

NTS ALERT

Population Displacement

A common thread in various non-traditional security issues – such as climate change, political violence, poverty and resource scarcity – has been the displacement of populations. This edition of NTS Alert examines the various factors contributing to population displacement in selected Asian countries and the limitations in contemporary measures towards mitigating the plight of these unwilling migrants.

Peace in Sight? – The Plight of the Displaced Filipinos

The most commonly-publicized cause of the Filipino population displacement had been armed conflict between the government and insurgent groups, chiefly the Moro-Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the New People's Army (NPA). Despite the paucity of data available, according to the Department of Social Work and Development (DSWD) the conflict has led to the displacement of nearly two million people between 2000 and 2006 – 90 percent of which was generated from the Muslim-dominant and resource-rich southern island of Mindanao.

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Clashes and Banditry

Causes of insecurity include not just armed incidents between government forces and the militants but also widespread banditry and clan disputes (or “rido”), which sometimes degenerate into armed incidents.

For instance, in early May 2008, hundreds of villagers on a remote southern island were displaced due to *rido*, according to police reports. In fact, a study funded by Asia Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development revealed that over 1,200 *ridos* occurred in the south since the 1930s, resulting in nearly 5,000 deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands of residents. *Ridos* too have the potential to stymie the negotiations for truce.

Underdevelopment and Poverty

Under-development and the destruction caused by years of fighting have further impoverished an already disadvantaged population, with IDPs particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, health risks and unemployment. In addition, the Philippines has also witnessed massive population displacements – mainly the poor and indigenous peoples –each year due to natural disasters and economic development projects. Consequently, the Philippines has been highly-ranked, by the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE), for the violation



of violating housing rights due to development or “beautification” projects.

In the absence of peace, the Filipino IDPs could not return to their homes safely and the situation exacerbated in 2007. By June 2008, the rebels warned that its ceasefire with the government will expire after August 31 unless the International Monitoring Team (IMT), deployed since 2004, which requires its mandate to be renewed, is 'revived.' Malaysia, a key partner in the team, announced in April 2008 that the mandate, which it has been brokering, will not be extended after it expires on Aug 31 due to lack of progress in the talks and therefore threatening the withdrawal of all IMT participants.

Guardian or Wrecker of Peace?

Conflict-induced displacement in the Philippines seemed to expose an irony with regard to the military's role. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) counter-insurgency approach tend not to discriminate between combatants and civilians, according to a UNICEF textual analysis of official AFP documents. In February 2007, the government was forced, under international pressure, to release the "Melo" report, which backed the findings of visiting UN special rapporteur on alleged extrajudicial killings by the AFP. In December 2007, nearly 3,000 villagers reportedly fled after the AFP occupied their settlements to launch attacks against NPA insurgents. The AFP however dismissed these allegations as propaganda.

Stunted Development and Missed Opportunities...

For the IDPs, basic needs and access to livelihood opportunities are the most pressing issues. Most linked their poverty to on-going armed conflicts and blame population displacements for their economic, health and livelihood problems. The cumulative effects of conflict and displacements result in near arrested development. Many returnees found their properties destroyed and hence in dire need for assistance. The sporadic and protracted nature of the conflict leads to uncertainties and hence the reluctance for long-

term planning. Assets were destroyed while surviving assets were reportedly exchanged for weapons needed for 'self-protection' (the cost of one firearm is equivalent to several months of an impoverished family's income). The loss of productive assets makes it harder for refugees to resume their lives. The presence of the militants or the military limits IDPs' access to their lands, hence reducing livelihood opportunities. Analisa Ugay, lobby specialist for a local NGO, Balay Rehabilitation Centre, pointed out that children are the most severely affected due to internal displacement. “They comprise 40-60 percent of total IDPs,” she told IRIN in January 2008. A UNICEF study found that in terms of schooling, IDP children are generally the worst affected because they are unable to attend school amongst other things. For instance, by the end of January 2007, skirmishes between the AFP and rebels forced some 6,000 villagers to seek refuge in schools which inevitably led to the suspension of classes.

The Conditions of the IDPs...

