

**Statement by CSOs
On
Dalit Inclusion in Disaster Response & 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 have 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, age, 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:

Recognition and monitoring of exclusion of Dalits

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. Such discrimination and exclusion that exist in society is magnified during disasters.
2. We accept that such discrimination and exclusion needs to be explicitly acknowledged and also that effective inclusion of these vulnerable groups is possible only through interventions that specifically engage with these communities and groups.
3. We recognize that Dalits and other most deprived and excluded communities are more vulnerable to the impact of disasters and less able to recover without support. We also recognize that the societal processes often deny relief and rehabilitation benefits to Dalits.
4. We endorse the principles and means for achieving disaster resilience among the vulnerable and deprived communities laid down and agreed upon in Hyogo Framework of Action by the civil society organizations and Government and recognize the need to be transformed into social policies and operational mechanisms for the respective organizations in addressing exclusion.

5. We resolve to initiate the process of inclusion of Dalits to be incorporated in common minimum standards and technical chapters in Sphere Minimum Standards for humanitarian emergencies.¹
6. We shall explicitly state and recognize exclusion of Dalits and strategies for their inclusion in policy documents and intervention guidelines pertaining to humanitarian assistance.²
7. We will ensure that Dalits and other excluded groups (children, people with disabilities, single women, the elderly etc.) are consciously and deliberately reached³ out to while assessing needs during humanitarian crisis and that we all agree on minimum guidelines and indicators on inclusive support for them.⁴
8. We shall collaborate to collectively develop common tools based on participatory methods and principles of social equity audit, for monitoring / auditing the extent of social equity and inclusion of Dalits in their disaster response and risk reduction programmes.
9. We commit to appoint committees (cells) (the equivalent of the Ombudsperson mentioned in 15 below) to look into grievances related to exclusion in our disaster response and risk reduction programmes. Adequate guidelines and procedures should be laid down and administrative facilities provided for such committees to fulfil their functions effectively. Their recommendations should be binding for the executives of the CSOs and the Governing Boards should be liable to monitor the implementation of the recommendations for inclusive practices.
10. We will 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.
11. We undertake to institute in all our Disaster Response and Risk Reduction programmes a MIS that continuously provides disaggregated information on the programmatic and financial share of Dalits; and mechanisms for mid-term corrections if required.
12. We agree to be guided and reviewed by the principle of adequate (proportionate) representation of Dalits on staff and community level decision making bodies at all levels in the Disaster response and Risk Reduction Programmes⁵.
13. We pledge to abide by an uncompromising code of child protection so that no beneficiary especially children is harmed or exploited in any way directly or

¹ A major sensitization campaign needs to be undertaken on caste-based discrimination and exclusion of Dalits in the context of disasters and to get civil society to recognize all that being stated here.

² They should recognize the societal processes of caste-based exclusion at work in communities and hence should avoid mediation of powerful dominant communities in our efforts to reach out to the Dalits and vulnerable groups.

³ 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.

⁴ Ensure participation of more vulnerable members from within the Dalit community on the lines of Gender, Disability, Age and other vulnerabilities.

⁵ Form community level committees for selection, monitoring, and vigilance etc. in a manner and at a level that provide adequate space to Dalits to access them and influence their decision making process; demanding representation of Dalits in institutional decision-making processes and consultations at local and national levels

indirectly by staff and or partner staff in the course of our humanitarian interventions.

14.

Influencing state policies and programmes for inclusion of Dalits

As responsible Civil Society Organizations we resolve to advocate and lobby for the following changes and innovations in policies that we expect the State authorities to bring about:

15. The appointment of an independent and sensitised focal person specially monitoring all aspects of inclusion of Dalits at all levels of the administration – planning, implementation and governance of Disaster management interventions.
16. The appointment of ombudspersons 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 to 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.⁶
17. Representation of Dalit rights organisations with proven track record at all levels of GO-NGO coordination mechanisms in the context of Disaster Management. NDMA, SDMA and DDMA to constitute task forces / committees representing the dalits and other vulnerable groups that deliberate on and decisively influence disaster management programmes.
18. The state authorities to mandatorily furnish specific disaggregated information 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. A data base of such vulnerable villages/people, particularly Dalits in disaster prone areas, to be prepared by the authorities and made available in the public domain by all district disaster management authorities / nodal ministries and IAG Coordination units.⁷
19. Government to recognise the unique challenges and needs of children, especially the vulnerable ones (e.g. Dalit children, children heading families, orphans and those in institutions or under the care of people not their biological parents) and respond accordingly.
20. State authorities to be urged to define the entitlements of Dalits and other vulnerable groups and ensure accessibility of those entitlements 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.

⁶ 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 recommend departmental inquiry or / and prosecution of public servants who may have through their acts of omission or commission led to such exclusion of Dalits.

⁷ This data base in the public would make the enumeration of the affected transparent and non-negotiable.

21. The abhorrent practice of forcing Dalits to remove carcasses and corpses to be ended with immediate effect. We would leave no stone unturned to pressure the state to eradicate this practice.⁸
22. The state, in consultation with civil society to introduce education to a Culture of Human Rights from the early years of schooling to transform the mindset of caste-based discrimination and exclusion instilled by socialization. More specifically, ideas about disasters, originating both from natural and human causes, and how to respond to such situations as responsible citizens and compassionate human beings, could be introduced gradually at a later stage. Towards this objective we should make efforts with NDMA, NIDM and MHRD and their counterparts in the states⁹.

⁸ 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. This work has to be done by specially trained and well-paid staff of the government and volunteers - equipped with full protective gear

⁹ The contents of this Human Rights Education (HRE) will include the basic values of human dignity, equality, compassion for those who are less fortunate and social responsibility.