

Between Land Erosion and Land Eviction

Emerging Social Movements in the Mishing Fringe Villages of the Kaziranga National Park (Assam, North East India)

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As the humanity started to debate on the environmental consequences of an unequal, unregulated and intensive development, “sustainable development” has become the new global task. Today’s aim is to manage land, forest and other natural resources in a sustainable way.

Today, conserving the biodiversity and the wildlife habitat is a main task of most conservationists and environmentalists. The local people are most frequently considered as contributing to the degradation and the depletion of those habitat when practising *Jhum* cultivation (slash and burn practices of the hills), hunting or other activities. Nevertheless, land is insuring the livelihood and represents also the root of the communities’ identity. So, in the tribal social-ecological system, land is managed as a common property resource on which uses and practices are regulated by community based customary laws. The “modern” formal legal law inherited from the British rule and the tribal system are two different sets of principles based on different background culture and world views. When the formal system is based on private and individual property, the tribal system is based on common property resources management (Gadgil, 1995; Fernandes, 2008, 2011).

In the North-eastern part of India, different communities depend

on the natural resources of the floodplain for their livelihood. Even if they are frequently disrupted by natural hazards, a co-evolution exists between the riverside dwellers and those geophysical constraints.

Originally living in the Himalayan state of Arunachal Pradesh, the Mishing Tribe¹ has been migrating out to the Brahmaputra floodplain of Assam in the 13th century most probably in search of fertile land (Lego, 2005: 10; Mipun, 1993: 36). Consequently, they became a part of the Assamese society composed of a diversity of socio-ethnic groups such as Ahoms, Nepalis, Tea Garden communities and others. Currently, Mishing villages are mainly settled in upper Assam along a narrow strip of wetland situated between the Himalayan foothills and the river, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, as well as on the opposite south bank. During their migration, some tribal clans crossed the large braided river to reach the territory of the Bokakhat Subdivision of the Golaghat district where the Kaziranga National Park (KNP), classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site², re-qualified Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in 2007, is situated today (26°34’N to 26°46’N and 93°08’E to 93°36’E).

Since the earthquake of 1950, the Brahmaputra riverbed has become larger, flooding and erosion has occurred and caused riverside agricultural land to decrease³ (Sarma, 2005). A strip of five kilometres of riverside land has been eroded in the Bokakhat area since this major event happened⁴. These eroded lands were mainly inhabited and cultivated by the Mishing community. The families have accordingly shifted their villages further inland (Map 1).

In 1974, the forest department evicted the Mishing villages settled within the KNP, and the villages were shifted to the fringe of the protected area. The villagers became more vulnerable with the growth of population density on a reduced territory. Again, 6 additional areas have been notified for the extension of the Kaziranga National Park. Those additional areas are at the moment inhabited by some village settlements, cultivated and grazing lands (Smadja, 2011). For the Mishings, the order of eviction is coming out when already the community is facing many economical pressures.

The Kaziranga National Park is now become a recreational area

mostly for the urban people, who come as tourists for a few holidays on a jeep safari and on elephant riding tour. The numbers of tourist are every year rising up. The park as a tourist attraction has become a main economical hub and thousands of resort are opened around the park to compete on the tourist economy ground.

But on the fringe of the park, the local people are excluded from the benefits earned from the tourism industry. They are deprived of their common land from where they could get their livelihood. Due to river erosion, most of the Mishing villages became landless and most of the investments for development never reaches the Mishing villages which remains below poverty lines. Land is livelihood for the Mishings and for most of the rural societies in Assam. So, when the land is lost due to erosion or due to land requisition by the government for conservation, the people become landless. In the fringe villages of the Kaziranga National Park, the Mishing tribe is facing both sorts of evictions. Rural landless people may fall into poverty. What are the solutions left for the people? This paper examines how environmental pressures associated to administrative constraints stimulate the emergence of social movements, territorial claims, and territorial restructuring.

