources to resume their agriculture as well as business activities, which had severely affected their household income. Moreover, it was difficult to get employment immediately after the conflict. For all these reasons, the victims of the riot had suffered from poor financial condition. Significant differences in monthly income between the pre and post 2012 conflict across villages inhabited by Bodo community, villages inhabited by Muslim community, and villages inhabited by mixed population of different ethnic communities in Kokrajhar is observed from Table 3.

Table 3 reveals that the monthly earning of the households in the directly violence affected villages were changed significantly with varied magnitude due to the conflict. Thus, it affected their spending capabilities that was bound have serious impacts on the nutritional intake and overall human resources. Before the 2012 conflict, the minimum monthly household income of all the respondents were above Rs 10,000. However, after the violence, minimum household income of a few respondents went below the Rs 10,000 mark in the directly affected

villages. Before the conflict started, about 65 per cent of the respondents of directly affected villages reported to have monthly family earning between Rs 21,000 to Rs 30,000, but after the conflict proportion of such respondents in the same earning bracket came down to 39 per cent. Before the conflict about 18 per cent of respondents had monthly income ranges between Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000, which had increased to 47 per cent after the conflict. It is an indication of rising proportion of population of the directly affected villages in the low-income group. Around 16 per cent of the respondents were also earning between Rs 31,000 to Rs 40,000, which had decreased to 11 per cent in the directly affected villages after the conflict. To say again, several families have gone down to low-income group by one or two steps after the violence in the directly affected villages.

Table 3: Monthly Household Income of Surveyed villages before and After 2012 Conflict

Monthly Household Income (Rs)	Before Conflict		After Conflict		Change in Monthly Household Income Before and After Conflict		Overall Change between before & after Violence
	Directly Affected Villages	Not Directly Affected Villages	Directly Affected Villages	Not Directly Affected Villages	Directly Affected Villages	Not Directly Affected Villages	
Below 10,000	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (--)
10,000-20,000	54 (18)	1 (0.5)	140 (47)	1 (0.5)	86 (40)	0 (0)	86 (41)
21,000-30,000	196 (65.3)	91 (45.5)	116 (39)	88 (44)	-80 (-40.8)	3 (-12)	-83 (-28.9)
31,000-40,000	50 (16.7)	101 (50.5)	34 (11)	102 (51)	-16 (-32)	1 (0.9)	-15 (-9.9)
41,000-50,000	0 (0)	7 (3.5)	0 (0)	9 (4.5)	0 (0)	2 (28.5)	2 (28.5)
Total	300	200	300	200			

Source: Data had been collected from field survey conducted during December 2018 till February 2019. **Note:** Percentage values are in the parentheses. – means it cannot be computed.

Therefore, in the directly conflict villages, there was an increase of respondents earning income between Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 by 40 per cent. Whereas there was decrease of around 41 per cent of respondents earning income between Rs 21,000 to Rs 30,000. Respondents earning between Rs 31,000 to Rs 40,000 has also declined by about 32 per cent after the conflict.

However, in case of villages which were not directly affected by 2012 violence, there has been an insignificant change in the proportion of households in different income groups. Only, proportion of households in the monthly earning category of Rs 21000 - Rs 30000 has declined by 12 per cent while that of income range Rs 41000 - Rs 50000 was increased by 28.5 per cent.

If we look at the overall change in monthly household income in all the surveyed villages together after the conflict, the responses reveal that there was 41 per cent increase in respondents having monthly household earning between Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 and there was

a 29 per cent increase in households in the monthly household earning between Rs 41,000 to Rs 50,000. It means that many households had experienced decrease in monthly household income after the conflict, though there were also some households, particularly in the neighbouring non-directly affected villages who had experienced an increase in monthly income after the conflict. Because of no violence, the neighbouring villagers could enhance their activities to meet several requirements of the conflict affect neighbouring villages. Overall, it can be concluded that the conflict had negative impact on the earning of several households due to reduction in the livelihood activities in the area.

