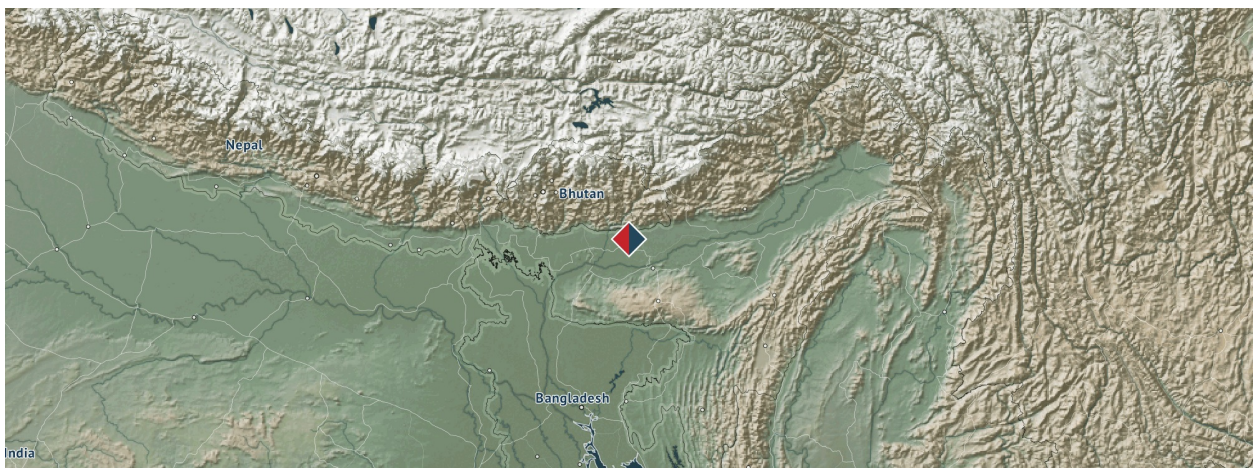




Conflict Factsheet

Violence Over Land in Assam in India

Type of conflict Main	Intensity 4
Conflict Locality Southern Asia	Time 1970 –ongoing
Countries India	Resources Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



Local resource competition



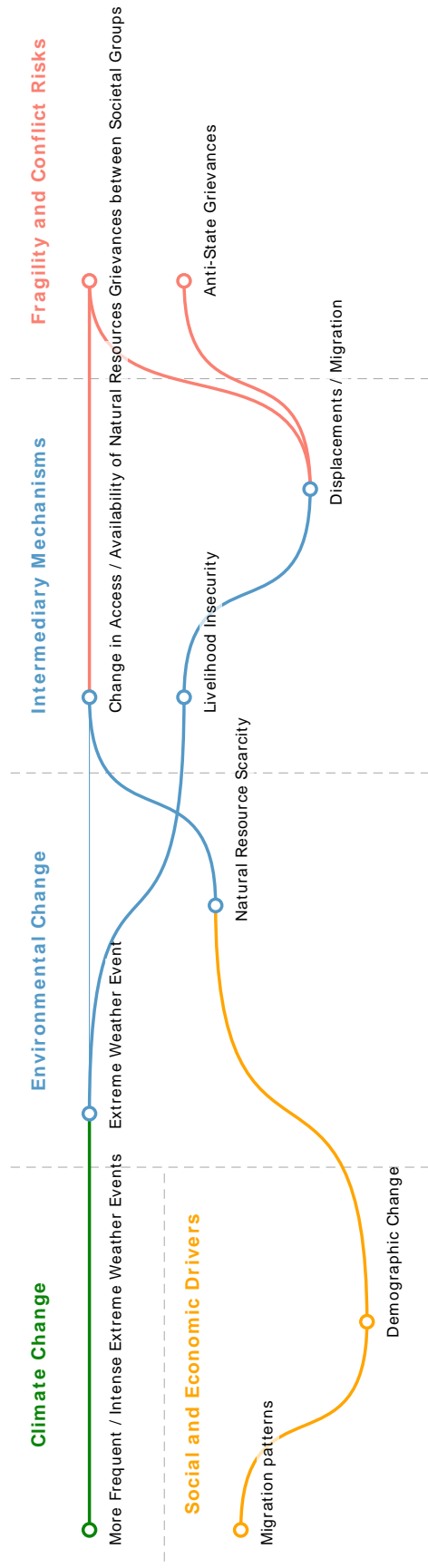
Livelihood insecurity and migration

Conflict Summary

Bangladeshi illegal immigration into Assam as a result of changed climatic patterns and deteriorating economic and social conditions in Bangladesh has led to ethnic violence with indigenous Assam communities since the 1970s. Today, clashes have also evolved over the distribution of environmental resources between migrants and indigenous communities, highlighting the impact of climate change on population density and resource distribution.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



Unresponsive Government



Conflict History

The violence between immigrants and indigenous groups in Assam is a historical trend, which can be observed since 1970s and 1980s when large groups of Muslim-Bangladeshis migrated. The high concentration of migrants has led to competition for land between indigenous groups. Environmental refugees fleeing extreme weather events in Bangladesh are arguably an exacerbating factor of ethnic violence in Assam (Ziegler, 2013). Despite government attempts to address the grievances of ethnic groups in Assam, violence has caused thousands of fatalities and continues today unabated.

