



**INTERNAL  
DISPLACEMENT &  
GENDER VIOLENCE: A  
PSW SYMPOSIUM**



**December 5, 2009**



**SUMMARY REPORT**

According to the UNHCR, there are 26 million internally displaced people in the world, out of which a staggering 60% of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are in Asia and Africa. The cause for displacement—conflict, development or disaster—may vary but the consequences by and large are the same. One of the most disturbing of these is gender violence.

Gender violence among internally displaced persons is a “systemic form of violence” for which the media, academia, social groups, and the government must take responsibility. This form of gender violence is creating a “new form of social and cultural isolation.”

Women IDPs experience violence in a variety of ways: physical, verbal, social, financial and intellectual. Financial violence, in fact, was identified as “crippling”; denial of livelihood, in the aftermath of displacement, adversely affected a woman’s decision-making capabilities. This, the speakers believed, lead to women experiencing low self esteem, depression and an increasing dependency on their husbands.

Forced migration also leads to emotional stress and insecurity among women as they find it difficult to cope with changes that occur as a result of displacement. To cite an example, when girls and women are forced to shift to inaccessible areas, they not only experience loss of social capital with their support systems broken, but also intellectual violence, which stems from being denied access to education.

One of the many challenges that IDPs face is acceptance from the host community. It was noted that being in an “environment of captivity” made intervention of any kind difficult. It is therefore necessary that people are empowered to make informed decisions either through existing structures or through people.

The latter half of the symposium was dominated by the “lack of inclusion and participation of women” in the development process and the difficulties they faced on being forcibly evicted. The uprooting of homes for facilitating numerous development projects in the urban set up was described as “shortsighted and undemocratic.” Forced displacement not only robs people of their source of income but also makes them “passive and dehumanised.” The speaker highlighted the “unconstitutional powers in the hands of the judiciary” and the lack of awareness among people regarding various stages of planning, which has contributed to their “exclusion” from public consultations.

Discussion about coping strategies, such as enhancing community participation, was brief. Women need to be well-informed and work as a closely-knit group. This, it was noted, contributed in controlling exploitation to a great extent like seen in the Kashipur region of Orissa and in some parts of Sri Lanka.

Participants agreed it was imperative to create a support system to address this humanitarian issue. Collective effort from government bodies, social groups and political parties to initiate public dialogue was seen as essential for informed action and intervention on gender violence, especially among internally displaced persons.

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