

International Consultation on Good Practices Strategies to Eliminate Caste-Based discrimination

Description of the practice:

The background to the practice? Describe any key events or actions that led to it?

Nari Surakshya Samiti(NSS), a women voluntary organization which aims at the socio-economic, legal and political empowerment of women in rural areas is headquartered at Angul, in Odisha. It has been working especially for women and children of marginalized communities like Dalit & Adivasis in respect to uphold their civil rights, livelihood concerns and political empowerment across three districts of Odisha namely Angul, Deogarh and Jajpur. The work began with forest protection and anti liquor campaign in the locality, where it was observed that alcoholism was a very common problem among the Dalit community working as agricultural daily laborer, minor forest product collector or construction workers.

A team of dedicated likeminded persons in the year 1997, took the initiative to ensure basic constitutional and human rights and defend the socio-economic and legal rights of these socially discriminated and excluded underprivileged section of the society through awareness meetings, rally, pada yatra, capacity building training and workshop, networking & advocacy with government officials, media, promotion of girls education among Dalit girls, promotion of people's organization, publication etc. Over a period of time it was realized that standalone activities is not always do not yield results and hence these were converged by bringing key stakeholders such as affected community, non-Dalit groups/dominant-caste people, law enforcement agencies in a single platform. Therefore in 2008 a forum called "Nagarika Surakshya Committee" was formed to address the issues of socially discriminated communities.

What was/is the title/name of the practice? Nagarika Surakshya Committee (Citizen Welfare Committee)

What was/is the aim/purpose of the practice?

1. To Ensure social, economic and legal rights of Dalit and socially excluded community
2. To Sensitize and pressurize the law-enforcement agencies (judiciary, police, government officials- District collector, Tehasildar, Block Development Officer, District Welfare Officer, Block Welfare Officer) and Non-Dalit groups, Media, and other stakeholders to address the case of atrocities on Dalits.
3. To hold inter-community dialogue for promoting social cohesion and harmony and a broader platform for change in perception.

What was/is the target group(s)?

Primary:

1. Men, women and children from Dalit hamlets/ rural villages/rampant untouchability and atrocity prone areas.
2. Victims of atrocities, Dalit women self help groups, unwed mother, families with caste based occupations, migrant workers, displaced and landless families etc.

Secondary: Non-Dalit groups, Civil society organization, CBOs, local NGOs, Campaign and lobby groups, Dalit and human right activists, media, law enforcement agencies, and Government.

Who were/are the partners involved (e.g. community based, NGO-based, government institutions, and other related stakeholders)?

1. Community Based partners are Village level committees, Panchayati Raj Institution members, Dalit groups/committee, Non-dalit groups etc.
2. NGO Based support from Dan Church Aid (DCA), Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), Orissa Mahila Adhikar Manch (OMAM), Local NGOs and CBOs working on human right and Dalit issues
3. Government Institutions such as District Collector, Tahsil office, Block office, Gram Panchayat Office, Human Rights Commission, SC/ST Development Commission, Law enforcement agencies
4. Other stakeholders such as media, Social activists, human right activists etc.

What was/is the duration of practice? Since 2008

Legal and institutional frameworks:

The legal and institutional framework of the practice: The bi-monthly meeting and discussion forums fall well within legal and institutional framework to provide Dalits equal rights and legal rights to exercising them with senior officers and law enforces. The Dalits of targeted villages are now able to share equal platform with the non-Dalit community in gram sabha, mid-day meal schemes, ICDS program. PDS etc. the case of atrocities and discrimination has been reduced significantly. (A) One of the key features of the bi-monthly meeting has been involving local government officials and law enforcement authorities such as the police, welfare officer, protection officer etc. While on one way this ensures the Dalit rights are upheld in case of any pending issues. it also sensitizes and building capacity of the officers about Dalit rights and the issues they are facing. (B) Public hearing has been conducted to resolve the pending issues. (C) Undertaking dharana/protest, demonstration/rally and submission of memorandum to the collector on issue related to atrocity, discrimination in government service delivery such as ASHA workers not touching Dalit pregnant women, Angawadi workers not weighing Dalit baby, separate seating arrangement in schools especially during mid-day meal etc. (D) Using media to bring attention of general public, human right activists and law enforcement agencies about atrocity cases and violation of basic human right. Half-yearly information sharing media workshop organized to sensitize on legal and social provision for Dalits such as SC/ST(POA) Act 1989, PCR Act 1995, and state provisions, Resettlement and Rehabilitation policy 2006, Coal India Resettlement and Rehabilitation policy 2008 etc. (E) A state level network called OMAM (Odisha Mahila Adhikar Manch) is responsible for advocacy and lobby on Dalit issues with government, media, human right commission at the state level.

