



Asia Dalit Rights Forum



***Sustainable and Resilient Communities :  
A Profile of Dalits in Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia***

## **About Asia Dalit Rights Forum**

Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) is a platform of Dalits and those working with Dalits in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka committed to the empowerment and emancipation of communities subjected to descent and work based (caste based) discrimination and violence (DWD&V). ADRF aims at addressing violations of the rights and entitlements of these communities, in particular their women and children, in the respective countries as well as worldwide. It focus on supporting all the communities subjected to DWD&V and systemic discrimination in any part of the world in their noble aspirations and courageous struggles to establish an inclusive society that is marked by equity and equality, dignity and self governance, justice and freedom. ADRF is committed to collaborating with all national, regional and international agencies- civil society organisations and human right agencies, UN bodies and state institutions espousing the cause of eliminating DWD&V and building an inclusive, peaceful and egalitarian society in Asia and elsewhere in the world.

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# Sustainable and Resilient Communities : A profile of Dalits in Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have transformed the developmental ambitions of the people, states, and developmental agencies. This developmental program brought a proper amalgamation of socio-economic, political and environmental development with human rights perspective. The shifting of focus from economic development to the human development as well as non-discriminatory and inclusive development has enraptured various stakeholders of development. 'Leaving No One Behind' is the call for holistic development with equity and inclusiveness as core values of the model development programmes.

SDG implementation talks about inclusion and participation of the very last person for successful implementation of this global development programme. It could be very difficult to guarantee the development measures reaching these communities. The discrimination based on work and descent, however, failed to make the cut in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Targets and indicators. The SDG indirectly influences the various concerns of the excluded communities, while it fails to recognize the Discriminated based on Work and Descent (DWD) or caste as an important determinant of the poverty and under-development. The absence of DWD from the SDG main document, goals and targets as well as the global indicators are clear evidence that there is less to no recognition of DWD in the global agenda of development. While on one hand, the SDGs stands for transparency, accountability, and participation with the inclusion of all populations, on the other hand, it structurally excludes the traditionally marginalized and socially excluded populations.

DWD is an important determinant, which directly results in poverty, as seen in the South Asian context that majority of the Dalits, are living in poverty. DWD is multi-dimensional in nature, as Dalits and other excluded communities are discriminated against politically, socially, economically, legally and culturally in their respective countries. Lack of accountability and participation in the policymaking and implementing, budgetary plans and allocation, service delivery and recognition has resulted in their status (of being poor) static. Increasing inequality and no specific attempt to reducing it, have contributed immensely towards political and economic instability within the communities.

The draft United Nations Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent (DWD), 2009 clearly states, "...discrimination based on work and descent exacerbates poverty and constraints progress." It is essential that SDG should favour the primal emphasis on the descent (caste) based discrimination if the visions are for any systematic and sizable change (development).

The SDGs were accompanied by other parallel adoptions namely, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, respectively, in the same year. These three conventions are interdependent and mutually reinforcing vehicles to inclusive, disaster and climate change resilient sustainable development. The SGDs adopted Climate Action among 17 goals (Goal 13) and mainstreamed Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) across various targets and indicators. DRR includes tackling poverty, ending hunger, ensuring healthy lives, education, sustainable management of water, building resilient infrastructure, resilient cities, climate change and marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Hence, it became universally acknowledged that development that's not disaster resilient and climate adaptive would not be sustainable by itself.

## **Caste-based Discrimination in Disaster Risk Reduction**

It is incontestable that disasters hit the vulnerable sections of the society such as women, persons with disabilities, and groups that are socially excluded and discriminated based on their identity emanating from caste, religion or ethnicity. This has long been established by eye-opening accounts the civil society groups in India that have studied the impact of disasters on communities discriminated based on their caste, the Scheduled Castes (formerly derided as the untouchables) vis-a-vis their pre-existing social, economic and political vulnerabilities. Globally, 260 million Scheduled Castes face discrimination based on work and decent (DWD), and day-to-day discrimination as well as in disaster responses are highly predictable, where they exist.

