

Infrastructure of Internally Displaced Persons in Manipur: A Critical Review of Crisis, Gaps, and Policy Responses

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Abstract:

The paper discusses the interrelation between displacement, resettlement, and infrastructure affected by the ethnic conflict in Manipur. The conflict between the Meitei community and the Kuki tribes began in May 2023, triggered by the Manipur High Court's recommendation on the Meitei demand for "Scheduled Tribe" status, which led to large-scale internal displacement and the collapse of essential infrastructure. The purpose of this paper is to assess the effect of inadequate infrastructure on the internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing within the relief camps. A qualitative research design is utilized, which is based on secondary data sources, such as reports by international organizations, government documents, media reports, and academic literature. The results indicate a lack of proper infrastructure in relief camps, which contributes to overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, inaccessible healthcare, and disrupted education, proving that a planned rehabilitation plan, humanitarian support, and universal peace-building measures are highly needed to facilitate sustainable recovery and resilience among the diverse communities in Manipur.

Keywords: Infrastructure, Internally Displaced Persons, Displacement, Meitei-Kuki conflict, Ethnic Conflict, Resettlement.

1. Introduction

Internally displaced persons (IDPS) and refugees continue to be the most deprived and excluded. The status is very similar; the difference is that IDPs do not cross international borders, but continue to stay in the country, while refugees do [6]. UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement defined "Internally Displaced Persons" (IDPs) as "the persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border" [20]. Historically, several forms of displacement have occurred in the north-east region that are attributed to conflict, natural disasters such as landslides and floods, insurgency, and development-related displacement [6]. Among the seven states in the NE-Region, the state of Manipur has also seen several causes of the immense internal displacement. One of the recent ethnic conflicts between the Meitei and Kuki tribes in Manipur has led to the displacement of about 60,000 to 67000 people that began in May 2023 [1,7].

This study focuses on the interrelation among displacement, relief camps, resettlement, and infrastructure shaped by the ethnic conflict of Manipur. It examines how the lack of infrastructure, such as healthcare, education, safe drinking water, unsuitable sanitation, prefabricated shelters, overcrowded spaces with minimal privacy for women, and deficient healthy food, has impacted those people living in the relief camps. It further highlighted the burning of housing infrastructure and the fear of violence, which have caused the displacement of both communities. Finally, discussed the resettlement issues despite the government's efforts. It argues that the infrastructure of resettlement is a major concern for IDPs. Without adequate government aid and security, it is difficult for them to return safely.

2. Methodology

The study used qualitative methods based on secondary data to highlight the basic infrastructure deficits in the relief camps in terms of health, poor sanitation, water, food, and other services. The limited basic services in relief camps make them vulnerable, marginalised, and excluded from social groups. Data were drawn from reports such as Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Amnesty International, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations, government reports, local newspapers, YouTube videos, and papers published in various journals on displacement and infrastructure to provide an authentic perception and to fulfil objectives. Considering the sensitivity of the conflict situation and the practical challenges of conducting fieldwork in an unstable scenario, this study maintains accuracy in the absence of primary fieldwork and provides ethically appropriate analysis.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Infrastructure as the Foundation of Everyday Life

Infrastructure is “the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities (e.g., buildings, roads, power supplies) needed for the operation of a society or enterprise” [12]. It plays a vital role in sustaining normal life and livelihoods. Crucial infrastructure systems that support residents' livelihoods enable activities such as education, commerce, and movement within the community. These systems need provision (e.g., water, electricity, and other utilities), public facilities such as schools, housing, telecom, and transportation systems [14]. In other words, both economic infrastructure and social infrastructure are needed not only for a country's economic growth but to improve the living standards of people. Infrastructure is a physical structure that provides a place to stay (home), a place to learn (Education buildings), an industry to start (industrial buildings), roads, Bridges, Railways, etc. It helps to deliver services and activities to function in everyday life, in particular. If this system is broken or destroyed, the livelihood of people will be disrupted as a whole. For instance, property like houses, burned or destroyed due to violence or natural calamities, the people living there have no option but to flee or be displaced to a safer place. Displacement risks their economy, social life, and built environment. Therefore, it is considered a foundation of everyday life.