Defining Mishing territories in the Bokakkhat subdivision on the fringe areas of the Kaziranga National Park

Most part of the Upper-Assam was dominated earlier by the Chutias and the Kachari Kingdoms from the 11th to the 16th century which was annexed by the Ahom Kingdom between the 16th and 19th centuries, then administered by the British Empire from 1838 until India's independence in 1947. The territorial regulations and land tenure have been successively modified (Gaits, 2006; Karna, 2004; Jacquesson, 1999). These regulations have defined the status and the shape of the territory all over Assam (Shrivastava, 2005). Indian land laws continue to be based on the British model. As for example, land without an individual *patta* and common lands are State properties. The State alone has the right to decide a public purpose and deprive even individual owners of their assets (Fernandes, 2008).

Currently, there are 27 registered villages (revenue village) inhabited

by a majority of Mishings in the Bokakkhat subdivision land use plan of 1958 (data provided by the circle office in 2007). Those administrative rules and regulations have never considered the existence of communal land use as it is prevalent in Mishing villages' socio-spatial organisation. Delimitation has restricted the communities' migratory habit and has imposed their permanent settlement in the territorial limits defined by the land tenure. Mishing's territorial boundaries had to be flexible, as their spatial organisation had to change from one season to the next, adjusting to the natural hazards. This mobility of the territorial boundaries is, however, not recognised in the government's land use plan. Last generations are used to of being sedentary but the river regularly erodes the river banks on which the plots of land allocated to the Mishing villagers are situated. These villages are washed away by the recent progression of erosion and the villagers are thereby compelled to find new lands to build new houses and to satisfy their daily needs. Some of the families are resettled inland, other families choose to stay on the river bank but they hardly get land documents, so some of them settle temporarily but illegally in the fringe area of the KNP on the Forest Department land.

Kaziranga National Park Wildlife Conservation Policy and Fringe Villages

The Kaziranga reserved forest was created under the British rule in 1908 but the villagers could collect some forest products until the foundation of the Kaziranga National Park in 1974. The initial area of the Kaziranga National Park was 376.5 m² as notified in 1984, than 430 km² in 1974. The area has been increasing to reach upto 860 km² including all 6 proposed addition areas notified from 1977 to 1999. In 2007, the Kaziranga National Park has been re-qualified as the Kaziranga Tiger reserve by the NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authorities) on 1033km², which also include the Laokhowa and Buhrachapori Wildlife sanctuaries. This area includes a large buffer zone and a tiger corridor in the Brahmaputra riverbed where human farms may stay temporary but where the focus is now given on the tiger conservation. The Tigers density is increasing in the park as it's offering an important habitat for them. As found through the tiger monitoring by the Aaranyak (an NGO working for environmental protection and biodiversity

conservation) and the Assam Forest Department, there was about 32.64 to 7.79 tigers per 100 km² in the Park area in 2009 (Ahmed et. al., 2010). Those tigers are sometimes coming out of the park and the weakest ones attack the villager's cattle in the *kuthis* (cattle farms) of the chapori area. The NTCA will provide compensation package to the farmers for lost of cattle in the buffer zones but not in the KNP addition areas. So, the civil society and the Non Governmental Organisations (such as Aaranyak, Bhumi, WWF) recommend to bring awareness among the villagers in order to improve the co-existence between villagers and the wild life.