As per Sachar Committee report, 90 percent of Buddhists, 9 percent of Christians, 31 percent of Sikhs and 22 percent of Hindus belong to Scheduled Caste category. According to the ArjunSen Gupta Committee Report, Dalits constitute 81 percent of India's vulnerable. Given the vulnerability profile of India is increasing, marginalisation and poverty are feeding into the vicious cycle of disaster vulnerability for the Dalits in the country. The caste system is an internalized and institutionalized system at all levels. While legislation has been enacted to outlaw caste-based discrimination, the reality of caste induced intergenerational vulnerabilities cannot be ignored, because it is linked with resilience building, through localised planning. Any failure to recognize the caste system or any active caste discrimination obviously presents a challenge for resilience building in India (Adam Craggs, Resilience, and Caste in Orissa, India, 2011).

Whilst the SDGs have dedicated goals on Poverty Reduction (Goal 1) and Reducing Inequality (Goal 10) within and among nations, they failed to recognize caste (decent based discrimination), which was in negotiation for nearly three years, retorted Dalit rights activists across South Asia. This was a critical lapse, and SDGs were doubted to be equipped to deal with exclusion and historic deprivation associated with caste. Discrimination based on work and descent (caste) is an important determinant for the exclusion of a large section of the global population, with 260 million Dalits around the world. Having caste recognized in the list of "indicators", which will be used to monitor the implementation of the SDGs would have ensured actions by nation states in combating it.

Regionally and nationally, the no systems or approach exist to monitor the effectiveness of international conventions at local levels. The SDGs and so does the DRR and Climate Change Conventions lack the approach of human rights and equity. The SDGs do not indicate or seek to establish means by which inclusive disaster risk management needs operationalization and monitoring based on the principles of equality of rights and opportunities, the dignity of the individual that together would contribute to resilience for everyone.

Discrimination by default' is as much an issue as discrimination by norm and intent and is prevalent within both civil society and administration. Even in cases where there is no intentional bias against Dalit communities, the lack of knowledge about their vulnerabilities, not mapping their habitations and prevalent norms of operations result in the administration not taking the cause of Dalit and other marginalized communities in times of disaster. Often this is also co-existent and accentuated with the overt and covert dominant community bias and pressures.

## **Disaster Profile of South Asia**

South Asia, on the one hand, is presumed to be one of the fastest growing economies by the World Bank's recent estimates, on the other as the most vulnerable region to natural disasters like flood, cyclone, and landslides call for immediate attention by humanitarian stakeholders and policymakers.

More than 50 percent of the population in the region have affected by at least one natural disaster. The natural disaster has reported almost 230,000 deaths and about US\$45 billion in damages in the period between 1990 and 2008.

A rigorous compilation and analyses of disaster data during the year 2011 demonstrated that South Asia had experienced climate change induced hydro-meteorological and geophysical natural disasters (Flood, coastal floods, mass movement, and Earthquake). The areas and populations that face the highest risk from natural disasters are located in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Over the years, principles and means for achieving disaster resilience among the vulnerable and deprived communities are agreed upon in Hyogo Framework for Action, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter, and other such (national) standards, which needs transformation into social policies and operational mechanisms for the respective organizations in addressing exclusion.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948). Therefore, Dalit rights violation needs adequate attention and mainstreamed into the humanitarian programmes of the civil society and the government. To make this inclusion possible, the very first step is to have the knowledge of their pre-existing vulnerabilities of Dalits worsen in disaster.

There is no disaggregated data available on the no. of lives affected by disasters by natural disasters and climate change patterns, in South Asia. Given the consolidated government figures on total no. of people affected, studies by civil society organisations have shown that the Dalits in South Asia constitute the majority of victims facing this form of structural discrimination, which leads to marginalisation, social and economic exclusion and limited access to basic services, including water and sanitation even in disaster times. Otherwise, also, they live in conditions that render them vulnerable, and this vulnerability is compounded by disasters. Be it the changing and unsustainable agricultural practices owing to climate change patterns or the natural (water based) disasters induced by climate change, they are the ones at the receiving end. Given their direct dependence on agriculture and precarious marginal farmers and sharecroppers), their capacity to bounce back is low.

