

# Concerns of Dalit women in High Level Political Forum- 2017 on Sustainable Development



**Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)**

*For a just and equitable society*



*Dalit women's group from Titiriya, Nepalgunj organized to fight against the unjust practices*

*This paper, compiled by the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) of Nepal in consultation with Dalit women's groups, seeks to inform the international community on the occasion of the High Level Political Forum on the SDGs 2017. It lays out the situation for Dalit women in Nepal, including the protections, the achievements and the challenges, and makes recommendations to governments and donors on the implementation of the gender provisions of the SDGs, to ensure that Dalit women's rights are achieved and that no-one is left behind.*

## Introduction

The Government of Nepal's commitment to women's rights is promising. Nepal has been a signatory to all the major international human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965) and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979). Further, the Government of Nepal committed and took steps to implement the MDGs through their development plans and policies.

Along with signing the treaties, Nepal has also passed and amended many legislations and provision of laws to improve the status of women, including the Gender Equality Act 2006, the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act 2007, the 12th Amendment of Country Code that criminalize witchcraft and recognizes it as a crime against state, the Domestic Violence Act 2008, and the Gender-based Violence Act 2011. Due to the policy-level commitment to achieve the targets set by MDGs, Nepal was able to achieve a remarkable stride in meeting the MDG indicators, including reduction of poverty and hunger, increase in the school enrollment rate and decrease in the maternal mortality rate (MMR). The progress is also noticeable in other indicators- women empowerment, environmental sustainability and global partnership for development (MDG Report, 2013). However, the report has also clearly stated the challenges in achieving the MDGs. The inequality and discrimination between male and female and the marginalization of Dalit and indigenous people are still high in the country; and not attained by the MDGs.

During the MDG phase, Nepal's achievement in bringing down the poverty and improving basic health of the people was appreciated by the international community. While many poor countries around the world failed to meet the MDG goals, Nepal was noted for its achievements. This was a particular achievement for a country that had faced violent conflict for more than a decade, followed by political instability. However, the achievements made by the government during the MDG implementation were still not felt in the daily lives of the Dalit community and Dalit women of Nepal.

Now that the MDGs have been replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals for inclusive and progressive development, there is an opportunity to learn the lessons of the past and look forward to a society where the achievement of all women's rights is a reality. As important as SDGs are to aid the development plans and policies- to empower and promote the social, political, economic or other status; it is even more vital from the perspective of Dalit women so that they are not left behind. The **Leave no one behind** principle, which is at the heart of 2030 agenda, can be only achieved when **first priority is given to those who are the most marginalised i.e. Dalit women**. Dalit women and girls should be the main right holders of development and one of the main target groups of sustainable development.

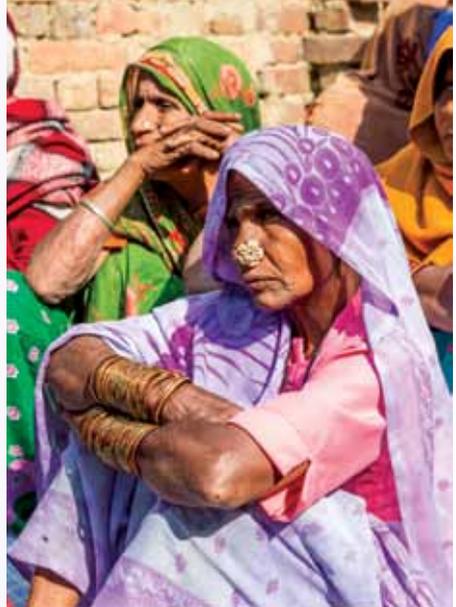
In order to achieve the SDGs by 2030 for everyone, including the Dalit community, concerted government effort should be urgently provided to support the overall

development of Dalit community, and especially Dalit women to **a) end caste-based discrimination and untouchability, b) ensure that living standards are equal with other communities, and c) eliminate poverty.** Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) has also been playing an important role from the very beginning of the SDG process to raise awareness amongst local stakeholders. Whilst many policymakers and members of the public have been engaged in the creation of the SDGs than the MDGs; now the attention must be focused on its implementation.

