



People marching for peace in Assam, India.
Photo: Bishnu Raj Upreti

Engaging the business sector in peace promotion in north-east India



Case studies featured here were conducted in north-east India.

Policy message

- Violent ethnic conflicts in north-east India severely affect all aspects of life in the region.
- The business sector is one of the worst-affected sectors but has shown little engagement in promoting peace.
- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) has been identified as the single greatest constraint to the engagement of the public in promoting peace in north-east India.
- The Look East Policy is aimed at creating a favourable business environment but has not succeeded in engaging the business sector in promoting peace in the region.
- North Eastern Region: Vision 2020 is a progressive instrument to address economic causes of conflict but has been less effective in engaging business actors in promoting peace.

- **The business sector in north-east India is not actively engaged in efforts to promote peace in the region, despite the need for peace to stimulate economic activity. A number of factors influence the engagement of the business sector in promoting peace, including the intensity of conflict; connection and linkage of business people and organisations with peace activists, political decision-makers and the conflicting parties; personal commitment and competence (i.e. knowledge) of individual business people; self-interest of business people; fear of losing neutrality and thus becoming a target for those fomenting violence; and concerns relating to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA).**

- The engagement of business people and organisations in promoting peace is indicated by their political, social, and economic engagement, and their involvement in research and knowledge generation.

Political engagement

- Five indicators are used to measure political engagement of the business sector in promoting peace in north-east India:
 1. engagement with peace negotiators and political decision-makers (lobbying or exerting pressure);
 2. mediating between conflicting parties or supporting confidential peace-related meetings;

3. organising and facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue;
4. engagement in trust-building measures; and
5. logistical support for peace negotiations.

Generally, the involvement of business people and organisations in these areas is limited and passive. The main reason for this lack of engagement was the perceived and actual risks faced by business people and organisations from the security forces under the AFSPA.

Social engagement

Three indicators were used to examine the social engagement of business people and organisations:

Featured case studies

Look East Policy and business engagement

In the 1990s, the Indian Government developed the Look East Policy (LEP) to promote economic cooperation with South East Asian countries, with a view to counteracting the increasing influence of China in the region. It was touted by the government as a powerful tool to develop the economy in the north-east. However, it did not explicitly address conflict resolution or peace-building, weakening its impact on the region. Continuing conflicts prevent the people of the north-east from taking advantages of opportunities brought by LEP. Moreover, LEP itself is highly constrained by AFSPA, which gives wide-ranging powers to state governors and the security services to deal with unrest. As a result, LEP has failed to promote economic development in the north-east of India (Lyngdoh and Rani 2008).

North Eastern Region: Vision 2020 and business engagement

This policy instrument aims at addressing the economic causes of conflict by improving transport and transit facilities, creating employment opportunities, and promoting community-based economic and social organisation. However, despite special provisions for specific areas (e.g. parts of Assam and Tripura fall under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution; hill areas of Manipur have local bodies mandated by State legislation), foreign relations, security and defence policy, and internal security arrangements remain under the control of the central government, and this is discouraging investment, infrastructure development, and commercial activity in the north-east (NES and MDONER 2008).

Table 1: Casualties resulting from conflict in north-east India, 2005–2012.

States	Civilian	Security forces	Insurgents	Total
Arunachal	2	3	72	77
Assam	1026	132	799	1957
Manipur	676	188	1370	2234
Meghalaya	52	15	94	161
Mizoram	10	4	29	43
Nagaland	101	3	371	475
Tripura	78	39	103	220
Total	1945	384	2838	5167

Source: Compiled by the author from ISAS (2009), Baruah (2009), Upreti et al. (2012), Das (2007), and the following: http://cdpsindia.org/ne_insurgency.asp; http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/Attachments/PresentationMaterial/9_23102009183559.pdf.

- working with civil society for peace building;
 - engagement in raising public awareness about the contribution business can make to peace initiatives; and
 - collaboration with the media in peace campaigns.
- Little concrete collaboration was seen between the business sector and civil society organisations in north-east India in promoting peace in the region, despite the strength of the civil society movement in such states as Manipur and Assam. More needs to be done to raise awareness among the business community and in the general public about the contribution business can make to promoting peace, both to encourage support for existing efforts and to encourage further engagement in the process. The mass media play a vital role in creating a favourable environment for peace by airing issues and raising awareness of positive developments, but there has been little engagement between the business sec-

tor and the media. Again, the main reason for low social engagement of the business sector in peace promotion was the perceived high risk of retaliation from security forces.

Economic engagement

The most logical area for engagement of business actors in peace promotion is in the economic sphere. Four indicators were used to assess the economic engagement of the business sector in peace promotion:

- funding for peace-related activities;
- targeted efforts to address root causes of conflict;
- providing peace dividends; and
- investment in conflict-sensitive business practices ('do no harm' and 'do good' for peace).