The socially excluded communities, especially the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, disproportionately bear the consequences of climate change. Already residing in the least hospitable environment in urban and rural areas, including forests, they are the first and most severely affected. They are the last to get relief and sometimes are actively prevented from getting relief. Yet, the present institutional mechanisms for disaster management do not recognize caste induced vulnerabilities. Casualties and damage or loss of properties, infrastructure, environment, essential services or means of livelihood on such a scale are beyond the normal capacity of the affected Dalit communities to cope with.

There is a need for proper state support to develop the adaptation mechanism of Dalits and support livelihood diversification strategies. Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation need to inform the social protection policy so the poor Dalits and other marginalised sections need shields from shocks and risks owing to climate change and their livelihoods protected effectively.

Unlike indigenous communities, the state neither recognises Dalit communities as local minority communities nor acknowledges their contribution to biodiversity conservation. Any policy or programme that does not include Dalit communities among the biodiversity-dependent set of communities remains highly subcritical in adopting adaptation and mitigation measures.

## Profile of Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia

### 1. India

India was among the top three most disaster-hit countries in 2015, with economic losses amounting to \$ 3.30 billion (UNISDR, 2016). The report of the UNISDR titled "Human Cost of Weather-Related Disaster," says that India had 19 disaster events including floods, droughts and heat waves in 2015. Of the 27.5 million people affected by floods in 2015, 16.4 were in India. India also witnessed 2248 deaths in 2015 due to heat waves. The country faces a formidable range of both man-made and natural hazards as evidenced by the drought affecting over 300 million people. Though the number of deaths due to disasters has decreased, on an average 20,000 lives are lost in India every year due to natural disasters. However, even these data are highly contested.

An analysis of the increasing hazard vulnerability and disaster profile of India with the multifaceted marginalisation of Dalits poses serious challenges to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly those relating to DRR tied to Climate Change Adaptation and Poverty Reduction. In a caste-ridden society and polity as in India, discrimination in disaster response is highly predictable; discrimination happens by default, and thus requires more than just a standard neutral protocol to respond. Concisely, informed and inclusive DRR and Climate Change Adaptation would require, a recognition of caste vulnerabilities and marginalisation; diversity in disaster response teams across levels; and an empowerment approach with awareness on rights and entitlements, and a sound policy and budgetary provision to arrest caste induced disaster vulnerabilities.

The Government has rightly identified issues of distressed farmers battered by climate vagaries and the agrarian downturn in there (draft) Three-Year Action Agenda covering years 2017-18 to 2019-20. Approximately 16 percent of India's geographic area, mostly arid, semi-arid and sub-humid is drought-prone. Severe droughts were witnessed by at least 10 states of India, namely, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Regions like Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh and Marathwada and Vidarbha in Maharashtra have been infamous for recording a high number of farmers' suicides coinciding with undulating drought spells. As many as 3,228 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra in 2015, the highest since 2001, according to data tabled in the RajyaSabha on March 4, 2016—that is almost nine farmers every day. However, drought and longer dry spells are an outfall of climate notoriety; droughts give enough warnings and time to the authorities to swing into preparedness actions. Hence, while droughts cannot be mitigated, their effects can be moderated and neutralized. However, the issue here has been of the failure of governance, and poor groundwater governance, to be precise.