IDPs refugees generally faced a barrage of problems, such as poor living conditions and the entailing health risks. It was reported in February 2007 that children and the elderly suffered risks to infectious diseases due to overcrowding, lack of food, water shortages and inadequate sanitation and poor makeshift shelters which left them exposed to wind and rain. As of May 2003, children between 2 to 6 years old constituted 80 percent of mortalities in the refugee camps mainly due to diarrhoea. Clean and safe water, was hard to find because 91 percent of all water sources tested positive for bacterial contamination.

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China : Human Costs From Economic Boom?

China, the world's most populated country, experiences a high rate of internal migration, largely from rural labourers moving from the countryside to the cities and coastal areas. Internal labour migration and related issues, especially regarding poverty reduction, have been one of the most significant policy concerns in China, especially when as many as 114 million rural labourers were involved in internal migration in 2003 despite China's rapid urbanization since economic reforms began in 1978. Internal migration is driven also by regional socioeconomic disparity under the central government's pro-east development approaches. As a remedy, the central government began to adjust its development strategy under the much-publicized 'Go-West' program. Through their hard work, high savings, low consumption and by reducing the pressure on the land, migrant workers managed to significantly contribute towards the development of poorer

regions. However, to a certain extent, labour migration in China creates the problem of 'brain drain' in certain regions. Also, the rural migrants remain at the bottom of the social ladder in the host regions and are usually paid piece-rate wages and had to work additional hours without pay and most do not enjoy welfare benefits and social protection.

Barriers in Mitigating the Consequences of Internal Migration

One of the longstanding internal migration concerns has been "the rural problem in three dimensions" – rural economy, rural community and rural residents – as highlighted in Premier Wen Jiabao's Government Work Report in March 2005. The rapid expansion of urban areas, advocated by many scholars, has been accompanied by the emergence in the cities' suburbs inhabited by large number of landless

Asia: Forced Migration Hotspot.. and Getting Hotter

The considerable wealth and income disparities, both within and between states in Asia, spurred large population movements. The dynamics of rapid economic development and changing demographic patterns, on the one hand, and human rights violations, discrimination against certain ethnic groups and unequal distribution of resources, on the other, have all contributed to large migratory flows, including irregular movements and forced displacement. In terms of durable solutions, according to the UNHCR Global Appeal report for 2008-2009, Asia remains the region with the largest number of resettlement submissions, totalling over 23,000 for the first six months of 2007 alone (as compared with some 27,400 for all of 2006). Over 15,000 Myanmar refugees, mainly from camps in Thailand, Bangladesh and urban areas of Malaysia and India, had fled for resettlement countries by September 2007. From January 2007 to the time of writing, more than 353,000 Afghans repatriated voluntarily from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In Sri Lanka, by mid-August, over 104,600 refugees displaced by events in early 2007 had returned to their places of origin in the eastern part of the country. Unfortunately, achievements in resettlement have not been matched by progress toward local integration—with the exception of some countries in Central Asia. Furthermore, in some countries and for some caseloads, UNHCR finds it a challenge to realize durable solutions for refugees, even when solutions have been identified: for instance, some host countries refuse to issue exit permits for refugees accepted for third-country resettlement.

Source:

UNHCR Global Appeal 2008-2009





and unemployed rural migrants. Although the Documents of the State Council focused on the rural economy and farmers' income in 2004 and 2005, a comprehensive strategy for sustainable rural development and other issues such as poverty reduction and public health remained unresolved. An overlapping set of dilemmas, such as the competition between rural and urban unemployed also need to be addressed. In addition, there is still a policy gap as far as internal migration and poverty reduction are concerned where the rural and urban poor are managed under separate programs which are administered by different agencies yet neither which covers the millions of rural migrants.

The most debatable issue related to the plight of China's internal migrants, however, is the Household Registration System (*Hukou*). *Hukou* distinguishes the rural migrants from urban residents and, to a certain degree, excludes them from urban social welfare systems including public healthcare. Despite the 2001 *Hukou Reforms* the new designation that distinguishes between 'temporary' and 'permanent' *Hukou* status remains akin to the previous designation of 'rural' and 'urban' *Hukou* status respectively, hence indicating a little-changed structure despite greater freedom of movement conferred. Recent reform efforts centred upon simplifying application procedures and easing limitations on rural-urban migration. However, the central government has been unable to drastically reform *Hukou* due to the expansion of social welfare services and the entailing exorbitant costs. An alternative of reducing services would also carry potential socio-political repercussions. Reform is therefore also a question of political will.