Even though the business sector in north-east India was not directly funding peace-related activities of political parties, civil society and the government, it contributed to addressing one of the root causes of the

Table 2: Major active armed groups in north-east India

State	Name of group
Assam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) Karbi Longri North-Cachar-hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS)
Manipur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's Liberation Army (PLA) United National Liberation Front (UNLF) People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
Nagaland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khole/Kitovi (NSCN-K)
Tripura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
Meghalaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC)
Mizoram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hmar People's Convention-Democratic - HPC(D) Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)
Arunachal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arunachal Naga Liberation Front (ANLF) — presently, this group has been merged with NSCN (K).

Source: Compiled by the author from ISAS (2009), Baruah (2009), Upreti et al. (2012), Das (2007), and the following: http://cdpsindia.org/ne_insurgency.asp; http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/Attachments/PresentationMaterial/9_23102009183559.pdf.

conflict in the region, i.e. poverty. Although the business sector had not made targeted efforts to address the root causes of the conflict in the region (for example, by providing employment to conflict-affected people), the job opportunities created by the business sector and the government's development programme have contributed to addressing poverty-related causes of conflict in the region. Given the ongoing conflict in the region, there has been little opportunity for a peace dividend.

The business sector could, however, have invested in conflict-sensitive business practices to minimise the negative effects of conflict and to promote peace, but there is little indication of the sector having adopted such an approach. There are two important policy instruments aimed at promoting economic and social development in north-east India; the Look East Policy and the North Eastern Region: Vision 2020. The latter is the master document defining the path for the future development of the region, and focuses on connectivity and infrastructure development, strengthening local democracy and building institutions. However, neither has focused on facilitating engagement of business actors in peace promotion.

Engagement in research and knowledge generation

Three indicators were used to assess the engagement of the business sector in generating and disseminating knowledge relating to promotion of peace:

1. funding of research and analysis;
2. publication and dissemination of peace-related information; and
3. collaboration with academic, research and think tank organisations.

This is the most neglected area: the business sector did not engage in activities in these areas.

Factors determining the engagement of business actors in peace promotion

Intensity of conflict was the primary determining factor; the more conflict affected business, the more the business sector engaged in activities to minimise the negative effects.



Media coverage of the conflict in north-east India.

Definitions

Perceived and actual security risks

Perceived security risk is a subjective judgment by people about the possibility of exercise of ASFP by the security forces if they engage in conflict-related issues. Actual security risk refers to the experiences of the people of north-east India relating to the exercise of ASFP by the security forces in the name of controlling conflict and terrorism.

Personal connections and links were also key determinants of engagement in peace-promotion activities. Those business actors who have good connections, links, and personal relations with political decision-makers, peace activists, and members of conflicting parties were more engaged in promoting peace than those with weaker connections and links.

Personal commitment and competence (i.e., knowledge) of individual business people is another important determinant of engagement in the peace process. However, the majority of business people felt that restoring peace is the responsibility of the government and politicians, not the job of businessmen, and thus they did not actively engage in the process.

Self-interest was another factor determining engagement of business people in promoting peace. If engagement in the peace process offers social recognition and visibility, ambitious business people are encouraged to engage more in the peace process. Those business people who

have political ambitions use engagement in peace-building as a stepping stone to politics.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) is the major factor discouraging public engagement in the peace process because it gives extraordinary authority to security forces to take action against anyone in the north-east of India. It has severely strained relations between the state and the public and created a negative perception of the state in people's minds. Business people fear that engaging in the peace process will bring them to the attention of the security forces and expose them to the provisions of AFSPA.

Fear of political and economic exposure and loss of perceived neutrality was another key factor limiting engagement of the business sector in the peace process. Business people and organisations feared that by engaging in the peace process they would be viewed as partisan and affiliated with particular political ideologies/parties.



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Policy implications of NCCR North-South research

- The business sector will actively engage in the peace process only if internal security and law and order are improved and transparent local self-government is put in place.
- There are more than 200 ethnic groups in the region, each with its own language and socio-cultural identity. Both the business and political sectors must acknowledge, respect, and promote ethnic and cultural diversity if the business sector is to engage effectively in the peace process.
- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) must be replaced with more-progressive security legislation that aims at winning the hearts and minds of local people.
- The scope of the Look East Policy should be expanded to explicitly address promotion of peace through economic development of the north-east region.
- North Eastern Region: Vision 2020 should be revised to explicitly address conflict resolution and promotion of peace.

Further reading

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Upreti BR, Ghimire S, Iff A. 2012. *Is Peace the Business of Business? An Exploration of Corporate Role in Conflict Transformation*. SAS RCO Discussion Paper. Kathmandu: South Asia Regional Coordination Office of National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South

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