3.2 Displacement

Displacement studies indicated that one of the most precarious and effective causes of the forced migration of people is the loss of housing [3]. Housing plays a central role in ensuring social and economic security. Besides acting as a source of pride and cultural identity, housing acts as a social meeting place among friends and family, and it is a resource that has a huge political and economic value. The loss of it during conflict disrupts the shelters, identity, family stability, well-being, education, and livelihoods. One of the

most evident impacts of the conflict and natural disasters is the destruction of homes or their loss because of displacement or dispossession [2]. Therefore, Conflict is solely one of the primary causes of displacement [9], but a systematic disruption of fundamental infrastructure systems, especially the housing as a lifeline. In this regard, the infrastructure turns into a target and a victim of war, and its destruction turns temporary insecurity into forced migration. In other words, conflict is not to be perceived as a single stimulus that leads to displacement, but instead through the destruction and disruption of infrastructure that is the immediate and material state that forces people to migrate.

3.3 The Infrastructure of Resettlement

Additionally, the infrastructure of resettlement, such as housing and essential utilities like energy and water, became a crucial means of incorporating displaced people into growth plans. The article argues that to solve these issues the fundamental question of what infrastructure development actually means for the livelihoods of displaced and relocated people. In general, infrastructure is associated with public works, and displacement occurs when certain individuals are either excluded from the public or considered as being ‘in the way of someone else’s plans for development’ [11]. If resettlement infrastructure is properly defined and supported as a component of livelihood reconstruction and community reconstruction, it can support the development of displaced persons. To put it another way, the public, including the displaced, must be reconstituted by the resettlement infrastructure in order for them to be able to assert their own development aspirations. As a result, the infrastructure of development for those who have been resettled should go beyond the housing and utilities that are typically included in the original settlement package. This implies that we must focus on the resettlers’ continuous battles, as they are frequently compelled to acquire their own infrastructure, become citizens, and assert their own inclusive development. To put it another way, resettlement infrastructure should be termed as a general framework that facilitates the inclusion on a long-term basis, allowing displaced populations to regain their lives and become valued members of society [11].

3.4 From Ethnic Conflict to Displacement.

Global data indicate that 68.3 million of the 75.9 million internally displaced people (IDPs) are driven by conflict and violence, while 7.7 million were shifted due to natural disasters. Displacement due to conflicts, such as 707,000 individuals, is being displaced in Burkina Faso, the highest since the war intensified in 2019. In 2022, Sudan was the second-largest displacement, with 6 million people displaced by conflict, and in Palestine, the greatest number since data became available in 2008, 3.4 million people were displaced by violence [7]. In the Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) 2024 report, the ethnic conflict in Manipur, a state in India has led to the displacement of about 67,000 people, which is considered it as largest internal migration in Southeast Asia over the years [7], highlighting the crucial importance of immediate humanitarian aid and legal action to solve the various socio-political and economic issues that have contributed to the crisis. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, as of 2025, the violent clashes have claimed about 260 lives, and many more were injured, and 1,091 political violence events, 226 incidents of looting and property destruction, and 396 claimed fatalities, the majority of which are civilians [21]. More than 5,000 cases of arson, including the torching of more than 4,700 houses, have been reported. Moreover, 386 religious’ structures (254 churches and 132 temples) have been vandalised [22]. To understand the conflict properly, a brief overview of Manipur’s demographic profile is presented here. The state covers a total area of 22,327 sq. km. with a population of 23,93,896. Geographically, the state has two distinct regions: the valley at its center and the surrounding hills. The entire area is divided into 16 districts (reorganized in 2016). The valley is mainly

populated by the Meiteis, with 56.9 percent of the total population. They follow Hinduism and Sanamahism. Along with them are the Pangals, or Manipuri Muslims, who represent the largest minority community in the state. The valley accounts for 10% of the total land area and is surrounded by hills. The state's land laws under Article 371 (C) of the Constitution prohibit the Meiteis and other non-tribals (as listed in the schedule) from purchasing land in the hills or settling there. As a result, 90% of the land has been reserved for scheduled tribes (Singh, 2009). Consequently, the Meitei people question land rights, arguing that the Meitei community—along with many other communities residing in one-tenth of the valley—are increasingly facing congestion. The Meitei community started demanding the extension of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in the state to protect the rights of Manipur's 'indigenous' people after fear of being crowded into the Valley. Later, the Union government extended the ILP in the state in December 2019 [15].