Challenges Ahead for China's Internal Migrants

An estimated 150 million migrants had since migrated from the rural to the urban regions, where they become the backbone to the booming Chinese economy. The availability of cheap labour, in the dynamic and informal sectors for instance, constitutes one of the main pillars of China's economic growth. However, the influx of rural migrants in the cities has led to the

emergence of housing slums. These large estates of substandard quality are largely inhabited by the migrants because they cannot afford quality houses. And this is due to their inability to access the credit market because they do not possess registration documents. Although these slums are better than the ghettos seen in other developing countries, it is still far inferior compared to the houses enjoyed by the urbanites. According to the China Academy of Social Sciences estimates, China's urban population is expected to exceed one billion people in less than a generation and this presents tremendous opportunities for economic growth but 70 percent of the population expansion is expected to comprise migrants who are seeking for job opportunities and a better life. China's unusual course of policy has brought with it particular difficulties that need to be resolved, notably in large gaps between people defined as urban or rural—even when both live in the same cities. As mentioned earlier, despite reforms, *Hukou* is still regarded as inefficient and deeply unfair. It is only recently that the deplorable plight such as discrimination, access to education, social insurance and public healthcare as well as lower or defaulted wages, of the rural migrants had been brought under the spotlight. NGOs' collaboration with the Chinese government had led to some successes towards alleviating migrant plight, taking the example of achievements reported in April 2008 of a joint project, titled "*Enhancing Legal Aid Service for Migrant Workers in China*," which started in January 2007 and successfully provided professional legal aid allowing thousands of migrant workers to claim millions of yuans of defaulted wages and other compensations. However, still more could be done. The price of economic development, ironically, had been the increased socioeconomic gap between the rural and urban populations.

Environmental Migration in China – An Emergent Issue

Scant attention has been paid to environmentally-driven migration in China, with connections to environmental regeneration and anti-poverty programs initiated by the central government. This is a large scale and significant phenomenon especially in western China, due to serious

environmental degradation, especially soil erosion and desertification. Erosion had increased by 10,000 square kilometres per year, with a five billion ton per year loss of soil, two-thirds of which originating from western China. Among the causes, such as over-cultivation of arable land, desertification is particularly problematic, with an upward trend observed over the years at 10,400 square kilometres per year for instance in the Gobi Desert due to growing population and livestock alongside reduced protective vegetation. The geographical distribution of China's poverty-stricken population is highly correlated to these ecologically-fragile zones (EFZs), with high poverty incidences largely the result of increasing rural population, slow urbanization process and

the exploitation of natural resources resulting in environmental degradation and increased pressure on the agricultural land. The March 2000 'Grand Development in West China' policy,

which called for environmental measures to halt EFZ deterioration, led to the forced relocation of populations from these regions to relieve population pressure on the environment, allowing the rehabilitation of the ecosystem and eradicating poverty. Approximately two million residents were displaced between 1983 and 2006. Rising demand and the decline of sustainable access to safe drinking water in cities may also trigger human migration in the future. In 1997, 5623 billion cubic meters of water had been consumed and was expected to rise by another 646 billion cubic meters in 2010, followed by another 720 billion cubic meters by 2050. Environmental degradation and resource depletion in the EFZs could lead to new floods of 'environmental migrants'.

The Chinese government to date has recognized the implications of climate change. In June 2008, a joint China-UNDP initiative, titled "The

Climate change and the 'Environmental refugees'

According to a 52-page report by Christian Aid in 2007, a billion people – one in seven people on Earth today – could be forced to leave their homes over the next 50 years as the effects of climate change worsen an already serious migration crisis. This report is based on the latest UN population and climate change figures and envisaged that conflict, large-scale development projects and widespread environmental deterioration would combine to make life unsupportable for hundreds of millions of people. The world faces its largest movement of people forced from their homes. "Forced migration is now the most urgent threat facing poor nations," said John Davison, the report's lead author. "Climate change is the great, frightening unknown in this equation."