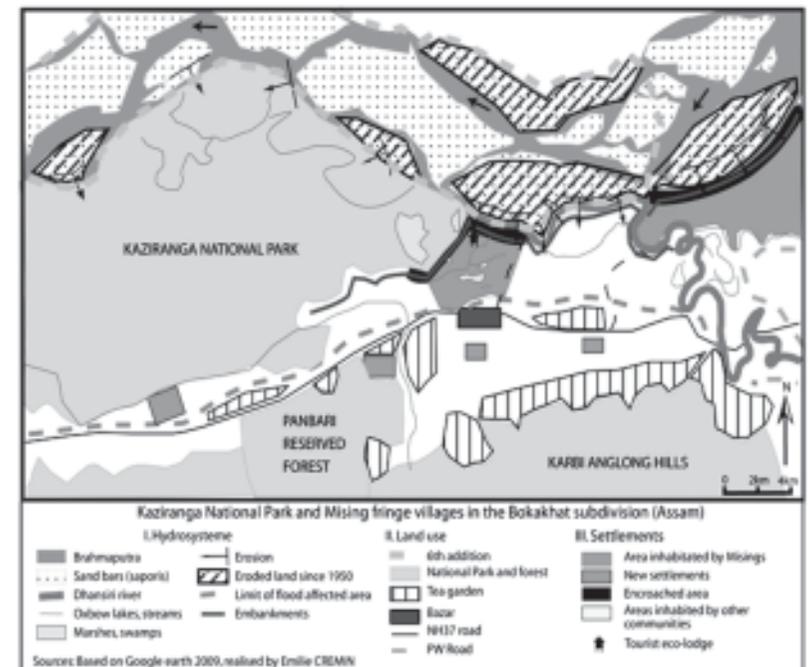
Physical constraints and pressures on natural resources caused by demographical pressure have compelled the Forest Department to implement a number of measures to improve the reserve protection against the encroachment of local villagers (Gokhale, 2005). One of these territorial planning measures concerns the extension of the protected area by integrating the fringe areas of so notified 2nd (6.47km² notified in 1985) and 3rd (0.69 Km² notified in 1985) additions, as well as the sand bars of the Brahmaputra riverbed created after land erosion in a 6th addition⁵ (Mishra, 2005). Having been evicted from the successive additions of the protected area, the Mishing villagers are again directly affected by these conservation policies. The extension of the KNP area reduces land potentially exploitable by the villagers.

The number of protected species (rhinoceroses, elephants, buffalos, and deers) is constantly rising. With this increasing density of wild animal populations, some of them escape from the protected area and graze on the cultivated land. The park has recently implemented the construction of an electric fence to delimit the border between the wild and the domesticated animals grazing lands. This fence doesn't prove to be fully efficient as in some part of the fringe areas, the fence has collapsed and the villagers let their cattle enter the park. Generally, the villagers still do not receive compensations for depredation and damage caused by wild animals on their land. The arrangements to prevent the depredation of wild animals also remain insufficient to protect cultivated lands.

The authorities have decided upon the extension measures

without any consultation with the communities. This overall situation creates tensions and conflicts between the villagers and the Forest Department. From the 1st Notification of the Kaziranga National Park, conservation policy has increased the separation between the wildlife protected area and the local people. Until its creation, the Kaziranga National Park was a temporarily inhabited space and a part of the territory of the Bokakhat Mishing Community. Since that time, the villagers have been excluded from the protected area. The villagers of the fringe areas are claiming their right to stay in the fringe areas notified as additions.

Map 1: Map of the Kaziranga National and Mishing fringe village in the Bokakhat subdivision



* Source: Google Earth 2008, realised by Emilie Cremin, 2008.

Government management plans and NGOs eco-development projects in the fringe villages

The governmental measures applied in the Bokakhat Subdivision are contradictory. The Forest Department tries to protect and conserve the forest area by excluding the local people. But, at the same time, the territorial authorities of the Bokakhat Subdivision is inciting the villagers to intensify their agricultural productions (mainly paddy and mustard) when the risk is to damage the soils of Brahmaputra flood plain through an overexploitation.

The lands are continuously cultivated and the production of crops intensified, which would lead to over-exploitation and to degradation of biodiversity, soil fertility and as a consequence to reduction of harvest. Meanwhile, an action plan involving real “co-management” or “participatory management” is still non-existent in the KNP conservation strategy.

About 55 Eco-development comities have been implemented by the government in the fringe villages. One of them became an, Eco-Tourism projects has been initiated by NGOs (such as the North-east Social Trust in association with the local NGO Dagrob, Eco Tourism and Eco-development Society) in some fringe villages such as the Dhuba Ati Beluguri Mishing village with the aim to promote the culture of the Mishing tribe among the tourist visiting the park.

The idea of the NGO is to demonstrate how the “community conserve and coexist with wildlife”. The NGOs claims that “The major share of the credit of making the KNP a success story goes to the relentless sacrifice of the communities living around the park. They protect the wildlife sacrificing their agriculture, their livestock and forest based agriculture”.