These ethnic communities have long-standing disputes for decades in the state; first, the Naga-Kuki (1992) clash, followed by the Kuki-Paite clash, and Meitei-Naga tension over natural resources, land rights, ethnic conflicts, insurgency, and identity politics [10]. The deep mistrust among the various ethnic groups fuels more tension in the ongoing clashes between the Meitei and Kuki tribes of Manipur. These conflicts began in May 2023 and are still ongoing [15]. The immediate trigger of the violence is the Manipur high court recommendation on the Meitei demand for "scheduled tribe" status, arguing that it is necessary to "preserve" the community and "save [its] ancestral land, tradition, culture and language". The Kuki, however, argue that the more numerous Meitei are already privileged. The minority fears that if the Meitei get Scheduled Tribe status, they will not only corner the reserved government jobs but also start acquiring land in the hills, displacing Kukis and other tribal communities [5].

The Meitei-Kuki conflict caused massive demolition of settlements and houses, forcing both the Meitei residing in the Kuki region and the Kuki residing in the Meitei region to flee [22]. As an example, when the residential or built environment is destroyed by fire and houses are burned down, the people have no real choice but to relocate. Displacement here means beyond a result of physical violence, it also includes a loss of shelter, security, and a built environment.

4. Analysis and Discussion

More than 60,000 to 67,000 people were displaced from both Meitei and Kuki communities due to the ethnic conflict. They flee to those districts where each community has a larger population base. The majority community, the Meiteis, fled to Imphal and the surrounding valley, while the tribal Kukis, meanwhile, returned to the hill districts of Churachandpur and Kangpokpi. There is another set of people belonging to both communities who share a similar unpleasant situation. Those whose houses were reduced to ashes and rubble, and those who have not been able to return home since the violence started. These are the people who have been surviving for years inside Manipur's relief camps.

4.1 Inside Manipur Relief Camps: Case Study of Akampat Relief Camp, Imphal, and KIC Relief Camp, Churachandpur

The inside story of Manipur's relief camp illustrates the ground reality of the humanitarian crisis that started after the 2023 ethnic conflict. With visual documentation and personal narratives, it emphasizes not only displacement but also the destruction and lack of critical infrastructure that support normal life. About 351 relief camps located throughout the state had internally displaced people (IDP). schools, colleges, community halls, half-finished buildings, and even market areas were transformed and reused by the government as camps; they were not built [1]. This is conceptualized as an "infrastructural

improvisation” in which the extent of public infrastructure is pushed to its maximum extent to act in response to crises. But that kind of adaptive reuse also reveals the deficiencies in the structure; these spaces do not have sufficient amenities to support long-term living, including sanitation, privacy, healthcare, and education.

A media-based case study from a video report by ‘The Quint’ (2024) illustrates the lived experience of displaced individuals residing in “The Akampat Relief camp, Imphal” and “KIC Relief Camp, Churachandpur” discussed below:

Case study 1: Akampat Relief Camp, Imphal

Figure 1: Displaced People from the Hills of Manipur Living in a Makeshift Shelter in Akampat Relief Camps



Source: Times of India, 2023

The report underlines that “The Akampat Relief camp” in the capital city, Imphal, is home to thousands of displaced people, even after a year since the violence erupted in Manipur. Through the story of a 40-year-old Ningtoujam Manglembi, who’s a Meitei, fled from her hometown, Moreh, a few days into the crisis, and ended up at Imphal’s Akampat relief camps. She is living in the relief camps with her mother, daughter, and her four sons. The report highlighted that severe overcrowding in the camp, where multiple individuals share limited living space, contributes to mental health issues, financial problems, and disruption of daily life. The report tells how displacement is transforming everyday life into a condition of chronic confusion. The woman explained the inability to pay for education and health expenses, depending on government-provided nutrition, overcrowded spaces, and no mental calmness. It determines the state of loss of dignity, psychological health, and children's prospects for the future. The fact that the educational systems of children are interrupted is a sign of the long-term impact on human capital development. Moreover, it reflects broader infrastructural deficiencies