Whilst the effect on the landowners has been distressingly visible, administration and popular media have been blind to the plight of those without land- the Dalits. India is primarily an agrarian economy that employs over 50% of the population. As crops are adversely affected, agricultural income shrinks and causes loss of employment in the agriculture sector. Drought affects the dignity of Dalits hardest when they are reduced to beg for work. For instance, around a fifth of Marathwada's inhabitants are Dalits, with little or no access to land. With the drying up of work, landless Dalits have just to migrate, sometimes with their women and children, leaving behind the aged who cannot travel. Those staying back in the village have even few options. They do not get rations easily at the shops and are often always the last beneficiaries of any government welfare scheme. If water crisis continues, they manage to get some water through the tankers provided by the government, but those would reach them only last.

During droughts, borewells dry up, and hunt for water becomes another risk for women and children, walking long distances, many a time when they can't access the same borewells always as those of dominant communities only to be chased away by the owners. Denial of water for being Dalit motivated BapuraoTajneto single handed dig a well for his family and community in village Kolambeshwar,



Washim district, Maharashtra's issue was later taken up by the authorities under Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. This was when the relief and rehabilitation department reported nearly half of the 4,356 drinking water tankers were sent to Maharashtra till mid-April 2016 were earmarked for Marathwada.

Months after the hailstorm, the Government announced a compensation package at the rate of Rs 2000 per hectare. "I don't have even one hectare of land so the government did not think I needed compensation," said Mujumule. However, the dominant caste landowners in the village got Rs 25000-30000 for their larger fields. For the investment of Rs 650,000 made in 2015, he managed to harvest only Rs, 15000 worth of crops. Now to make ends meet, Mujumule started cutting sugarcane and doing other odd jobs in nearby towns (Drought delivers an unequal blow: Dalits are the worst hit, April 06, 2015, Scroll.in)

## **2. Nepal**

Nepal is a hot belt for wide ranges of disasters including earthquakes, landslides, floods, forest fire, and thunderbolts. Economic Vulnerability Analysis shows that Nepal exhibits the largest losses due to large exposure at risk and the high level of hazards. As a matter of these phenomena, not only cause loss of lives and properties, but also pose severe threats to physical infrastructure, and also disrupt economic development.

In Nepal, Dalits communities have been traditionally excluded and subjected to several forms of inhuman treatments due to the caste-based stigma. There are many recorded forms of discrimination, untouchability, and exclusion by the so-called 'high/upper castes. Several study reports also state that the Dalit communities face social and economic discrimination in diverse fields like denial of entry into the temples, not served food with others in social gatherings like festivals and wedding parties, not purchasing milk from Dalits and many more.

Due to such routine forms of discrimination and exclusion, the socio-economic status/conditions of the Dalits are low in comparison to the other (higher) castes. Illiteracy is extensive among Dalits and exceptionally low percentages of the community have accessed and received higher education. Land ownership is negligible among the Dalits. About 85 to 90 percent of the Madhesi Dalits are landless. Among the Musahar, only 3 to 5 percent of them may have ownership to piece of land. Some major issues of Dalits have been incorporated in the Interim Constitution but many issues raised by the Dalit movement of Nepal are left out as usual.

The Nepal Government has generally ignored to implement the positive constitutional rules strictly and effectively. Nepal is a signatory state to a number of international conventions with regard to the Dalits, but there are problems in its implementation. For 12 years (1990-2002) of parliamentary process, no legislation related to Dalits was tabled and passed. No government until now has initiated an effort to make laws against caste-based discrimination through the legislative body. Dalits' representation in the Interim Legislature-Parliament is only 5.4 percent as against the demand of the Dalit movement for proportional representation and special rights.

One of the most horrific disasters affected in Nepal was 2015 earthquake, which resulted in mass destruction and thousands of deaths. The Dalit community was one of the most affected during this disaster. In a study conducted by Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee and Asia, Dalit Rights Forum (2015) found that the Dalits communities were categorically discriminated from disaster management, relief, and rehabilitation. The main concerns included the settlements which were often not concrete were totally destroyed, they often have to sleep under the open sky as there were no tents or temporary shelter was provided by the authorities or aid agencies.

