

Manipur Violence: The Role of Localised Networks and Small Peace-building Models

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Humanitarian aid has historically been framed by a classical Dunantist paradigm, stemming from the principles established by Henry Dunant, which focuses on providing immediate, impartial relief to those affected by crises, such as conflicts and disasters, with an emphasis on basic needs and emergency response.

In contrast, Resilience Humanitarianism represents a broader approach that seeks not only to alleviate immediate suffering but also to build community capacity for long-term resilience. This approach encompasses sustainable development, local empowerment, risk reduction, and preparedness, acknowledging the interconnectedness of various dimensions of well-being.

The observed shift from Classical to Resilience Humanitarianism has been driven by the changing nature of crises, recognition of local capacities, emphasis on prevention and sustainability, and a desire for lasting positive impacts.

As part of a series of field-based studies documenting the ground impact of the ongoing conflict in the state of Manipur, the Centre for New Economics Studies (CNES), in partnership with different civil society actors, social organisations and informal community-based solidarity networks, has spent last three months interacting with different responders (providing relief support and humanitarian assistance through food, healthcare, basic amenities to affected ethnic groups).

In this article, we share some of our key observations from the field.



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The transition from Classical Dunantist Humanitarianism to Resilience Humanitarianism is closely linked to the concept of the Triple Nexus Approach, which advocates for the integration of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts to achieve more holistic and sustainable outcomes in crisis-affected regions.

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Manipur: Local Communities' Role in Peacebuilding

As the resilience paradigm has garnered much attention in recent years, different communities across the globe, especially in conflict-ridden areas have started perceiving their role from recipients of aid to active agents in peacebuilding.

The case of Manipur can best demonstrate this shift, from a top-down to a democratic approach, with the grassroots communities taking up equal responsibility for ensuring peace in the state along with other formal humanitarian agencies. The Northeastern Indian state of Manipur has been embroiled in an ethnic conflict, simmering mainly between the Kuki tribe and the Meitei community.

The ongoing violence in the state has claimed the lives of innumerable people and failed to restore normalcy. In the wake of the current crisis, multiple local communities within Manipur have assumed active roles and responsibilities while participating in peacebuilding in the state. One of the recent community-based peacebuilding efforts was the White Flag Movement, held in May.



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As houses were burnt and people killed in different parts of the riot-hit state, residents of H Wajang village, in Kakching district hoisted white flags in front of their houses. The residents, both Kukis and Meiteis, used the white flag as a symbol of reassurance and peace, signifying the urgent need for putting aside differences and working towards mutual understanding. The movement acted as a catalyst in resolving some of the issues, as it paved the way for multiple meetings between the representatives from both communities, aimed towards mutually working on their differences.

The role of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) has been of prime importance considering the ongoing efforts towards peacebuilding. The FNR, with other civil organisations from Nagaland, called for peace in the state of Manipur under the title “A Call to Goodwill,” as a commitment towards maintaining non-violence and solidarity among the neighbours of Nagaland.

Following the crisis in Manipur, the Interfaith Forum was founded on 5 June 2023 to lay extensive focus on building solidarity and initiating dialogue processes at civil society levels. The forum, on the 13 of July, took out a huge rally at the Palace compound. About 500 individuals from diverse religious, ethnic, and spiritual communities joined the rally that called for dialogue initiatives and restoration of humanity.

The Pangal community also turned to local response mechanisms to the crisis, as they formed human chains and took out torch rallies to foster peace in the state. The rally started from Bishnupur Muslim Leikai, passed through Tongjel Maril, and culminated at Bishnupur Keithel. Organized by UMPCO Wangkhem Kendra, a conglomeration of 20 Pangal local clubs, and joined by the residents of Yairipok Singa, Yairipok Bamol Leikai, and Yairipok Kekru, the torch rally called for the territorial integrity of Manipur and questioned the silence of the Prime Minister on the crisis.

In fact, the Meitei Pangal community distributed edible and other essential items to the displaced people in seven relief camps on humanitarian grounds. On similar lines, Ramakrishna Mission is seen engaging in peacebuilding as it is distributing essential food items and hygiene kits to displaced individuals in different areas. Apart from rallies and peace movements, community peacebuilding has been taking place in the form of saving lives as well.

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Small Peace-building Models in Action

There have been reports of several instances where some people have saved the lives of others, irrespective of religion or ethnicity.

While in Sekmai, the locals helped the police to rescue an abducted Kuki youth, the Meira Paibis in Yairipok Khoirom Mathak Leikai rescued a family of four, who were held hostage. In other news, a Meitei teacher carried a six-year-old Kuki boy on her back and saved the lives of 29 other students when tear gas shells and guns were shot in a rally outside the school in Torbung.

Moreover, several Kuki women formed human chains in the town of Churachandpur to protect the Meitei Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from a mob and help them board army vehicles safely.

The approach of the Christian Forum Dimapur (CFD) towards conflict-ridden Manipur has been the integration of relief as well as peace. CFD collaborated with the All Manipur Christian Organisation (AMCO), Assemblies of God of East India (AGEI) and the Catholic Church through Peace Channel, a Clarician congregation, to reach out to both Kuki and Meitei relief camps. Catering to the needs of both communities, irrespective of their backgrounds, showcased the essence of inclusivity and solidarity.

The Christian Forum Dimapur also reflected upon the importance of interaction with inter-religious groups and intellectuals of the Meithei communities, to foster a safe environment for dialogue and peaceful coexistence among diverse groups.



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It is imperative to know that all these initiatives are a part of small peace models that are adapted to illuminate pathways and enhance our pursuit of more effective methodologies in shaping the future of Manipur.

Community-based approaches play a pivotal role, which synergises seemingly with the Resilience Humanitarianism and Triple Nexus Model. It strengthens governance and social bonds, especially where institutions are weak. CBA adapts from prevention to peace preparation, acting as a dynamic tool for challenging environments. In essence, CBA, Resilience Humanitarianism, and the Triple Nexus work together, sparking positive change and brighter prospects for Manipur through small peace models.

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