Case Study 2: KIC Relief Camp, Churachandpur

The report highlighted that the KIC relief camp in Churachandpur which is far from 70 km from Imphal has hundreds more displaced persons as well. Lheizahoi is at the KIC relief camp in Churachandpur along with her 7-year-old daughter and her husband. Both she and her daughter are critically ill. She said in the interview that she has a tumour in her heart, but the doctor told her that they did not have the required facilities in Moreh to treat her; for that, Aizawl (in Mizoram) was the nearest possible option. The lone hospital, Moreh, did not have the facilities to treat 43-year-old Lheizahoi, who belongs to the Kuki community. She cannot go to Imphal, where a vast majority of the state’s medical facilities are located. Her daughter takes medication for tuberculosis. The nurses have given her Horlicks and eggs from time to time, which are her only supplements. They provide her vitamins as well sometimes. But the family has

been unable to do anything for her; they have used up all her savings. And her daughter went for an operation due to tuberculosis. They don't have anywhere else to turn to.

Through the story of Lheizahoi, the infrastructural inequality has been largely revealed. Absence of adequate healthcare infrastructure in Moreh, inability to access advanced medical facilities in Imphal due to ethnic conflict and lack of security, and dependence on other alternatives like Aizawl. It reveals how health infrastructure collapse is interrelated with conflict-induced displacement, transforming curable illnesses into life-threatening ones [1].

4.2 Pregnant Women and Maternal Health in Relief Camps

The figures 554 childbirths and 77 high-risk cases on pregnancy and deliveries in the relief camps has shown complex circumstances.

Figure 2: Living Conditions in KIC Relief Camp, Churachandpur



Source: Times of India, 2024

The number indicates that the reproductive life was still active even during a crisis, but the absence of healthcare infrastructure has affected people living in far-flung areas in the event of displacement [8]. The lack of attention from state has disrupted the pregnancy woman profoundly.

Institutional care and infrastructural gap: The government seems to have delivered the practices of institutional delivery on the ground, such as pregnant women were taken to the hospitals situated around to give birth, Antenatal services, lab tests, and USG were done regularly, and high-risk pregnancies were monitored by the health department.

Pregnant women in relief camps have been treated using 'Mironbi gi khudol', a special state program based on the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritvan Abhiyan, which was previously utilised to care for pregnant women in remote locations. Though this is rather a bare minimum survival plan and not comprehensive care. Institutional delivery cannot guarantee the well-being of the mother as long as the infrastructure of maternal well-being, like nutrition, sanitation, privacy, and mobility, is weak or missing. Relief camp became a reproductive risk environment in which Malnutrition impacts the health of the mother and the infant, Shortage of maternity pads and baby linen compromises hygiene, Lack of privacy equates to lack of dignity and mental health, and Congestion makes one more susceptible to infections. In a specialized centre, such as the Khuman Lampak Relief Camp in Imphal, which had only pregnant women, 164 births inside the camp setting are disturbing because it is vital to know whether such centres are adequately equipped in terms of obstetric care [8].

Finding high-risk pregnancies among different districts, particularly in Churachandpur, Bishnupur, and Kangpokpi, indicates the presence of spatial inequality in healthcare provision, such as Proximity to functional hospitals, Limited transport infrastructure, and Conflict-induced mobility restrictions. It has been reported that antenatal care is offered weekly, but its consistency and quality depend on the

accessibility, which is uneven across the districts. This confirms that the problem of access to healthcare is not only a service problem but also an infrastructural and territorial problem, conditioned by conflict geography.

The deaths of two pregnant women in the relief camp in a hospital in Churachandpur district demonstrated the ineffectiveness of referral and emergency services, such as transport delays, insufficient advanced medical services, and overworked district hospitals. Such deaths challenge the rhetoric of adequate care and, rather, incriminate the malfunctions of the emergency obstetric systems on a systemic scale [1].

