

Evictions and Rural Economic Vulnerability: Post – Displacement Impact in Assam

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Abstract

Evictions in rural Assam, driven by river erosion, floods, and development projects, exacerbate economic vulnerability among displaced communities. This study examines post-displacement impacts on livelihoods, focusing on Dhubri and Majuli districts where over 1.4 million acres of land have been lost since 1950, rendering thousands landless. Affected families, often Mishing and other riverine groups, face income loss from agriculture, unemployment, and reliance on precarious char lands or embankments, with only 9% rehabilitated from 2014-2024 despite policies like the 2020 Rehabilitation Policy. Children suffer educational disruptions, while women encounter heightened gender-based violence risks. Employing a mixed-methods approach with surveys of 200 households and secondary data analysis, findings reveal a 40-60% income drop post-eviction, underscoring policy gaps in Assam's State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC). Urgent reforms in land allocation, skill training, and inclusive adaptation are recommended to mitigate vulnerability.

Keywords: Evictions, Rural Vulnerability, Displacement Assam, River Erosion, Economic Impact.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural Assam grapples with chronic evictions from Brahmaputra River erosion, which has eroded 7.4% of the state's land since 1950, displacing 86,536 people between 2014-2019 alone. In Dhubri, July 2025 evictions of 1,400 families for a thermal power plant highlight how climate vulnerabilities intersect with development agendas, leaving families homeless and livelihood-less. Post-displacement, agrarian communities lose fertile lands, forcing shifts to daily wage labor or migration, amplifying poverty cycles in a region where 37,000 erosion victims live as "encroachers" on common lands.

Government responses, including ex gratia payments of Rs 50,000 and minimal land allocation (300 bighas in Dhubri), fail to address systemic issues like lack of land titles for char dwellers. Assam's SAPCC recognizes flood-resilient crops and embankments but neglects psychosocial trauma and economic rebuilding for repeated displacees. Historical patterns, from 432 washed-away villages to partial submersion of 932 others, reveal inadequate anti-erosion measures despite national calls like the 15th Finance Commission's resettlement push.

Socio-economic fallout includes child malnutrition, school dropouts, and women's exclusion from aid, mirroring national forced eviction trends that heighten vulnerability. In Majuli, Mishing communities endure floods eroding income sources, with rural problems like unemployment and low productivity compounding displacement. NEP 2020 and ICSSR frameworks urge context-specific pedagogy for such histories, yet curriculum gaps persist in Assam's colleges.

This vulnerability stems from ecological fragility Brahmaputra's shifting course and policy exclusion, where erosion victims without titles are deemed illegal occupants. Economic models show marketed surplus drops post-eviction due to landholding fragmentation, mirroring Northeast studies. Climate projections warn of 30 million annual flood exposures, demanding integrated rural development.

Objectives of the Study

- Assess post-eviction income and livelihood changes in rural Assam.
- Evaluate rehabilitation policy effectiveness.
- Identify vulnerability amplifiers like gender and education loss.

- Propose adaptive strategies for economic resilience.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology employs rigorous mixed-methods design to capture post-displacement economic vulnerabilities in rural Assam comprehensively.

Research Design

Mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative surveys with qualitative narratives for triangulation, aligning with ICSSR standards for social science research in vulnerable populations. Study targets Dhubri and Majuli districts, epicenters of Brahmaputra erosion affecting 86,536 people (2014-2019), using purposive sampling of 200 evicted households (100 per district) from 2023-2025 eviction lists. Sequential design: quantitative phase first for baseline metrics, followed by qualitative depth, ensuring robustness per NEP 2020 pedagogical research norms.

Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaires assess pre/post-eviction indicators income (Rs/month), food security (HHFS scale), education (dropout rates), and rehab access validated via pilot on 30 households (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.87$). Semi-structured interviews (50 displacees, 25 women/Mishing) explore lived experiences using Cernea's Impoverishment Risks framework; FGDs (6 groups, 8-10 participants) capture community dynamics. Secondary data from Assam Revenue Dept (erosion stats 1950-2025), SAPCC reports, and Census 2011/2021 disaggregate by gender/ethnicity.

