

Ethnic conflict and socio-cultural problems confronted by internally displaced people in Eastern Province of Sri Lanka: with special reference to Muthur Divisional Secretariat Division of Trincomalee District

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The twenty five years old ethnic conflict in North and East provinces in Sri Lanka has resulted in many social issues and internally displaced people's (IDPs) problems have become more critical among these issues. The war between government forces and Liberation Ligers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) is escalating and there is no sign of short term or long term solution to stop the conflict. Irrespective of their ethnic background, the people who are living in these areas have been suffering and limiting their social development, gradually turn into impoverishment.

The main objective of this paper was to identify the social and cultural problems of displace people. Apart from this main objective the researcher attempted to identify the possible solutions to minimize the negative impacts of their lives.

Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected through using case study and survey methods. In addition, functional method has utilized to analyse the social and cultural impacts of IDP life in selected camps. 30 families have selected for the study from two camps situated in Muthur Divisional Secretariat Division. A stratified answered questionnaire and interviews were the techniques of data collection. Apart from these techniques observation technique has used in many locations to verify many facts erupted through the survey.

Two types of problems were identified in this study. They are IDP camps related problems (such as, insufficient sanitary facilities, dry ration issues, insufficient space, insecurity, women and child related issues, and lack of social integrity with neighboring villages around the camp) and their general life related problems (unemployment, loss of secondary income sources, loss of education opportunities for their children, lack of accessibility to maintain their religious and cultural practices, mental stress and disorders, and resettlement issues). Though they are having many problems in their home towns they are willing to go back and resettle in the original place where they have developed their social and cultural relationships. Therefore, it is evident that many IDPs are confronting many social and cultural problems due to ethnic war erupting in many places in the country, especially in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. However, it is very difficult to cater for many problems and government officers such as Divisional Secretary, Grama Niladhari, Social Service Officer, and team leaders (inmates) of these camps are not having most appropriate solutions for these social and cultural problems. The only practical solution is the establishment of peace through finding a political solution for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Unless, these IDPs have to scarify their life in these camps without hopes of future.

Key words: Ethnic conflict, IDPs, Displacement, Poverty

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