

**Statement by CSOs
On
Dalit Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction
(19th June, 2010, New Delhi)**

Affirming the fact that the Constitution of India explicitly recognizes the scourge of untouchability and caste based discrimination in Indian society and outlines measures protecting the rights of the Scheduled Castes through a series of legislation and social policies of Affirmative Action,

Acknowledging the findings of vigilant monitoring by civil society groups that has revealed the consistent pattern of discrimination and exclusion faced by vulnerable communities and groups in all interventions pertaining to disaster response, mitigation and risk reduction,

Concerned about varied forms of exclusion based on caste, gender, ethnicity and religious differences and committed to strive towards eliminating all forms of exclusion and discrimination, it recognizes the seriousness of exclusion on the basis of caste;

We, a group of concerned civil society organizations and citizens, engaged consistently in disaster response, mitigation and risk reduction initiatives at the national and international level over many years, having deliberated on the grave and pertinent issue of the exclusion of Dalits from such initiatives, state the following:

1. We recognize that large numbers of people affected by disasters are excluded due to various forms of vulnerabilities created by social stratification and discrimination imposed by caste, gender, age, ethnicity and sometimes religion. The exclusion is by default or design.
2. We accept that the prevalence of such discrimination and exclusion needs to be explicitly acknowledged by governments and civil society in order to ensure effective steps towards inclusion of these vulnerable groups
3. We recognize that Dalits are more vulnerable to the impact of disasters and less able to recover without support.
4. We urge the governments to accept the Hyogo Framework of Action to develop social policies towards achieving disaster risk reduction among the vulnerable and deprived communities.

Hence we urge the Central and State Governments and their agencies such as NDMA, the SDMAs and the nodal ministries to acknowledge the above statements and take the following urgent steps:

1. The DM policy guidelines and minimum standards for relief and rehabilitation should recognize the reality of exclusion of Dalits and vulnerable groups, explicitly acknowledge and state the same.
2. Steps and procedures should be laid down so that complete inclusion of Dalits and other vulnerable groups is ensured as a non-negotiable entitlement.

3. The officers of state agencies should recognize the societal processes of caste-based exclusion at work in communities and hence should directly reach out to the Dalits and vulnerable groups, avoiding any mediation of people from the powerful dominant communities in reaching out to them.
4. There should be specific circulars and GOs / GRs that instruct specifically and make it incumbent on the officers of the administration to visit and enumerate the affected people in the settlements of the Dalits and other vulnerable groups (children, people with disabilities, single women, the elderly etc.)
5. The reaching-out and assessment process would use participatory methods for better inclusion, so as to design programmes that are sensitive to the rights of Dalits and relevant to their economic and livelihood needs.
6. State agencies should collaborate with CSOs to develop tools based on participatory methods and principles of social equity audit, for monitoring / auditing the extent of social equity and inclusion of Dalits in disaster response and risk reduction programmes. (The MNREGS Model could be looked at).
7. Ensure and monitor proportionate allocation of public resources that are required for the Dalits and excluded groups to enable them to cope with the disaster on par with the other communities. The budgetary allocation and spending on disaster response and DRR interventions should be transparent and be proactively disclosed to be widely accessible in a form that is comprehensible to the victims and all citizens.
8. The nodal agencies implementing disaster response and DRR programmes should build up an internal MIS on the share of Dalits in the response programme. The MIS should provide disaggregated information on all the affected households of vulnerable communities and also give detailed data on women, pregnant / lactating women, infants, children, persons with disabilities, aged people and so on. They should institute mechanisms for mid-term corrective measures based on the information so received.
9. Focal persons should be appointed by the Government in order to monitor all aspects of inclusion of Dalits at all levels of the administration – planning, implementation and governance of Disaster management interventions.
10. Ombudspersons should be appointed by the state on a permanent basis, specifically to look at the issue of exclusion in disaster-prone areas, and in any area that has been affected by any disaster. These ombudspersons should be vested with adequate powers to enforce inclusion of Dalits and other vulnerable groups by state agencies and function as per guidelines and procedures laid out to address grievances and cases of exclusion. They should not only be empowered to direct the administration to include and grant entitlements for all those excluded in disaster response and risk reduction interventions of the government; but also to initiate departmental inquiry or / and prosecution of public servants who may have through their acts of omission or commission led to exclusion of Dalits.
11. Dalits should be represented in institutional decision-making processes and consultations in disaster management - at all levels - from local government level to the national level.

12. Dalit rights organisations with proven track record to be represented in all levels of GO-NGO coordination mechanisms in the context of Disaster Management. NDMA, SDMA and DDMA should have task forces / committees representing the dalits and other vulnerable groups that deliberate on and decisively influence disaster management programmes.
13. Specific disaggregated database should be compiled on Dalit households and all other vulnerable groups, the mode of access to those households and the preparedness of the administration to reach out to them in the event of any disaster. This database should be made available in the public domain by all district disaster management authorities / nodal ministries.
14. The entitlements of Dalits and other vulnerable groups should be defined, communicated precisely through all relevant media and made accessible with minimum procedural hitches. The onus should be on the duty-bearer (the state) and not on the affected (the rights-holder) to ensure that all the affected Dalits and vulnerable groups receive their entitlements pertaining to Disaster response and risk reduction programmes.
15. Government and civil society should recognize the unique challenges and needs of children, especially the vulnerable ones (e.g. children heading families, orphans and those in institutions or under the care of people not their biological parents) and respond accordingly.
16. The state to ensure that child protection policies are in force during humanitarian interventions so that no child is harmed or exploited in any way directly or indirectly by officers at any level.
17. Special attention should be given to the differential food security needs and nutritional needs of Dalits and vulnerable groups, particularly in disaster relief and during the recovery period.
18. The abhorrent practice of forcing or enticing Dalits to remove carcasses and corpses has to be ended with immediate effect. This work has to be done by specially trained and well-paid staff of the government and volunteers - equipped with full protective gear. All public health operations to remove the dead should be carefully monitored for any such abusive practice, and strict standards and norms for this function, with punitive provisions for violations should be laid down.
19. The NDMA, NDMI and MHRD and their counterparts in the states are urged to introduce modules on inclusion of Dalits and vulnerable groups in disaster response, mitigation and DRR, as part of courses on human rights in schools, universities and training programmes for Government staff. Such courses instilling a culture of human rights should start from early years of schooling so that the mindset that promotes caste-based discrimination and exclusion could be transformed early in life.