## Situation of Dalit Women in Nepal

Dalit community constitute 13.2 percent of Nepal's population where more than half of it are Dalit women who are the most marginalized group amongst the marginalized. Dalit women suffer from triple discrimination as oppressed by the so-called high caste people (which affects both male and female Dalits), oppressed by the design of the Hindu patriarchal system and oppressed by Dalit male counterparts. We face the problems led by Untouchability, caste and gender-based discrimination in our daily lives, and excluded from both the public and private spheres.

The exclusion, deprivation and discrimination faced by Dalit women are chronic and multidimensional. Extreme poverty, illiteracy, landlessness, restricted livelihood options, poor access to resources, discouraged entrepreneurship and poor participation in political and decision making processes are key problems faced by Dalit women leading to a very poor development indicators. We are also subjected to caste and gender-based discrimination, physical, sexual and psychological abuse, prone to trafficking and child marriage, victims of accusation of witchcraft, boycotted by the society during inter-caste marriage and are likely to unsafe migration.



*Chithkala Dhobi, aged 60, is a member of Dalit Women Group in Purina village, Nepalgunj, Nepal.*

Further, there is a high rate of occurrence of GBV and caste-based discrimination against Dalit women and girls. Based on research done by FEDO in 2013, 30.7% of Dalit women have claimed to face discrimination on a daily basis;

which is even high in the eastern part of the country where 50.6% Dalit women experience violence on a daily basis. Forms of violence include physical and sexual, verbal and psychological abuse, harassment, obstacles to obtaining basic services and entitlements such as legal identity documents property inheritance, child education allowances, as well as socio-cultural practices such as child marriage, abuse from in-laws, dowry-related violence, polygamy, Chhaupadi (the practice of keeping menstruating women in a small shed away from the main house), accusations of witchcraft, and trafficking. In this backdrop, Dalit women are ignored, their voices go unheard, and their participation is denied from human rights as stipulated by the international convention corresponding to the constitutional and legal provision of the country.

## Socio-economic situation of Dalit Community

S.N.	Socio-economic Situation	Percent among Dalit community	National Average
1.	Poverty	42 %	23.8 %
2.	Literacy	49 %	59 %
3.	Landlessness	55.1 % (Terai Dalit) 15 % (Hill Dalit)	22.1 %
4.	Standard Housing	11.1 %	28 %
5.	Use of toilet	30.6 % (Hill Dalit) 13.3 % (Terai Dalit)	41.7 %
6.	Use of Liquid Petroleum Gas	15.4 % (Hill Dalit) 13.3 % (Terai Dalit)	23.4 %
7.	Professional employment	¼ %	6.1 %
8.	Life expectancy	67.17 year	68.8 year
9.	HDI	0.446 (Hill Dalit) 0.400 (Terai Dalit)	0.490

Source: SDGs and Issues of Dalit and Dalit women, FEDO publication, 2017.



*A dalit woman from Bajura, involved in aggregate making for her survival.*



*Titiriya Dalit Women's Group set up by FEDO in Titiriya village, Nepalgunj, Nepal.*

## Call for Action

Along with the women movement FEDO has successfully trained and empowered Dalit women in order that their voices can be heard and can claim their rights. This has led to historic achievements for Dalit communities, where the fundamental human rights of Dalit women are recognized and included in the new constitution. This is the result of tireless efforts of FEDO itself and the collective efforts of Dalit Civil Society groups and Dalit organizations through regular lobbying and advocacy at different levels.

FEDO on behalf of Dalit women in Nepal strongly raises the concerns of Dalit women, and calls for renewed political will and action in ensuring the realization and full implementation of SDG-5. Implementation must be inclusive and participatory, and harness the capacities of all sectors for the benefit of Dalit women. We respect the commitment of the Government of Nepal for volunteering a National Review in the High Level Political Forum 2017, and request that they now commit to accelerate the process of localization of SDGs in order to achieve effective implementation of Agenda 2030.

The following action should be taken to address the issues of Dalit women in achieving gender equality and empowerment of Dalit women and girls and its targets.