Even if NGOs are putting lot of efforts in developing projects involving the communities of the fringe villages, the separation between the park and the people remains the rule. The villagers are struggling to maintain their livelihood and most of them remain Below Poverty Line (BPL) citizens.

In the land of flood and erosion: Mishing’s settlement in Bokakhat from vernacular settlements to legal resettlements

Land as livelihood: Mishing’s vernacular settlements

In the past, the Mishing villages use to shift their settlements when the river shifted it channels. The usual village settles temporarily on and along natural alluvial embankments above wetland depressions, surrounded by forests covering the riverbank. Nevertheless, land rules of the formal legal system have forced the Mishing to practise a settled agriculture as there was no provision for shifting cultivation in the plain. Today’s cultivation system is based on paddy cultivation.

Several villages were settled in the area of the actual Kaziranga National Park before 1950. Remains of human settlements are still visible in the park as we can see some battle nut plantations or other domesticated trees. The actual area of the Kaziranga National Park contain large wetland used in the past for fishing, large forest usefull for fire wood, diverse grasses and trees suitable for building the Mishing traditional platform house. The platform houses built on piles, called ‘*chang ghar*’ in Assamese, ‘*okum*’ in Mishing, stand in the centre of the communitarian territory and of the family homestead. The Mishing bamboo houses are functional, in the wetland, as the high platform above the ground protects from wild animals and annual floods.

Land is for the Mishing the main source of their livelihood as they depend mainly on natural resources for their daily life. Rituals, such as today’s Ali Aye Ligang, are performed before starting the cultivation. Natural resource management is mainly based on a renewable use as only the surplus of resources is harvested, so the rest is kept as it is to insure the regeneration of the resource. For example, we can see this process in the harvest of bamboo and grasses. This system is based on community sharing principles and guarantees the availability of resources for the next year and for the next generations.

Nevertheless, the combination of geophysical, administrative and demographical constraints adversely affects the territory and obliges the Mishings to modify their livelihood. The anterior social-ecological

systems of the flood plain dwellers are disrupted and they become more vulnerable to changes, whereas they used to have an adaptive strategy to cope with natural hazards. The social-ecological system is hardly able to adjust to higher pressure on natural resources because of scarcity of land and administrative restrictions. This environmental concern is increasing the impoverishment of the riverside communities. When they use to preserve the natural resources in the past, the impoverishment and loss of livelihood is involving that to earn their livelihood, they will, for example, cut the trees to sell it as fire wood or, in extreme cases, get involved into poaching activities. The loss of livelihood further increases the pressure on natural resources outside of the protected areas, as well as brings the people into poverty and identity crisis. Linked to it is loss of the values through which the communities had managed resources as renewable leading to further degradation (Fernandes, 2011).

Land erosion and landless villages: Asking for resettlement in liable land

The villagers, which used to stay in the Park has been relocated out of it in the flood and erosion prone area. As the erosion process was continuous from 1950 to 1998, the villagers of the eroded area are still asking for land documents (*pattas*) and resettlement on legal plots of land. This administrative process frequently takes many years and many households stay landless. The community is also divided and fragmented by settling in separate locations. Some villages has received plot of land but those who did not received convenient propositions shift their villages by them self and settle on embankments or on vacant land. As they have no legal rights for this type of displacement, the villagers who settle on the public land are called “encroachers”. They are mainly settling on the embankments to get protected from floods even if they are liable to administrative eviction. From those embankments they have access to the sand bars common lands on which the cattle can graze and from which they can still extract resources as they did previously. But, since 1999 this area has been included in the addition areas. The access to this land gets more controlled by the forest guards.

To solve the problem of “encroachment”, authorities have relocated and resettled, further inland, four villages affected by the

erosion. Some of them are today located in the 2nd addition area of the Kaziranga National Park such as the *Borbeel Mishing gaon*. Other villages has been rebuilt next to the town (*Am Tenga Mishing gaon*) or next to tea gardens, on parcels of land which are not suitable for the agricultural techniques used by the community and where the access to natural resources is limited. So, some of the Mishings, who have been resettled inland by the local authorities, commute many kilometres every day to reach the lands and the swamps where they can extract the resources which are necessary to follow their traditional livelihoods. Integrated in a new natural environment and in the main Assamese society, some villagers change their practice. As thousands of villagers have lost their lands and are consequently unemployed, they try to start new economic activities but they hardly get employment as landless agricultural labourer or daily wage-earners. The most educated section may find employment in public services or small business establishments. Most of the villagers which could get resettlement are remaining jobless. They live under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) and receive some help from the Public Distribution System⁶ (PDS). Recently, some of the villagers of the fringe area get involved in illegal activities. When the people lose their land and their pride than criminality may be increasing as no alternative exist to sustain their livelihood.

