**Inclusive Education to empower minority youth.**

**Thank You Mr. Chair, for giving the floor.**

**I am Ankita Paudel B.K, speaking on behalf of Dalit youth in Nepal and also representing Feminist Dalit Organization.**

**Dalit youth in Nepal face many challenges in the education system in Nepal.**

1. **High Illiteracy and low enrollment rate**

The educational scenario in Nepal is highly centralized and presents difficulty of access for economically poor and marginalized groups. Despite making education free at the primary level when moving to secondary and tertiary level, there is a very low rate of enrollment. The gross enrollment rate at the primary level for Hill Dalits and Terai Dalits is between 70-90% while at tertiary level it can be as low as 1.2%.

Given this scenario, it is hard to retain dalit youth in education due to number of reasons. One of which is due to extreme poverty and having the responsibility to sustain themselves and family. Also, the course of the curriculum does not give space for encouraging the culture of Dalit community.

1. **Discriminatory practices against Dalit children in schools**

The forms of structural discrimination and abuse that Dalit children face is stigmatizing due to which they are often times forced to drop out of school. Teachers and other peer groups belonging from a so called higher caste at school exclude Dalit children- segregating classrooms, excluding them from various both extra and curriculum activities, denying for access to school water supplies and toilets, physically punishing them and also act of favoritism.

1. **Multiple forms of discrimination faced by Dalit girls and defined gender roles**

The extreme poverty in which most of the Dalit families live and defined gender roles force Dalit girls out of school. Dalit girls are overburdened with household works or are married off at an early age. As a result of which they have less opportunity to enroll in formal education.

1. **Lack of role model from Dalit community**

As mentioned earlier only 1.2 percent make to tertiary level and even less pursue higher**.** From my personal experience, while I was studying masters, I was the only one attending school from Dalit community from a group of 30. The reason for also very low representation is due to the cost of private education in Nepal. Also, many Dalit youth have the frustration and do not seek to pursue for further studies and rather migrate for menial jobs…..

1. **Access to water, sanitation and hygiene**

As the settlements, particularly in rural areas of the Dalit community do not have proper access to toilet facilities, clean drinking water and also medical first-aid. To fetch drinking water they have to cover 5-10 km just for drinking water. This leads to poor hygiene and cleanliness and hence, the school management discourages the children to attend schools.

Also there is a pre-conception rooted in the mind of people that a person from Dalit community is unhygienic and polluted hence, cannot be touched. They face discrimination based on it as a result are de-motivated to attend school.

**Recommendations:**

The current scenario of education in Nepal is nationally standardized and homogenous and lacks space for local culture and resources. Because the Dalits are traditional occupants, the course that is offered does not promote and protect its usefulness. Dalits are often the crafted skilled artisans- for example; blacksmiths, cobbler, carpenter. So these occupations need to be protected and promoted and seen as a respectful job. Even educated Dalits are less offered in the job market. Therefore, the affirmative and positive action should be promoted to the private sector.

The government does provide scholarship- limited within the government schools and colleges, but there is no outreach of the Dalit youths; hence unaware of schemes provided by the government. Hence, the state should bring programs to spread awareness.

The state should ensure quality education in governmental schools and subsidize for those willing to study in private schools; provide professional training especially for women and girls to promote leadership.