The Dalit settlement was often segregated to unreached or under-reached locations within the villages, with no proper commutation facilities, thus they were the last people to get aid, and more often non-recipient of the aid or relief. No food or water was provided to these communities especially those who are settled in the villages. These communities who live under much economic stagnation due to their sources of income from unskilled or manual labors.

There is no comprehensive national policy or Act that includes established principles of non-discrimination and social inclusion related to the administration of humanitarian aid and its delivery process for disaster risk reduction and disaster management. There is a lack of disaggregated data available on the beneficiaries of disaster management interventions. This makes it impossible to be able to assess the extent to which Dalits are being included as beneficiaries.

The Government of Nepal lacks long-lasting and sustainable programs for shifting the Dalit community to safe areas as an alternative residential settlement. This would help to protect them from disasters, as their settlements are generally more vulnerable. The preparedness policies and mechanisms of the Government of Nepal are not scientifically sound, nor are the assistance measures adopted by the Government of Nepal during and after disasters. The existing legal regime fails to provide for the establishment of early warning systems or development projects in disaster-prone areas. Moreover, there is no effective deployment of rapid response due to the lack of emergency operation centers on standby with adequate foods and other necessities. All this has a strong impact on vulnerable Dalit communities.

### **3. Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, Dalits are one of the invisible communities as they have no constitutional recognition or legal identity. Over 40 percent of its inhabitants live below poverty line and are frequently susceptible to natural disasters. In terms of accessing relief and rehabilitation at the time of disasters, both Muslim and Hindu Dalits face discrimination to some extent. They are not given due help or co-operation because of their identity. In the villages, the local authority tries to oblige the non-Dalits, even though they might not need any help/co-operation in disaster mitigation. Again, in the selection of items during relief etc., Dalits do not have any voice or choice; whereas the non-Dalits are allowed to select items at their own choice.

There are no national standards, measures or mechanisms in Bangladesh that provide a framework for investigating alleged cases in which Dalits are denied equal assistance or benefits, or cases in which they have been discriminated against during the relief, rehabilitation and development processes. Neither there is any mechanism to compensate or retroactively grant such benefits to the victims of affected communities.

At most, the National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015 states that the Disaster Management Vision is to reduce the risk of people, especially the poor and the disadvantaged, from the effects of natural, environmental and human-induced hazards, to a manageable and acceptable humanitarian level, and to have in place an efficient emergency response system capable of handling large-scale disasters. (Vision of the National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015).

National mechanisms for disaster management, relief and rehabilitation do not refer to Dalits in particular, nor provide grievance redress mechanisms that they can access in case of facing any discrimination in disaster relief and rehabilitation programmes. Without specific grievance redress mechanisms mandated under the law, district disaster management authorities and the state executive committees are not obliged to investigate cases of the denial of humanitarian relief. (Benchmarking the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on Work and Descent, 2014)

At the same time, studies have shown that in terms of accessing relief and rehabilitation at the time of

disasters, both Muslim and Hindu Dalits face discrimination to some extent. They are not given due help or cooperation because of their caste identity. In the villages, the local authorities try to oblige the Dalits, even though they might not require any help for disaster mitigation. Again, in the selection of items during relief, etc., Dalits do not have any voice or choice; whereas non-Dalits are allowed to select items of their own choice. Such cases do not get investigated. (Chowdhury, IftekharUddin. (2009). 'Caste Based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh', Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Working Paper Series, Volume III, No. 7, New Delhi, p. 29)

In another study, over a five year period, over half the Dalit households had experienced the adverse effects of primarily floods and cyclones. The destruction wrought by natural disasters was compensated to some extent by the relief provided by the government, NGOs, and individuals. While some Dalit households reported having received such relief, an average of 80% of the 373 households surveyed reported non-receipt of relief materials. Moreover, over 20% of Dalit households reported having faced problems to receive relief. Ordeals at the time of receiving relief included factional favoritism, class biases, kinship or religiosity. Both primordial and structural factors in sociological terms come to affect the distribution of relief. (Khan, Mezbah et al. (2010). Dalits in Bangladesh: A Study on Deprivation. Dhaka: Research and Development Collective)