About 155 million people are known to be displaced now by conflict, natural disaster and development projects. This figure could be augmented by as many as 850 million, as more people are expected to be affected by water shortages, sea level crises, deteriorating pasture land, conflicts and famine, the report says. Nevertheless, the reports admit that the figures are uncertain "because there are no recent, authoritative global figures on the number of people who could be displaced by climate change". It stressed also that "...the lack of knowledge must not lead to a neglect of what can be done now to prevent displacement and to help people who are affected," saying that the best solution would be to reduce global poverty. It draws heavily on the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, which said that by 2080, about 3.2 billion people would be experiencing water scarcity, 200-600 million would suffer from hunger and about five million a year displaced by coastal flooding. The report stated that a staggering number of people are being pushed aside to make way for dams, roads, logging, grain plantation and other large-scale development [projects]." It says that this includes 25 million displaced by conflict and human rights abuses, 25 million by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, and 105 million by large development projects, with 8.5 million now officially classed as refugees. By 2050, it says, twice as many people could be displaced by conflict and natural disasters, but 250 million could be permanently displaced by climate change-related phenomena such as droughts, floods and hurricanes, and 645 million by dams and other development projects, based on a current rate of 15 million people a year. "The growing number of disasters and conflicts linked to future climate change will push the numbers far higher unless urgent action is taken. We estimate that between now and 2050 a total of one billion people will be displaced from their homes."

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Provincial Programmes for Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation in China,” was launched to assist provincial governments to mitigate climate change issues. The programme will not only help establish new local institutional mechanisms but also work with the local government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency initiatives. Another noteworthy recent project embarked in June 2008 to help sustain China’s development, which would facilitate rural socioeconomic developments, is the China-UNDP collaboration to promote sustainable development in a variety of areas ranging from poverty reduction, socio-economic development to environmental and ecological improvement.

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The figures include 645 million who will migrate because of development projects, and 250 million because of phenomena linked to global warming like floods, droughts and famine. For instance, the conflict in western Sudan's Darfur region, which has displaced more than two million people, was not just driven by political forces but also by competition for increasingly scarce water and land to graze animals. "Security experts fear that this new migration will fuel existing conflicts and generate new ones in the areas of the world -- the poorest -- where resources are most scarce," said a statement accompanying the report, adding that "A world of many more Darfurs is the increasingly likely nightmare." The problem is all the more alarming as those displaced in their own countries have no rights under international law and no official voice. In Myanmar for example, ethnic minority groups had suffered decades of violence, displacement and persecution only to see the military rulers now using the freed space for dams, logging and palm oil plantations. Climate changes will drive grain production growth as more developed countries will raise demand for bio-fuels over crude oil to reduce global warming.

Lately in 2008, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warns that there are now more than 11 million refugees worldwide. A new report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says conflicts, climate change and rising food prices are some of the factors leading to the rise in global displacement to 11.4 million refugees worldwide-up from 9.9 million last year. The International Federation of Red Cross says climate change disasters are currently a bigger cause of population displacement than war and persecution. The global impact of the environment on human livelihoods is creating a new kind of casualty – the environmental refugee. Rising sea levels, increasing desertification, weather-induced flooding, and more frequent natural disasters have, and will increasingly become a major cause of population displacement in several parts of the world. There are now about 19.2 million people officially recognized as "persons of concern", likely to be displaced because of environmental disasters. This figure is predicted to grow to about 50 million by the end of the year 2010. These forecasts are not inevitable and will hinge on whether the international community can deliver a decisive and meaningful agreement on climate change at the UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen in 2009.