Coming out of territorial claims in the Mishing territory

Government order for eviction and People’s movement

Recently, in January 2011, the settlers of the 2nd and 3rd additions have received a notice from the Bokakhat circle office to evacuate the land they occupy within 15 days (the letter was sent on 3rd January, 2011). The 2nd and 3rd additions notification dates from 1985. The notice issued in 2011 qualifies the settlers as “encroachers”. In January 2011, the Bokakhat SDO affirms that: “*the villagers could not provide any documents to the High Court to support their claims for land ownership. Their claims have been rejected and the government has issued an order*”. Some of villagers have taken compensation but most of the settlers did not. On *Patta* land, the government can also take any land with compensation, as the land should be given for national interest. This additional area would become a corridor joining the Park and the Pan Bari Reserved

Forest. At the moment, the area of the 3rd addition is mainly used for paddy cultivation.

The villagers do not agree to give the 3rd addition. Therefore, the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) has instantly supported and organised the people to struggle against the eviction. Similarly, the settlers of the 2nd addition also received notice to evacuate the land. But the villagers refuse to leave their villages. They have already send memorandum to government demanding *pattas*. The government do not recognise to have given order to the eroded affected families to shift to the actual 2nd addition, where is located the *Borbeel Mishing gaon*. The inhabitants of Borbeel have come from Bamun gaon, Charoh Gaon, Sapekati, Elengmari, Riri, Bongkual. But they have no document to prove their rights.

From 1793, the *Permanent Settlement Act* defined the tax collection and land revenue system. Then, from 1894, the *Land Acquisition Act* again provided more power to the State over the land use. “Land Acquisition” refer to, “*As authorised by the law, government can acquire land for public purpose from the individual landowner(s) after paying a government fixed compensation in lieu of losses incurred by land owner(s) due to surrendering of his/ their land to the concerned government agency*” (Ramanathan, 2008).

The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 mentions that: “*Government has right to occupy land for wildlife protection as habitat or for protection*”. Those acts do not take into account the fact that in the rural economy land as a common property resource is the sustenance not merely of its owners but also of the landless dwellers. By that process, the government agencies turned common lands into a state property. Their dependants are now called “encroacher” of the habitat where they have lived for centuries before those laws were enacted (Fernandes, 2008; 2011). So, the Mishing villagers with the support of the KMSS claim that they will not give their land for the KNP extension: “*It’s our land, the land of our indigenous people (Bhumi putras)*”. They also affirm: “*We the people staying in the fringe area of the KNP we are conserving Kaziranga, so we have rights on Kaziranga*”.

On the bank of the Brahmaputra, the Mishing villagers has lost their land due to erosion, the boundaries of their territory has been washed away by the river, so they did not continuously paid their *pattas*

and their land has been included into the 6th addition. Land alienation is a consequence since the tribe was unable to deal with the changes imposed on them (Fernandes, 2011). This unequal encounter is the basis of conflicts between the people and the local and state level governments.

Emerging territorial claims: asking to be recognised as having rights as tribes of Assam

The occupation of the Mishings and their use of land are traditionally ruled by indigenous jurisdictions, which are different from those determined by the central government. To Mishing villagers, the territory is inevitably linked to the natural resources. It extends to all the spaces occupied by the Tribe in Upper Assam.