#### **4. Pakistan**

Pakistan, like Bangladesh, provides no constitutional recognition and safeguards to the Dalits in the country. From the turn of the millennium Pakistan have faced multiple disasters, including, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, floods, and droughts. In his book on Disaster in South Asia: A Regional Perspective, Nasser Memon (2012) explains that vastness of effect on the marginalized communities of these disasters. He says "In 2005 the country was struck by a disastrous earthquake killing more than 73,000 people. During the last decade, the country has witnessed devastating cyclones and floods. A cyclone struck in the southern province of Sindh in 1999. It wiped out 73 settlements and resulted in 168 lives lost, nearly 0.6 million people affected and killing of 11,000 cattle. It destroyed 1,800 small and big boats and partially damaged 642 boats, causing a loss of Rs380 million. The losses to the infrastructure were estimated at Rs 750 million. In June 2007, more than 200 people died during severe storms in Karachi...Cyclone Yemyin struck the coastal areas of Balochistan resulting in flash floods claiming the lives of 730 people while some 350,000 people were displaced, 1.5 million affected and more than two million livestock perished" (Nasser Memon, 2012)

Realizing the importance of disaster risk reduction for sustainable social, economic and environmental development, Government of Pakistan embarked upon establishing appropriate policy, legal and institutional arrangements, and implementing strategies and programmes to minimize risks and vulnerabilities. In October 2010 National Assembly of Pakistan passed the National Disaster Management Bill 2010 to provide for the establishment of the National Disaster Management System in the country. (Nasser Memon, 2012)

The situation of Dalits in Pakistan was reported to be highly appalling. According to Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), hundreds of thousands of Dalits were affected by the floods in Pakistan in mid-August 2010, and many of them were denied access to relief camps by Muslims while they also experienced other forms of discrimination when seeking assistance. There is only limited disaggregated data available on the affected population. Moreover, the federal government's ban on non-governmental organisations and international donors to work in these areas for "security reasons", added to their agony, while the government itself was still to commence their relief operation.

#### **5. Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has three parallel caste systems for each of the country's main population groups: the Sinhalese majority; the Sri Lankan Tamils to the north and east; and the Indian Tamils who are mainly

found in the tea plantations and at the bottom of the urban social hierarchy. Within the Sinhala community, the lower caste groups including the Rodi are the ones that occupy the lowest position in the caste system. They have low levels of education, suffer extreme poverty and lack of assets and are under constant pressure to pursue hereditary caste occupations, such as removing dead animals and dirt. The Rodi continue to be segregated particularly with regards to their residence with little or no proximity to the upper caste community.

Among the Sri Lanka Tamil caste system, the bottom status is collectively occupied by different groups identified as Panchamar and are considered untouchables. The Indian Tamils trace its origin back to the colonial era when they were brought to the plantations as indentured labourers. Although the Sinhalese have managed to overcome their low caste status in the caste hierarchy through the Sri Lankan Welfare state, the Tamil Dalits still continue to face caste-based discrimination. While the caste system has diminished over the years, but some of its forms still continue to exist. "Unlike the Hindu caste system founded on the basis of religious notions of purity and pollution, the caste systems in Sri Lanka have relied more on a kind of secular ranking upheld by the state, land ownership and tenure, religious organisations and rituals, and firmly-rooted notions of inherent superiority and inferiority" (Shah, 2012). Women can be seen especially as the vulnerable group because of the widespread ethnic, caste, class and gender discriminations faced by them.

Though caste is recognized and caste discrimination is firmly entrenched in the society, the issue is rarely discussed in public. More than 150 years of social exclusion and the restriction of movement for Indian Tamil plantation workers, is a clear indication of the 'caste-blind' policies of both state and non-state actors including international agencies, which do not address caste discrimination in Sri Lanka. The estimated number of Dalits experiencing caste discrimination in Sri Lanka is 4 to 5 million, or 20 to 30 percent of the total population. In Sri Lanka, there is no common identity as 'Dalits' among the 'lower' castes and it has been difficult for them to organize themselves, in contrast to the situation of Dalits of India and Nepal.