- Review and analyze the impact and output of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) comprehensively to realize the issues of Dalit community – what and how they were addressed in Nepal prior to developing effective strategy to achieve SDGs. The gender issues should be analyzed very wisely from the lens of Dalit women.
- Review domestic policy frameworks and processes to identify how they can align with the SDGs and facilitate effective implementation. Civil society, including women’s rights organizations and Dalit groups, should assist the government during the process of policy review and development.
- The government of Nepal should strengthen its measures to effectively implement the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act and eliminate all forms of discrimination against the Dalit community, as recommended by the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) in 2014. In particular, by sensitizing law enforcement officials, investigating and prosecuting those responsible for discrimination against Dalit and conducting awareness-raising campaigns on the rights of Dalit, as recommended by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in 2014.
- Dalit women should be empowered to exercise their rights to the resources and services such as inheritance, education allowances, health and legal services.
- Government of Nepal should work to promote women’s economic rights and regulate informal sector to prevent Dalit women from exploitation and violence.

- Legislation should be enacted and implemented to ensure the meaningful participation of Dalit women at decision making level of the constitutional, administrative, and security bodies. Furthermore, the government should set concrete goals and timetables so as to accelerate the representation of Dalit women in elected and appointed bodies in all areas of public life.
- Design appropriate policy, program and budget for the development and upliftment of entire Dalit community, including declaration of Dalit Rights Decade at the national level to implement it effectively and efficiently. First priority should be given to Dalit women whilst designing policy, program and budget from local to national level.
- Make relevant ministries, government agencies, law enforcement agencies and civil society much more inclusive, effective, responsive and accountable as envisaged in SDG-5.
- High level monitoring and evaluation should be formed from among expert, government officials including representation of Dalit community to monitor the effective domestic implementation of conventions and treaties ratified by the government of Nepal at international level.
- Government should draw on the skills and resources of civil society to maximize the impact of their efforts to raise awareness amongst local stakeholders about the SDGs.
- Set local indicators with accurate and disaggregated data of Dalit community including women and Terai Dalit. While monitoring and reviewing of indicators and data, consultation should be made of the participation of Dalit community.
- Donor agencies should give first priority to Dalit community for inclusive development of Nepal. International development agencies and donors should be supportive in preparing essential strategy, policy, program and budget and also coordinate and work with Dalit community.

## **About FEDO**

*Feminist Dalit Organization, (FEDO), has been working to protect and promote civil and political rights of Dalit women, uplift their socio-economic status, and create a movement against caste and gender-based discrimination. FEDO's main aim is to bring changes in the lives of Dalit women by increased representation and leadership in public spheres, enhancing social recognition, and providing economic and livelihood opportunities. Our priority is to contribute to eliminating gender and caste-based discrimination by making the duty bearers responsive and right holders pro-active towards enhancing equal rights and opportunities. FEDO envisions a just and equitable society where Dalit people enjoy their rights and have opportunities to life, equity, development and participation.*

## **Vision**

*FEDO envisions a just and equitable society where Dalit enjoy their rights and have opportunities to life, equity, development and participation.*

## **Mission**

*The mission of FEDO is to create a movement against caste and gender-based discrimination in order to protect and promote civil and political rights of Dalit women and to support their socio-economic empowerment.*

## **Goal**

*The goal of FEDO is to eliminate caste and gender-based discrimination against Dalit women by making duty bearers responsive and right holders pro-active towards enhancing equal rights and opportunities.*



## **Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)**

Head office, Kupandol, Lalitpur

Po.Box No. 4366, Kathmandu, Nepal

Ph: 00977-1-5543986/5520982

Fax: 00977-1-5520982

Email: [dms@fedo.wlink.com.np](mailto:dms@fedo.wlink.com.np)

Facebook: [ww.facebook.com/fedonepal](http://ww.facebook.com/fedonepal)

Website: [www.fedonepal.org](http://www.fedonepal.org)

Blog: [www.dalitwomenofnepal.wordpress.com](http://www.dalitwomenofnepal.wordpress.com)