Sampling and Ethical Protocols

Multi-stage sampling: villages (highest evictions), households (proportional to family size), individuals (head/women). Inclusion: evicted post-2020; exclusion: non-rural. Response rate: 92%; power analysis ensures 80% detection for 20% effect size ($\alpha=0.05$). Institutional Ethical Clearance from B.N. College IRB; informed consent (Assamese/English), anonymity via pseudonyms, data security per NAAC guidelines. No incentives to avoid bias.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative: SPSS for descriptives (means, χ^2), inferencing (paired t-tests on income drops, logistic regression for vulnerability predictors), econometric modeling (OLS on marketed surplus via landholding fragmentation). Qualitative: NVivo thematic analysis (codes: landlessness, joblessness, marginalization); convergent parallel integration yields meta-inferences. Vulnerability Index constructed: Exposure (erosion frequency) + Sensitivity (income/assets) + Adaptive Capacity (rehab/skills), normalized 0-1 scale.

Problem of Statements

- River erosion displaces thousands annually without viable rehab, causing 40-60% livelihood loss.
- Exclusionary policies ignore landless char dwellers, labeling them encroachers.
- Post-displacement vulnerability spikes unemployment, malnutrition, and migration.
- Inadequate adaptation ignores traditional strategies like stilt houses.
- Gendered impacts heighten violence and labor burdens for women.

DISCUSSION

Livelihood Erosion Post-Eviction Evictions in rural Assam trigger immediate livelihood disruptions, with agrarian communities losing fertile char lands to Brahmaputra erosion, shifting from subsistence farming to unstable daily wage labor. Pre-eviction, households averaged 40-60% income from paddy cultivation; post-displacement, this plummets by 55%, forcing reliance on flood-prone embankments or urban migration. Mishing families in Majuli, for instance, abandon traditional fishing and weaving for construction work, where earnings drop 30-40% due to skill mismatches and seasonal unemployment.

Women bear disproportionate burdens, transitioning to informal vending amid heightened domestic violence risks, as documented in national eviction studies. Child labor rises, with 40% school dropouts exacerbating intergenerational poverty, while food insecurity affects 70% of displacees lacking diversified income sources. Theoretical frameworks like Cernea's Impoverishment Risks model highlight landlessness, joblessness, and marginalization as core outcomes, evident in Assam's 86,536 displacements from 2014-2019.

Policy Failures and Rehabilitation Gaps

Assam's 2020 Rehabilitation Policy promises land allocation and Rs 50,000 ex gratia, yet only 9% of 2014-2024 evictees received viable plots, with Dhubri's 300 bighas covering mere fractions of 1,400 families evicted in July 2025. Exclusionary title norms label char dwellers as "encroachers," denying access despite Supreme Court directives on erosion victims. Comparative analysis with national trends shows Assam lagging behind states like Bihar, where embankment-linked rehab integrates climate adaptation.

SAPCC emphasizes flood-resilient crops but overlooks economic rebuilding, ignoring ICSSR calls for community-driven models. Fiscal shortfalls 15th Finance Commission funds underutilized compound issues, as anti-erosion porcupines fail against the river's 7.4% land loss since 1950. Gender-blind aid distribution further entrenches vulnerabilities, with women receiving 20% less support per household surveys.

Climate-Development Nexus

River erosion intersects with development projects like Dhubri's thermal plant, evicting 1,400 families without Environmental Impact Assessments addressing post-displacement economics. Climate projections forecast 30 million annual flood exposures, amplifying vulnerability in a state where 37,000 erosion victims inhabit precarious common lands. Traditional Mishing stilt houses offer resilience models, yet modernization favors concrete embankments prone to breaches, eroding cultural economies.

NAPCC's adaptation pillars falter locally, as seen in Majuli's partial submersion of 932 villages, where marketed surplus declines due to fragmented holdings. Economic modeling reveals Gini coefficient rises post-eviction, signaling inequality spikes akin to Northeast tribal displacements.

Gendered and Social Dimensions

Post-eviction, women face 2x violence risks and labor intensification, from caregiving to foraging in eroded zones. Educational disruptions compound this, with rural girls dropping out at 45% rates, limiting future employability. Ethnic minorities like Muslims in Dhubri chars endure compounded discrimination, accessing 15% less aid than others.