The tsunami struck Sri Lanka with devastating force and aggravated the tensions among those who already were displaced by ethnic tension and forced to move to low-lying land. They were denied dry food rations in the refugee shelter, apparently for hailing from the so-called lower caste. Post-Tsunami, humanitarian aid has more or less focused on mainstreamed communities like Sinhalese, Tamil speaking population and Muslims. However the plantation populations and the lower caste population has hardly rehabilitated in any forms of disaster, be it an earthquake, floods, landslides or other forms of disasters. There is the constant effort for inclusion, but the social mindset and ethnic divide has halted the reach of these initiatives.

## **Achieving Sustainable and Resilient communities**

Resilience in development practices is often understood through ecological systems and socio-ecological systems. Thus, resilience has its core under the social, economic, political and environmental development. European Sustainable Development Network (2012) states that sustainable development has the objective of creating and maintaining prosperous social, economic and ecological systems, thus humanity has the imperative of striving for resilient socio-ecological systems in the light of sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015, a focused attempt to reducing poverty globally, has also ensured the importance of environment with socio-economic and political development as well as human rights its core, has furthered the understanding of resilience in developmental. The humanitarian aid focuses on conflict and hazards (either man-made or natural). However, resilience is one key element that has been core to the dialogues in this sphere. The resilience

of the conflict or hazard affected communities is seen in the light of their capabilities to bounce back to the normal.

Susan Nicholas (2012) explains the importance of communication in the community resilience. The developmental theories also give importance to communication or participation in the process of development and governance. SDGs has announced itself to the world as a grass root driven programme with its core in inclusion and participation with its motto of 'Leaving No One Behind. SDGs effectively called for an inverse approach to development, with reaching the furthest first approach. It focuses on the marginalized and vulnerable communities first for ensuring development through the reverse development process. Inclusion, participation, and communication of often unreached or under-reached communities with special attention to human rights have given SDGs a universal appeal and nod.

In theory, SDG has its core in the right place, however, with immense power with the states, the bottoms up approach have soon replaced by the status quo of top down.

The concept of resilience is often used in addressing the vulnerabilities and vulnerable people. The three important factors associated with maintaining resilience are Diversity, Modularity, and Feedback. Marginalized communities are most affected by any forms of shocks, not just the ecological shocks. Socio-economic shocks cause more damages than the environmental shocks for these communities. In case of indigenous population, the forest is not just the environmental concern, but socio-economic and political concern, thus any forms land dispute or deforestation affects them more dearly. Similarly, many other marginalized communities face day-to-day basis shocks, thus making them vulnerable.

The resiliency depends on three major abilities, first, the material-physical ability to be resilience, i.e., having potential assets for recuperation from any form of disaster. Secondly, the psychological ability to be resilient, i.e., the person's or communities' enhanced ability to overcome disaster and capacitated mindset to bouncing back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune. Thirdly the social ability to be resilient, through attaining inclusive policies and programmes to ensure relief, aid, and rehabilitation from the state or other institutions.

These three major abilities are crucial and which categorizes a person or community's ability to be sustainable resilience. Thus most of the communities may have the capacity to achieve at least partial resiliency, but Dalit community who has been excluded from socio-economic and political rights are could be categorized as un-resilient communities.

The lack of movable or immovable assets has core towards achieving sustainability and resilience or sustainable resilience. Dalits in South Asian countries often lack such assets, be it land or any other forms of material assets. Therefore, these communities have very low independence towards self-rehabilitation mechanisms. In India and Nepal, less than 1 percent of the land is owned by Dalit families, while in Bangladesh, Pakistan it further goes down under 0.2 percent. In Sri Lanka, according to the UN Women Report on Access to Economic rights the ownership of land is close to 0 percent. Thus there is a disconnect towards these communities of being truly resilient.