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Two Years On in Timor Leste

The shooting of Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta in February 2008 underscored the urgency of addressing sources of conflict and violence in Timor-Leste – the unresolved displacement crisis is one of the important problems. More than 100,000 people – 10 percent of the total population – remain displaced ever since civil conflict erupted in April 2006. Presently 30,000 refugees are sheltered in 51 camps located in the capital, Dili, while, approximately, the remaining 70,000 live outside camps, with families and friends. Many became displaced because of the east-west divisions while others were victims of crimes and social conflicts. Successive governments and their international partners have failed to resolve these issues. In April 2008, an IDP camp located in Dili was closed down after its 173 resident families returned to their homes. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) hailed it as "a first significant breakthrough." Still, these limited achievements did not hide the very fact that the process of reintegrating IDPs back into their communities is a long process plagued by a host of problems.

The Desire to Return Home, But ...

An estimated 40,000 people returned within a few months of their displacement in 2006 but subsequent return rates slowed considerably. Four main obstacles prevent the IDPs from going home even if most, if not all, want to:

(1) *Fear and insecurity*: Insecurity stemming from fear of division-driven violence and distrust for the ineffective security forces prevented IDPs from returning and reinstating their livelihoods. For instance, in April 2008 it was reported that military restrictions placed the multi-million dollar coffee industry in jeopardy as authorities

prevented the displaced growers from preparing for the annual May coffee bean harvest.

(2) *Pull factors*: Free food and shelter, and the many economic opportunities offered by the IDP camps, made these camps attractive places for IDPs to stay on. The government had failed to cease food distribution for political as well as food security reasons. Some IDPs in Dili told IRIN in February 2008 that they were against such policy, and the *Diario Nacional* newspaper warned that such cutbacks could result in civil unrest.

(3) *Politicization and criminalization of camps*: Some IDP camps are effectively managed by individuals and groups – some of which are violent – with vested interests, for either political or profiteering reasons, in keeping occupancy numbers high.

(4) *Lack of housing alternatives*: Destroyed or damaged houses have not been rebuilt while others are subject to unsettled ownership disputes. The housing stock is simply insufficient for the rapidly growing population.

Viable Solutions?

1. *National response*: The efforts of the Timor-Leste government are limited both in terms of operational and financial capacity. The dialogue processes were ineffective and there also exist political disagreements on the IDPs' future. Successive governments have failed to resolve the IDP problem mainly due to the lack of institutional capacity. The new government that assumed office in August 2007 has a more vigorous approach through its national recovery strategy which, while containing many feasible ideas, unfortunately has not allocated sufficient resources. The 2008 budget reportedly has no provisions to buy rice for the hungry IDPs.

2. *International response*: The departure of UNHCR due to lack of funds in July 2007 has left a potential protection gap in a country with extremely limited capacity in the field. To ameliorate the problem of inefficient food distribution, the World Food Programme (WFP) had reportedly cut food aid for IDPs in Timor-Leste to ensure that assistance reaches the needy.





Conditions of the IDPs – Gradual but Slow Improvements

Having been occupied continuously since May 2006, many IDP camps are crowded and plagued by increased health and malnutrition risks. Successive governments had only recently improved living conditions in collaboration with external parties by January 2008. Displacement also prevented children from accessing proper education. Women and children IDPs are also vulnerable to domestic violence in camps.

It was assumed that once the immediate emergency was over and a reasonable level of stability has been established, the refugees would return. However, about 50,000 people have returned starting in July 2006, but 100,000 did not.

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A Young and Fragile Nation

Timor-Leste is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, with a per capita income of \$389 in 2003, ranking 142nd among the 177 countries in terms of HDI. Almost half of the population has no access to safe water and 80 per cent has no access to sanitation facilities. Unemployment rates are high in a country with few economic opportunities. Timor-Leste’s population has one of the highest growth rates in the world. Also, the young nation is confronted with a variety of challenges for survival. The bulk of Timor-Leste’s agriculture is low input/output subsistence farming. Demographic factors have increased the vulnerability of Timor-Leste to civil conflict. Customary systems of land and natural resource management are complex and widespread in Timor Leste and the inability of UNTAET to address land and housing issues left many disputes unresolved. To compound these problems, Timor-Leste is also a highly disaster-prone country. Disasters include including flooding, earthquakes, landslides, cyclones, tsunamis and drought. During 2007, drought and severe floods and landslides caused food shortages, infrastructure damage as well as displacement.

Source:

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