4.3 Education infrastructure:

A total of 14,763 school-going children resides in 351 relief camps in Manipur. The report by India Spend critically exposes a disconnect between official claims and ground realities regarding children's education in conflict-affected Manipur. While government data suggests that over 93% of displaced children were re-enrolled in nearby schools, field evidence indicates that many—particularly from the Kuki-Zo community—remain out of school. A major structural issue is the conversion of schools into relief camps, which has directly disrupted educational infrastructure. At the same time, economic hardship prevents displaced families from affording school-related expenses, even where access exists. This demonstrates that displacement produces not only physical dislocation but also institutional exclusion, where children may be formally enrolled yet remain functionally outside the education system [13]. Beyond infrastructure, the report highlights the psychosocial and security constraints shaping educational access. Children in relief camps experience trauma, disrupted routines, and fear, all of which affect their ability to return to school. Parents, particularly concerned about safety, are reluctant to send children—especially girls—to distant or unfamiliar locations. Ongoing violence and spatial segregation further restrict mobility, making education both unsafe and inaccessible. This reflects a broader systemic crisis in which education as a social institution is undermined by conflict, resulting in long-term consequences for human capital formation and social stability [13].

5. Government Policies and Rehabilitation

The only demand for the people living in the relief camp is a safe and secure return to their own homes. But the issue is that most of the displaced persons are unable to return because of destroyed or occupied houses, ongoing insecurity, and the absence of proper rehabilitation aid. This has made temporary camps into semi-permanent settlements, which adds pressure on the organization. The state plans to close 350 relief camps and resettle them in a three-phase rehabilitation programme starting from mid-2025. The resettlement drive is being implemented under a Rs 523-crore Resettlement and Rehabilitation Package, announced in the Manipur Budget 2025–26. The plan is structured in three phases - resettlement of families whose houses were partially damaged; rehabilitation under a special PMAY-G package within districts and inter-district relocation between valley and hill areas where required. The Manipur government has said that more than 10,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from over 2,200 households have been resettled across the state [18].

Despite the government providing aid and making resettlement programmes, built this deadline has been met with uncertainty by the IDPs without proper aid and security. Districts such as Kangpokpi claim that rehabilitation is not something that can be cut down to paperwork when underlying grievances concerning property damages and security are still pending [16,23]. In other words, the internally displaced persons (IDPs) experience serious difficulties with resettlement despite government efforts, when the grievance regarding property damages and security issues has not been completely resolved. Since the deadline for

the reconstruction of documents by the Justice Gita Mittal committee has been postponed. These unaddressed problems add to the fear and insecurity that obstruct the process of resettlement and influence the feeling of safety and stability of IDPs.

6. Conclusion

The prevailing ethnic conflict has greatly impacted the socio-economic condition and livelihood of people. The crisis of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Manipur is a humanitarian emergency. In this crisis, inadequate critical infrastructure is considered a basic concern. Without adequate infrastructure, people suffer deeply. The evidence highlighted that the majority of IDPs residing in the relief camps of Manipur have severe deficiencies of basic services, such as housing, sanitation, healthcare, water supply, and education. The relief camps are prefabricated and highly congested. Only two or three latrines and cramped sleeping quarters serve 100 families with minimal privacy. Inadequate water supply, people are highly dependent on ponds. The nutrition aid provided by the government is not sufficient [1]. Furthermore, the economic vulnerability has been enhanced by the disruption of livelihoods in the agricultural, fisheries, and local economies, as well as the increase in inflation. Women and children are the most vulnerable to the crisis because of the absence of privacy, poor menstrual hygiene facilities, and gender-based violence. At the same time, the collapse of the healthcare infrastructure is shown in disease outbreaks, a shortage of specialists, and the inability to provide care to chronic diseases, especially those residing in camps in peripheral regions, as well as the absence of mental health services. The issue of educational disruption also increases disparity in the long term, because children are also out of school and out of access to digital learning [1,13].

Altogether, the study points out that conflict-induced displacement is due to the collapse of infrastructures such as social, economic, and institutional structures that are needed to live with dignity. Besides, Relief camps are places of survival, not recovery, in which the state lacks support and is usually assisted by NGOs and community associations. This brings out a critical gap between the policy implementation and on-ground reality, whereby short-term relief strategies have failed to move into long-term sustainable rehabilitation systems. An urgent planned rehabilitation strategy in cooperation with IDPs, adequate humanitarian aid, and inclusive peace-building efforts is needed to bring about sustainable recovery and resilience within Manipur's diverse communities. If compromised, the conditions will eventually lead to long-term outcomes that include intergenerational poverty, poor health, and social instability.

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