Did the practice specifically address the situation of Dalit women or other women affected by discrimination based on work and descent? How was this done? The primary target is to address the issues pertaining to Dalit women in particular but we also address women/gender issue in general such as single mother issue, unwed mother, gender discrimination etc. (a) Organizing block level workshop on domestic violence, caste and gender discrimination, communal harmony etc. (b) Promoted Dalit Self Help Groups to organize women at village level and promote awareness among them about their rights. (C) Formed and promoted block level Dalit women Resource center involving rural Dalit women for promoting leadership and skill development to access basic services and monitoring government schemes.

(d) A state level network called OMAM (Odisha Mahila Adhikar Manch) is responsible for advocacy and lobby on dalit issues with government, media, human right commission at the state level. (e) Developed relationship with national level network on Women and mining, NAWO, National level women organization JAGORI and set up resource centre for women in the area.

Were there any other positive targeted measures? Among many other cases one case pertains to denial of entry of Dalit men and women in a rice mill which was finally resolved after continuous advocacy with district administration and sensitizing the rice mill owners and non-Dalits who had been protesting Dalit entry about social, legal rights of Dalits to enter such a place and its possible consequences in the presence of block development officer, welfare officer and local police station in charge. In the last two years (2009-2010) 15 cases of violation of Dalit rights were mutually resolved. During its intervention it identified an important issue i.e. growing incidence of unwed motherhood in the areas of mining belt, as an inadvertent consequence of social disorder resulting from reckless mining and industrial activities. During random survey in 2003 in Talcher, Kanhia and Chhendipada coal belt area of Angul district 108 unwed mothers were identified & the reason behind this was false promise of marriage, poverty, illiteracy, sexual abuse and exploitation migration of labour to mining area. Out of 108 cases 50 unwed mothers get self employment through continuous advocacy with district administration under SGSY schemes of Government of India in 2008.

During a pilot study in 2010 on lingering impact of reckless mining and industrialization in Angul district on Dalit segment Dalits are not getting the compensation as per the Resettlement & Rehabilitation Policy 2008, the displaced families (150) in some area are rehabilitated over underground mining, no scope for women to work, lacking basic amenities such as water, education, health care service, social environment (burial ground/playground), identity proof etc.

Women and children are the worst victims of human rights violation and environmental problems. The poor people are deprived up getting health care, education, drinking water, and other basic services. The poor and illiterate women are jobless. There is no security for women in the area.

Implementation of the practice:

What was the tangible impact of the practice (on the policy environment and/or as an actual change on the ground?)

-In the last two years (2009-2010) 15 cases of violation of Dalit rights were mutually resolved in the quarterly meetings.

-Out of 450 pending atrocity cases in Angul district since 2001, after the intervention of Nagarika Surakshya Committee more than 250 pending cases has been resolved.

-Increased sensitization among non-Dalits and govt. officers about Dalit rights as evident by decreasing cases of Dalit right violation and more positive attitude towards Dalits

-Dalit hamlets are getting their ration under PDS, mothers are getting treatment from ASHA and Angawanwadi workers under ICDS, Children are seating together in schools and mid-day meal, thousands of dalits got job under NREGA, 38 Dalit households got land entitlements, 24 unwed mother availed houses under Mo Kudia scheme of state government for rehabilitation by the district administration.

-Secretary NSS is the NGO member of ST/SC Vigilance & Monitoring Committee to address the issue of atrocity against Dalits in the district under SCs & STs (POA) Act 1989, Juvenile Justice Board with judicial power and member of Zilla Parishad Governing Body.

What were the implementation methods, means, and strategies to make this practice a success? What made it possible to effectuate a change? Can you identify the key factors of success which may be replicable?

Implementation method: PREPARATORY ACT requesting government officers in writing; publishing about the meetings; arrangement of venue; informal meetings; agenda preparation; Open Group discussion and presentation; etc

Strategies to make it a success: a) focus to amicably resolve issues with mutual understanding than taking a confrontational approach or legal steps unless necessary; b) respect to Dalits and non-Dalits alike in the meetings and highlighting cases of mutual benefit happening around c) involving government officers; the Sarpanch (Head Man) and law enforcers like the police, media in meetings; this helps as the forum by such means carry a degree of formality and authority. D) Regularity – the regularity of meetings ensure that people take these seriously and try to be conscious of the issues rather than treating these as one off affairs. E) Exposure to Government officials and Capacity building of law enforcement agency specially police and protection officer. F) Documentation – documentation of discussions, case study and happenings provide evidence for future reference and to mobilize new government officers about the formality of such meetings.

did the practice involve a dialogue with affected communities and was it a participatory process? If yes, then how? Yes it is a participatory process involving Dalit communities. Before any issues resolved a fact finding exercise is carried out among Dalits and non-Dalit villages by our trained volunteers as a preparatory activity to find out issues of contention through interaction and discussing between them or any cases of Dalit right violation for discussion during the forum. We also look for positive cases of mutual respect and seeking solution measure from the community itself to solve the issue.