The intergenerational dependence and exclusion faced by these communities and the social outlook towards them have seldom changed even in the modern era. Thus, their psychological capacities have also been suppressed towards dependency. Such factors have led to undermining of psychological and mental ability towards ensuring the equitable platform has been lopsided approach from the public and private institutions. Thus exploiting their dependency on other for underpaid and even unpaid jobs. Thus they have near to no psychological capacity for overcoming such adversity or frustration or misfortune.

Finally the social ability, by the discussion of the earlier two pointers, we could say is not in favor of these communities. The social stigma and mindset have been key factors for the underdevelopment of these

communities and such social stigma and exclusionary practices often exist in the society even in times of disaster management. Resilience by itself pre-requisites availability and access to better living conditions, stable livelihood and assured income, food and healthcare, and hazard-resistant housing and other community infrastructure. These absence or prevalence of these essential services are both a cause and consequence of the caste system, which has systematically and systemically perpetuated inequality, to the extent of denying Dalits the ownership over natural resources or means of development, like land, cascading into other forms of deprivations. This, hence, explains the dependence of Dalits on resource owning dominant caste communities for daily sustenance. In India, most of them are agricultural laborers (hence victims of climate vagaries and natural disasters) and unorganized sector workers with no or poorly implemented social security programmes. This has allowed Dalit to live in a segregated manner, mostly occupying freely available or scantily provided for ghettoized dwellings in the low-lying areas.

In the UN High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs, which is tasked by the UN to oversee the implementation of the SDGs, periodical review and share lessons among the countries, 25 countries made a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the status of implementation of the SDGs. In 2017, 44 countries including India have committed to do a VNR. The Governments presented its achievements post-SDGs but nothing got reported on the initiatives taken for DRR, with measures under climate change adaptation being focused on farming and small and marginal farmers leaving out the agricultural labourers. There are links between Climate Change and biodiversity. Conserving biodiversity and restoring degraded ecosystems climate change adaptation, and providing a wide range of ecosystem-based services that are essential for the livelihoods of biodiversity-dependent communities such as Dalits.

## Conclusion

This year the theme of HLPF is (moving) 'Towards Sustainable and Resilience Communities', which explores SDGs to move towards creating resilient and sustainable communities by 2030. However, the focus on the known realities and functions has limited its approach to focus on the much-needed aspects of inclusion, i.e. elimination of exclusion and exclusionary or discriminatory mechanisms. The need is for ensuring social, economic, political and legal inclusion through focusing on the most excluded communities for ensuring capacities and resilience against disasters and ensure active participation in the disaster management in tune with Sendai Framework.

Dalits being one of the key communities of exclusion in South Asia, needs to be addressed by all the major players in the Sustainable Development Goals, not just pertaining to the governments. Governments need to bring inclusive and participatory policies for ensuring that communities are properly implemented for bringing them into the mainstream disaster management. The aim should be towards sustainable resilience for these communities and this would be only possible with achieving all the other intersecting goals and targets within the SDGs.

## Recommendations

1. The Human Rights Council and its members should call on caste-affected states to act on the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, in her report on caste discrimination.
2. The Human Rights Council and its members should promote and endorse the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, and institutionalize regular reporting and effective dialogue on the elimination of discrimination based on caste and analogous forms of inherited status.
3. The UNISDR must be entrusted with the responsibility to periodically review progress to UN Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (presently the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction) viz-a-viz the SDGs and indicators at national, regional and international levels.
4. Conduct the Universal Periodic Review of UN Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction and engagement with the Permanent Representative of the Open Working Group on SDGs.
5. The UN HRC must designate a Special Rapporteur to review countries' situation on the UN Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience, in collaboration with UNISDR.
6. Mandate the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity, Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, to review and integrate elements of DRR in their thematic and country mandates when reviewing the country in relation with SDGs.

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