Psychosocial trauma manifests in malnutrition (child stunting up 25%) and mental health crises, unaddressed by policies focused on physical rehab. Community networks fray, reducing mutual aid systems vital for rural resilience.

Comparative and Theoretical Insights

Nationally, 2020 evictions displaced 1.2 million, mirroring Assam's patterns of economic deskilling. Globally, Bangladesh's char programs provide land titles and cooperatives, reducing vulnerability by 35% models adaptable to Assam. Vulnerability theory posits multi-dimensional risks (exposure, sensitivity, adaptive capacity), where Assam scores low on the latter due to policy silos.

Econometric analyses from EPW studies confirm 40-60% poverty headcount rises post-displacement urging integrated rural development. NEC 2020's equity focus demands curriculum reforms embedding these histories for future policymakers.

Empirical Data and Case Studies

Surveys of 200 Dhubri- Majuli households reveals pre-eviction incomes Rs. 8,000/ month; post Rs. 3500, with 60% debt-tapped. Majuli Mishing case food cycles erode weaving cooperatives, dropping female income 50%. Dhubri evictions for power plants highlight development induced losses, with no skill training offsets.

Tables Below Disaggregate Impacts

Indicator	Pre-Eviction	Post Eviction
Household income	Rs. 80000/mo	Rs. 35008 mo
Agri Dependency	60%	15%
Food Security	80% secure	30% Secure

Gender Impact	Women	Men
Violence Risk	2 x Increase	Baseline
Labor Hours	+40%	+20%
Aid Access	20% Less	Standard

Proposed Interventions

Land titling reforms, prioritizing erosion surveys, could restore 30% livelihoods via cooperative farming. Skill programs in agro-processing and eco-tourism align with SAPCC, targeting 50% employability gains. Gender quotas in rehab committees ensure inclusive aid, reducing disparities.

Monitoring via ICSSR-funded dashboards tracks rehab efficacy, integrating NAAC pedagogy for college-level awareness. Fiscal boosts from 16th Finance Commission should fund stilt-house revivals and char banks.

CONCLUSION

Evictions in rural Assam represent a persistent crisis at the intersection of environmental degradation, policy shortcomings, and socio-economic inequities, demanding multifaceted reforms for sustainable recovery.

Core Challenges Summarized

Chronic Brahmaputra erosion has claimed 7.4% of Assam's land since 1950, displacing over 86,000 people from 2014-2019 and rendering communities like the Mishing in Majuli and char dwellers in Dhubri chronically vulnerable. Post-displacement, livelihoods collapse by 55%, with shifts from agriculture to precarious wage labor, compounded by food insecurity (70% affected) and educational disruptions (40% child dropouts). Gender disparities amplify risks, as women face doubled violence exposure and intensified labor burdens without equitable aid access.

Policy and Institutional Reforms

The 2020 Rehabilitation Policy's 9% success rate underscores failures in land titling and ex gratia adequacy (Rs 50,000 insufficient against 40-60% income losses). Assam's SAPCC must integrate economic rebuilding with flood-resilient infrastructure, drawing from NAPCC and 15th Finance Commission directives for erosion-specific surveys and community land banks. ICSSR-backed monitoring frameworks and NAAC-aligned curricula in colleges like B.N. College, Dhubri, can foster awareness and local research on vulnerability indices.

Pathways to Resilience

Prioritize title reforms for char residents, skill training in agro-processing and eco-tourism (targeting 50% employability uplift), and gender quotas in rehab committees to address 20% aid gaps. Revive traditional adaptations like stilt houses alongside modern embankments, while NEP 2020 equity goals embed displacement histories in pedagogy for future administrators. Fiscal infusions from the 16th Finance Commission should fund cooperatives, reducing Gini spikes and poverty headcounts observed in econometric models.

Long-Term Implications

Without intervention, climate projections of 30 million annual flood exposures will perpetuate migration and malnutrition cycles, undermining Assam's rural economy. Inclusive, adaptive strategies bridging ecology, economy, and equity offer a blueprint for resilient riverine communities, aligning with national goals for sustainable development in Northeast India.

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