- Is the practice sustainable? If yes, then how and if no, then what can be done to sustain it?

Resources are the main concern for its sustainability. So far the organization has been sustaining these meetings

from its own resources and the organization is trying to ensure long term support for this activities.

Successes and challenges:

What were the conditions for success (what is the history, what was the capacity of the actors, what were the social, economic and political condition?)

In most of the villages the non-Dalits are the dominant caste and group. Whereas the Dalits are most excluded, exploited and discriminated among the villagers. Their socio economic condition was not only miserable but also left with abject poverty, victim of socio-economic injustice, prevalence of blind believes and social taboos and deprived of the right to access the village temples, hotels in the locality, low representation and participation in social, economic, political activities in the village. Also have limited ownership and control over village resources such as water, recreational facilities etc, paid less than non-Dalits for the same work, not allowed to sell or purchase goods in local markets, facing differential treatment in food security programmes, in schools, in fair price shops, healthcare and often facing sexual harassment, atrocities and frustration. This is especially in industrialized and mining areas.

Condition lies in (a) getting the village headman sarpanch, Peoples participation & involvement of non Dalits and government officers to agree to such forums. Capacities of Dalit community have improved as well as the attitude of non-Dalits has changed. (b) Overall social, administrative and political support is mobilized (c) series of awareness, information sharing through workshop/poster/booklet, training and exposer programmes. (d) Encouraging Community ownership and management.

What were the key challenges and obstacles to success? How were these removed?

Challenges and obstacles to success: The challenge is to find the proper balance between working with community, NGOs and govt machinery together is always challenging, time consuming, do not have similar rhythm, pace and consistency but both the actor can play crucial role. A) Non-acceptance of pro-Dalit works by non-Dalit community. B) Immediate remedy is demanded by the affected community. C) Poverty, illiteracy and lack of awareness. D) Lack of coordination and solidarity within various stakeholders. E) Cannot have homogeneous approach for all issues. F) Unavoidability of government, policy framework etc.

Remedial measures taken: i) Building good relationship and familiar with the community (ii) Building capacity of various stakeholders and sharing the knowledge. (iii) Regular supervision, follow up and local response strategy. (iv) Good linkage with government officials, Development of coordination mechanism and constructive negotiation to minimize the gap between the government officials, Dalit community, non-Dalit, PRI members, and local NGOs and media etc. (v) Documentation and Case study/exposure visit. (vi) Translating the policy/Acts related books and booklets in Odiya on Mahila Adhikar(Women Rights) POA Act 1989, PCRA 1995, Right To Information, Forest Rights Act-2006 & 2007 for Dalits and other traditional forest dwellers, women and Panchyatiraj, Resettlement and rehabilitation etc.

How was this practice innovative? Innovation lies in the fact of bringing different stakeholders on a common platform to discuss and to commit themselves to resolve any pending issues though mutual understanding in a regular manner. Creates a Platform for victims and survivors to support each other and follow up of the legal interventions/actions. It is different from traditional approaches of empowerment sensitization and advocacy/lobby in the form that these activities are often carried out separately without having a convergence forum. A convergent forum provides a positive change and the solutions achieved are often long lasting. The focus is on attitudinal/ behavioral change, involvement of non-Dalits in the process and enabling a learning environment by using local information.

Identify three key recommendations for similar practices/initiatives that can be replicated in the future. How could the process have been improved and sustained?

Involvement of all key stakeholders in the forums is absolutely necessary especially involvement of non-Dalits, government officers; village headman and law enforcers like police.

-Discussion not only issues of Dalit right violation but also of inspirational cases of mutual benefit to motivate parties concerned for voluntary cooperation.

-Documentation is critical as it provides documentary evidence in cases of confrontation and non-cooperating

officers/ mobilizing new officers to attend the forums.

This can be improved and sustained if a) Separate resource provision ensured. b) local media can be involved and highlight it c) Enhancing community participation and cooperation d) Encouraging Community ownership and management of the forum.

Publicity: Yes, IDSN can use this case publicly with due recognition of NSS.