

Concept note relating to 2-Day Consultations for Advocacy of
Standards for Equitable Disaster Response Practices

Background of the proposed consultations

All those who work with dalits would be painfully aware of the discrimination and exclusion that the Dalits face during disasters. It is not surprising because one would only expect the discrimination and injustice that is ingrained in the social structure to be magnified in times of disaster. Addressing this 'discrimination by default' becomes important as thousands of years of evolution of the caste system plays out during disaster situations and the thousands of years of non-confrontation of the caste norms lead to both civil society and administration operating on existing norms of exclusion and discrimination than equity and inclusion. Stories of disaster response programmes run either by government or by Civil Society Organisations (INGOs and NGOs) contains many sub-stories of how Dalits are being discriminated in all walks of life in various ways. Such stories always do not come into light. Hence conscious steps and choices have to be adopted by the administration to address exclusion of Dalits and other marginalized communities in times of disaster.

In this context it is only evident that the specific vulnerabilities faced by Dalit communities affect and impact their coping mechanisms to disaster as well as their access to response and recovery. An understanding and recognition of these factors would help us build the necessary mechanism to provide adequate and efficient disaster mitigation and response mechanisms. The long term issues of chronic poverty, malnutrition, ill health, migration, inability to access education, child labour, other exploitation among vulnerable communities and inter-community conflicts are accentuated by inappropriate disaster responses.

The *Dalits* are affected severely by natural disasters on account of their limited ability to cope with and recover from the adverse effects. Assessments undertaken by Dalit Watch and various other agencies have often pointed at a relatively greater impact of disasters on the lives of *dalits*. However, responses of various agencies towards reducing the risks and impacts of disasters have often not been able to accord due centrality to *dalits*, either by design or often due to a glaring inability to appreciate or deal with the social dynamics of exclusion of *dalit* communities from disaster mitigation interventions.

With the objective of identifying common forms of exclusion of *dalit* communities during disaster mitigation interventions and for identifying essential safeguards and strategies for equitable responses to disasters, a 2-day consultation is being organized by National Dalit Watch and Dalit Watch Bihar with support from Echo and ActionAid India. The proposed consultation intends to bring together likeminded *dalit*-focused organizations to deliberate upon the same and formulate a set of *dalit*-friendly standards of disaster response.

Specific objectives of the proposed

- Identifying common forms of exclusion of *dalit* communities during disaster mitigation interventions with concrete examples;
- Sharing the experiences of best practices of inclusion of Dalits in the disaster risk management measures undertaken by various organizations;
- Formulating standards dalit inclusion in disaster response, that is sought to be accepted and followed by agencies while intervening for relief, rehabilitation, vulnerability reduction and risk

reduction in disasters. The participants attending the consultations will collectively sign off and ratify the standards.

Participants expected to attend the consultations

The consultation with bringing together representatives of various dalit-focused organizations and networks; victims of disasters belonging to *dalit* communities; representatives of prominent NGOs, INGOs and research agencies, besides constituents of National Dalit Watch and Dalit Watch Bihar.

Dates and venue

The 2-day consultation will be held on **March 4-5, 2010** at **BIHAR VOLUNTARY HEALTH ASSOCIATION, West of Ganga Apartment, Opp.- L C T Ghat, Mainpura Patna-1**. On Day 1, an intense deliberation involving representatives of various *dalit*-focused organizations, networks and *dalit* victims of disaster will be undertaken, outcomes of which will be converted into standards for effective *dalit*-central disaster responses; while on Day 2, the identified standards would be shared with representatives of various prominent agencies that have been implementing disaster response interventions in Bihar.

BROAD AGENDA FOR TWO DAYS CONSULTATION

DAY-ONE; - session from 10.00 AM to 5.30 PM.

- Sharing of case studies on how **Dalits** have been discriminated against during disaster response programs.
- Sharing of case studies, best practices on how **Dalits** are included and provided benefits of positive discriminations during disaster response program.
- Group discussions on how discrimination against **Dalits** can be prevented during disaster response programs and on how positive discrimination can be used to provide equitable support to **Dalits**.
- Plenary session for presentation followed by formation of **core group** for drafting a policy draft on preventing discrimination against **Dalits** during disaster response programs.

EVENING WORK BY CORE GROUP FROM 7.30 PM TO 11.00PM. WITH A BREAK FOR DINNER

DAY TWO; -

- Presentation by the core group on policy on prevention of discrimination against **Dalits** followed by response from NGOs and INGOs engaged in disaster response programs.

- Formation of sub-groups to discuss how NGOs & INGOs can prevent discrimination against **Dalits** in their own disaster response programs and guidelines for positive discrimination in favour of **Dalits**.
- Presentation of sub-groups' reports.
- Open house discussion on how discrimination against **Dalits** can be prevented in Government led disaster response programs and formulation of advocacy agenda on the same.
- Plan for future course of action and formation of network of NGOs, INGOs, and Platforms of Dalits to work further on the issue.