Solutions proposed by public authorities have failed to take into account the cultural and socio-ecological particularities of the Mishing Tribe. While the Naga, the Bodo, and the Karbi tribes have claimed their territorial autonomy (self rule) since Independence in 1947, the Mishings have only started to request the application of their constitutional rights since the 1980’s (Racine, 1996). In a regional context, already restructured by tribal autonomous territories (e.g. the Bodo, Karbi, *adivas*’s), the main organisations of the Mishing Tribe⁷ are asking for the application of constitutional rights through the Mishing Autonomous Council created in 1995 (Pegu, 1998). The territorial claims of the MAC are based on the request for the application of the rights indicated in the 6th schedule of the 1950 Indian Constitution that already has a provision for the administration of Tribal Areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. These claims are influenced by regional and international dynamics, which recognise the rights of indigenous peoples⁸. By this way, Mishing villagers may acquire more control over the restructuring process of their territory in Assam. The claim for an autonomous territory represents a strategy to improve some of the social and environmental concerns. Nevertheless, the autonomous council has been suspended in 2008. To be efficient and representative, the structure needs to integrate the community at the grassroots level as it has remained until now guided by the community’s elites nominated by the state government. The missing organisations wait for the elections, which

should be declared by the State of Assam in 2010. Electoral system may empower the population, which would get involved in the debate and would participate to the construction of a common territorial development project.

In the vicinity of the Kaziranga National Park, the Mishing Tribe is discussing the question of territorial limits defined by the administration. The 27 villages of the Bokakhat subdivision⁹, the “Dhansiri-Diboï constituency”, are included as a satellite area of the expected Mishing autonomous territory. The community hopes to get involved in the management of the latest created KNP additional areas. The judgment of the “6th additional area” case is still going on in the Assam State Gauhati High Court of Justice (Smadja, 2009).

Nevertheless, those claims for land rights for tribal or indigenous people of Assam can also be instrumented by nationalist movements. In Assam, population density is increasing¹⁰. Migration of people from other neighbouring states, e.g. Bangladesh¹¹ and Bihar, is going on due to political, economic and ecological reasons. Those people are facing similar issues as the Mishings as annual floods creates devastations in the Brahmaputra/Ganga Delta. Thousands of families are constantly searching for lands, which would be similar to the lands where they used to reside before. These families earn their livelihood essentially from paddy cultivation, fishing and cattle grazing. The media, unions and authorities are accusing them to be encroaching on the Forest Department land. They sometimes compete for access to the limited natural resources with the other local dwellers so they became the main target of all the stakeholders and are today and again involved in main political issues of Assam.

Conclusion

The Mishings are dependent on the natural resources for their livelihood. The local ecological knowledge has permitted them to manage an ecosystem, which is both rich in biodiversity as well as particularly unstable, and to give value to the territory with environmentally sustainable practices. This interaction between the Mishings and the Brahmaputra floodplain environment has formed a socio-ecological system.

However, the evolution of geophysical and administrative constraints, as well as additional pressures due to demographic growth and to the intensification of farming on reduced land, are leading to the ecosystem's transformation in the fringe villages of the KNP. Since the creation of the KNP, access to the park is prohibited and the 6th addition area includes the eroded land of the Mishing villages, transformed in sand bars, on which the conflict is based. Co-management is still not considered in the territorial management projects. Therefore the villagers are excluded from the protected areas and become more vulnerable to the recent dynamics.

The National Forest Policy 1988 recognises that the “lives of tribals living with and near the forests revolve around forests” and enjoined that “the rights and concessions enjoyed by them should be fully protected. The domestic requirements of fuel wood, fodder, minor forest produce and construction timber should be the first charge of forest produce”. The policy further recognises the symbiotic relationship between the tribal peoples and the forests. The international community has recognised the close and traditional interdependence of many indigenous and local communities on biological resources, notably in the preamble to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. There is also a broad recognition that traditional knowledge can serve conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity, two fundamental objectives of the Convention (Métaillé & Roussel, 1998). In December 2006, the Indian Parliament passed the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. This historic legislation marks the first time in India's history that a law has been passed recognising the rights of forest communities.¹² It aims at giving them “responsibility and authority for sustainable use, conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance [...] strengthening the conservation regime [...] while ensuring food security” (Forest Right Act, notified on the 1st January 2008).