History of migrants in Assam

Since colonial rule, seasonal Bangladeshi migrants have found employment in the tea-gardens of Assam (Manuvie, 2010). Ethnic tensions already existed in the region amongst indigenous minority groups, such as the Bodos, Rabhas and Tiwas (Vivekanada & Smith, 2007). Most of these groups have traditionally resisted the centralised government and competed for autonomy; resenting the government for marginalising the rights of their minorities.

Government inaction leads to violent protest

The large and highly concentrated settlement of Muslim-Bangladeshi migrants in Assam, combined with government inaction to control illegal immigration, led to anti-foreigner agitation that polarised the indigenous groups against the Bangladeshi migrants. This culminated in the Nellie massacre of 1983, which killed over 3,000 people (Singh, 2010). Following this, the Bodos independence guerrillas waged an insurgency against the central government for years during the 1990s and 2000s as a result of government inaction to control immigration and to take measures to preserve Bodo culture (Singh, 2010).

Climate change as an exacerbating factor

Climate change has also arguably exacerbated these ethnic tensions. Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change because of its low lying geography, dense population and subsistence agriculture. Natural disasters and the destruction of livelihoods in Bangladesh caused by salt water intrusion into agricultural fields have pushed more migrants north into Assam (Ziegler, 2013; Vivekanada & Smith, 2007). Unfortunately, Assam is also vulnerable to climate change. In 2012, eighteen of the twenty-seven districts of Assam were flooded; displacing 1.4 million people (Ziegler, 2013). Estimations of Bangladeshi migrants in Assam vary between four and ten million (Singh, 2010). There is, however, a lack of publicised data on these figures, which means it is impossible to know the extent to which the migrants have affected social dynamics in given areas (Singh, 2010). It can be assumed that uncontrolled migration into an area that is already vulnerable to social, economic and environmental instability will exacerbate existing fragility (Ziegler, 2013). Episodes of violence against Bangladeshi migrants continue today and are often diffused by the deployment of federal forces. The Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) suggested that the region of Assam will remain vulnerable to ethnic clashes, as long as the government does not implement a coherent policy to deal with the tension (Das, 2012).



Resolution Efforts

In addition to the deployment of government troops to diffuse violent skirmishes, there have been various central government attempts to negotiate with indigenous groups to dissolve ongoing tensions.

Establishment of tribal councils had mixed results

The central government has established nine tribal councils in Assam to concede to grievances concerning a loss of autonomy and cultural identity in the wake of immigration. For example, the Bodo Territorial Council was founded in 2003, which granted the Bodos limited autonomy over 3,000 villages. However, it is argued that conceding to these demands has only encouraged their posturing for additional autonomy, which has fuelled mounting anti-immigration sentiment (Singh, 2010). This can be seen in the case of the Bodoland Territorial Council, which has been involved in violent clashes with migrants over land and land rights and has since demanded a separate state for Bodos in Assam (Singh, 2010).

Conflict resolution attempts fail to address illegal immigration

Investment in development has also been a solution approached by the central government but has been slow to evolve. In 2005, the independence group (the United Liberation Front of Assam) created an 11-member People's Consultative Group to prepare for official peace talks with the government (Singh, 2010). However, peace talks fell through, and the civil society group was abandoned. There has been no comprehensive approach to resolve the conflict, which has addressed the issue of illegal immigration and included all interest groups affected by the outcome of negotiations. Without civil society engagement, a large constituency of community stakeholders, including Muslim communities and Bangladeshi migrants, are excluded from the conflict resolution process.



Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

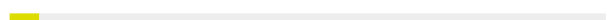


Human Suffering



INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Regional



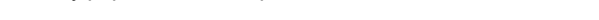
Mass displacement

More than 100.000 or more than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.



Cross Border Mass Displacement

Best estimate that more than 100.000 or more than 10% of country population are displaced across borders.



Resolution Success

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

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Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

-

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

-

Resources and Materials

References with URL

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[Das, B. \(2012\). Refugees flee ethnic violence in troubled Assam. Reuters](#)
[Singh, M. A. \(2010\). Conflicts in Assam. Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies](#)
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Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/assam-violence-india>