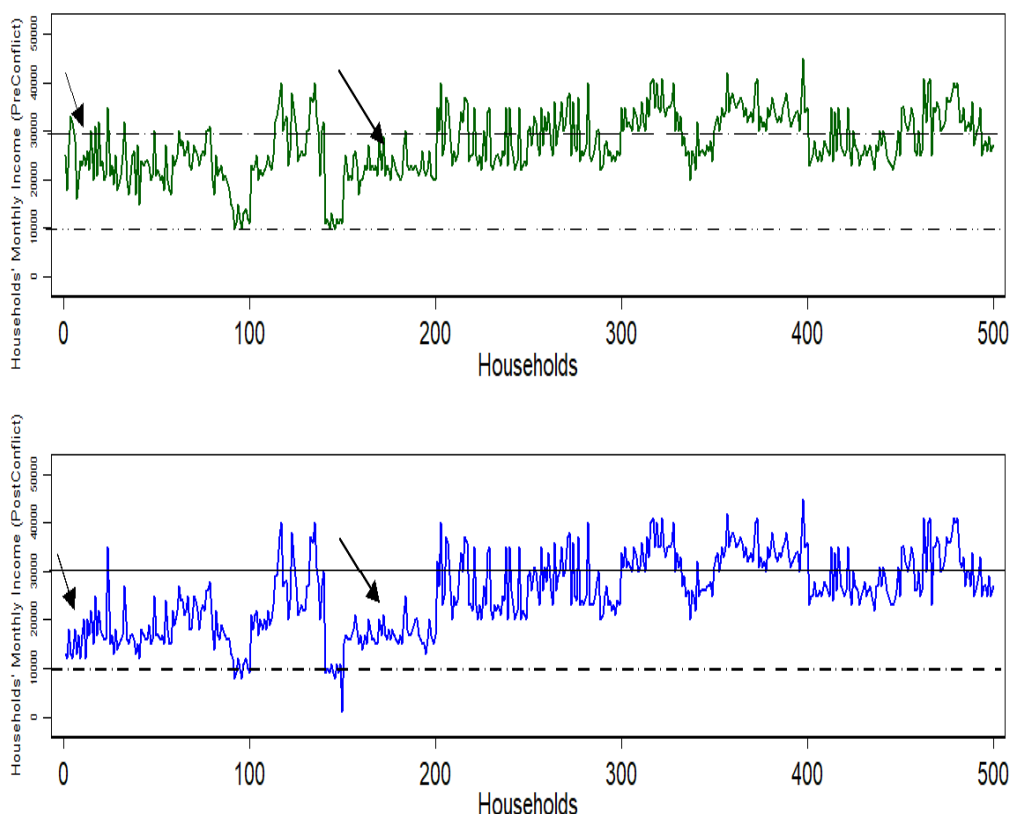


Figure 1: *Distributions of the Monthly Income before 2012 Ethnic Conflict in Ten Surveyed Villages of Kokrajhar District*

Comparison between the income of respondents before and after 2012 conflict is also reflected from Figure 1. It reflects that income of economically poor families had decreased further after the 2012 conflict. Before the conflict, majority of the respondents had family earning between Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000 per month, while about 17 per cent of the respondents in directly affected villages used to earn above Rs 30,000 per month. However, after the 2012 conflict, proportion of respondents in the monthly earning below Rs 20,000 has increased, indicating that many people of the conflict affected villages became economically poor. However, only a few households from villages which are not directly affected by 2012 conflict were found to maintain their earning.

Conclusion

Ethnic conflict and violence between the Bodo community and Bengali speaking Muslim community in Kokrajhar district of Bodoland Territorial Region had devastating impact on the people of the region who were directly exposed to violence during disturbance.

The effect was more pronounced in the year 2012 violence. The attack and counterattack have led to destruction of resources, physical assets, loss of employment and earning, and followed by displacement of affected population from their villages for several months. During violence, majority of the houses in violence affected villages were burnt that caused large scale internal displacement of people from their villages. The displaced people had to stay in relief camps for several months. During the displacement period, those displaced people were mostly unemployed leading to reduction in their income and saving.

Many respondents lost their household possessions and also personal belongings including academic certificates, title deeds and birth certificates during the violence. Many of the respondents had to abandon or disown their livestock during displacement and those livestock were lost. Conflict affected people who had invested in small-scale businesses in the rural areas had suffered heavy losses as most of the business premises were vandalized and were set on fire during the violence. Daily wage laborers and agricultural laborers also faced difficulty in finding employment after the conflict due to community based spatial segregation. Agricultural activities were adversely affected due to dispute and many of the farmers could not practice their agricultural sowing, weeding, irrigation, harvesting activities in time. Disruption of agricultural activities led to poor yields and consequently low income to most of the farmers. In the areas which were affected by ethnic violence, there was a decline in agricultural production as most of the farmers were displaced from their homes for several months. During violence granaries of victims were burned and cattle as well as agricultural equipment's used for cultivation were stolen. One of the long-term economic repercussions of the violence was that land that was previously used for farming and cattle rearing (dairy farm) was abandoned by some owners due to poor financial status of victims and inability to purchase and maintain cattle after the conflict. Even in situations where some farmers went back to their farms, the size of land under cultivation was reduced. On enquiry, it was informed that farming tools and tractors were destroyed, stolen or lost during the violence and it was not easy to buy some of these tools, which had affected agricultural production. Moreover, access to markets was also a problem after the conflict owing to disruption of transportation facilities during conflict, or out of fear the victims were scared to go out frequently, which had adversely affected agricultural income. Many of the victims who were engaged in private jobs also had to lose their jobs as they were unable to attend their works for displacement from their village for many months.

After rehabilitation to their villages, conflict affected people were forced to begin all over again by rebuilding their homes, purchasing livestock and by buying household essential items. The directly conflict affected people also faced difficulty in engaging in their previous occupation due to financial loss and destruction of assets during the conflict. The victims during violence were not able to restart their business activities or resume informal sector activities due to financial loss and they were also mostly discriminated from various job opportunities on ethnic line. Reduction in employment opportunities and change in occupation caused decline in scope of earning of those respondents. Many people had to suffer from reduction in income and some were even compelled to change their occupation after the conflict.

Thus, from the study it can be concluded that Ethnic Conflict has devastating impact on life of the rural population in Kokrajhar. 2012 conflict have severely affected occupation and livelihood pattern of the people residing in directly violence inflicted villages residing in directly conflict affected villages, which was continued at the time of survey. Conflict had also led to decrease in monthly income of households after the conflict. Decrease in monthly income has contributed to decrease in standard of living of the residents in conflict affected area.

Thus, in a myriad of ways ethnic conflict in the year 2012 had affected occupational pattern and scope of earning of the people, especially in villages which were directly affected by conflict and violence. Ethnic conflict has act as a barrier in sustainable rural development of Kokrajhar district in Assam. Thus, government should take required steps to prevent the reoccurrence of ethnic conflict in Kokrajhar.

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