The recent recognition of the rights of indigenous people, on the national and on the international levels, could influence the authorities of the Bokakhat subdivision and the KNP officers to take into account the objectives set by the Convention on the Biological Diversity: “*Conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of resources and equitable*

share of its advantages”, in order to allow the association between biodiversity conservation and sustainable social development. Ecosystems are complex adaptive systems, and their governance requires flexibility and capacity to respond to environmental feedback (Levin 1998, Berkes et. al. 2000, Dietz et. al. 2003). Accordingly, societies depending on natural resources need to be flexible and to constantly develop knowledge and understanding in order to cope with changes and uncertainty in complex adaptive systems.

The Mishing Tribe tries to find new strategies in order to recover a territory which is subject to the combined pressures of administrative restrictions and biophysical hazards. Territorial claims are rising as a reaction to this situation. As the Assam government and the local administration do not propose specific answers to their concerns, the tribe claims the application of a territorial autonomy. With territorial autonomy, the tribe also expects to get more facility to rebuild the traditional land use. The tribe’s territory is currently under construction by the empowerment of the Mishing Autonomous Council (MAC). But the Mishings are also co-habiting with many other communities. So, a territory such as the Bodo land is not much possible in the Mishing area. Would delimitations between territories really be the solution to solve the myth depicted by Hardin in 1968 in the “tragedy of the commons”?

End Notes

1. As defined by the Indian constitution, the Mishing group is classified as a Scheduled Tribe
2. Natural criteria ix and x of the World Heritage List.
3. The 1950 earthquake (8.7 on the Richter scale) had strongly modified the hydrology of the Brahmaputra flood plain. The Himalayan Mountains slopes have subsequently liberated sediments which were deposited in the plain, raising the level of the river bed. When combined with aquifer saturation as a consequence of high monsoon rainfall (about 2584 mm average a year); this situation causes regular floods and land erosion which entail severe damage to homesteads (Sarma, 2005).
4. When comparing the 1958 land use plan of the Bokakhat Subdivision with satellite pictures of 2005 and 2007 (Google earth, 2005; ONUSAT, 2007).
5. The sixth addition is the largest with 376 sq km of riverine stretches of the Brahmaputra river and was added in 1999. However, it is yet to be materialised

fully due to court litigation.

6. cf. Frédéric Landy, 2006

7. The ‘*Mishing Agom Kebang*’ (Mishing language society), the ‘*Takam Mishing Porin Kebang*’ (All Mishing student union), the ‘*Mishing Mimang Kebang*’ (Mishing Action Committee) and other groups.

8. Convention OIT 169, Convention on the biological diversity (CDB), Rio Declaration on the environment and the development of 1992 and Indigenous People Rights Declaration adopted the 30 June 2006 at Geneva and validated by the ONU in September 2007, support the indigenous people claims and in India, the “Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act” recognise the forest rights.

9. 60 % of those 27 villages are inhabited by Mishings.

10. The demographic growth in Assam has increased the population density in the Brahmaputra flood plain from an average of 286 inhabitants per km² in 1991 to 34011 inhabitants per km² in 2001. This growth limits access to sufficient agricultural land and increases the pressure on the natural resources available.

11. The migration of families from Bangladesh to Assam is an important issue since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, due to political tensions, the natural hazards (cyclones and floods) and the population growth.

12. <http://forestrightsact.com/>

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Environmental Degradation Resulting to Displacement in Rohmorja

A Case Study

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Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife. It is defined as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable. When natural habitats are destroyed or natural resources are depleted, environment is degraded.

Displacement is often regarded as a onetime phenomenon by which a person is forced to leave his / her original location and go elsewhere. Displacement needs to be viewed as a process rather than an event which starts much before the actual physical displacement and continues for a long time after the uprooting has taken place. According to Baxi (1989, p.168) displacement is not one event, but a series of happenings, affecting human lives in myriad ways.

Displacement and Migration whether permanent or temporary, has always been a traditional response or survival strategy of confronting the prospect, impact or aftermath of the disaster. However, today more than ever the complex nature of disaster is mainly due to flood, draught or scarcity of food. Disaster is, in fact, increasing impact through the combined effects of economic, social, demographic and technological