

Dalit NGO Federation – Nepal

2008 has been a turning point in the political history of Nepal as the country was declared a Federal Democratic Republic. The Constituent Assembly Election guaranteed 50 Dalit representations out of 601 in the new Constituent Assembly (CA). This is a historic achievement in Nepal. The Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) has contributed to this change, along with the various political parties and other Dalit NGOs in Nepal, through a series of campaigns advocating Dalit rights and by lobbying the political parties to demand proportionate representation in the Constituent Assembly.

One of the most significant activities towards the end of the year was the Constituent Assembly Representatives' seminar in December. DNF organised a national seminar for both Dalits and Non-Dalits, in which national and international level resource persons also participated. The training aimed at raising awareness among the CA representatives of the constitution drawing processes of various countries. The idea was to support the CA representatives in drafting the Nepal constitution, and to exchange views and ideas ensuring common consensus between Dalits and Non-Dalits. DNF also developed the Dalit Agenda after several regional consultations and national seminars with various stakeholders, civil society, political parties, INGOs and the UN agencies. The agenda was published and distributed to stakeholders and disseminated through the Kantipur National Daily Paper. More than 500,000 people have been made aware of the Dalit agenda. The target of DNF is to have the agenda included in the constitution.

In cooperation with the National Forum for Peace and Development, DNF provided Voter Education at community level, beneficial to 16,000 people. Similarly, DNF organised leadership development training in order to prepare potential CA candidates for the Constituent Assembly, along with campaigns in order to make people aware of the importance of voting. The National Election Monitoring Alliance (NEMA) is the largest alliance of Nepalese Federations and NGOs, formed to monitor the election during the Constituent Assembly Election. DNF is one of the members of NEMA and mobilised 1360 election observers in 17 districts who contributed to the execution of a free and fair election.

In cooperation with the National Planning Commission and the National Dalit Commission, DNF launched a major new project this year. The Plan International Project aims at analysing the Government provisions and policies in the 3 year Interim Plan (2007-2009), annual sector plans and budgets, and to sensitise, communicate and influence Government line agencies to help ensure better implementation of such plans and budgets.

The Government budget for old age allowance has been changed in 2008, taking into account the short life expectancy rate of Dalits. The allowance will now be allocated to Dalits at the age of 60, compared to the rest of the population who will receive the allowance at 70 years of age. This is the first time that Dalits are given old age allowance. Moreover Dalits, who had been provided with free education at primary level only, now get free education for two additional years. Another highly significant Governmental initiative is the abolishment of bonded labour on the basis of a series of campaigns supported by DNF.

In the area of education, DNF has provided 70 Dalit youths with vocational training, who are now able to generate a livelihood income. Around 672 students have benefited from scholarships provided by DNF and several dropout students are now in a position to rejoin school.

In the area of human rights, DNF started a campaign in three districts promoting the rights of the extremely marginalised Terai Dalits in collaboration with Care-Nepal. People are now aware of their rights and can raise their voice to fight human rights violations. Moreover, DNF is also monitoring the human rights violation cases throughout the country and has been mobilizing activists in five regions to watch the caste discrimination cases happening in the districts and intervene in the events to bring justice to the victims.

DNF has made several important publications and media initiatives during 2008. A highly significant production of the DNF's network is the documentary "Acchut". The documentary shows the social, political, economical conditions and the violations of human rights of the Terai Dalits. DNF interacted with the media in the hope of raising awareness of the social exclusion of Terai Dalits. As a result several journalists are now interested in exploring the issues of the Dalit community. Moreover, DNF and its network have published a research book on caste discrimination in Nepal, along with news bulletins and the broadcasting of several radio programmes at regional and national level.