

Statement at the Forum for Minority UN
World Barua Organisation
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Dalit women and effective participation in policy making

Madam Chairperson,

Today's afternoon session focuses on meaningful and effective participation in economic and development policy-making of minorities. This is an issue of serious concern indeed, as minorities are often marginalized from national mainstream policy and decision making.

The caste system is an economic order. It prevents someone from owning land or receiving an education. It is a vicious cycle and an exploitative economic arrangement. Thus, any strategy to combat discrimination against Dalits must begin with a meaningful understanding of the economics of exclusion.

The affirmative action or reservations for Dalits assists less than 1 percent of the Dalit population. There is a large body of legislation and administrative agency mandates assigned exclusively to deal with the plight of Dalits, the laws have benefited a few and, due to a lack of political will, development programs and welfare projects designed to improve economic conditions for Dalits have generally had little effect. For instance, the congress party in its manifesto of National common minimum programme year 2003 proposed reservation for Dalits in private sector but even after 8 years it hasn't yet been implemented. The reservation in private sector is outrightly denied by the corporate sectors which strongly influence the economical policy making processes.

Dalits, are highly excluded from the economic realms, The mainstream sectors such as businesses, market, and media under-represent Dalits. Dalits are especially excluded from the strategic and key positions such as policy and decision making. The political participation of Dalits is limited to Local self government and there too Dalit and especially Dalit women are used as proxies in the hands of the dominant groups. Active participation of Dalits in social, political and economical activities is life threatening for them. Assertive Dalits are killed brutally and Dalit women get raped and murdered. Dalits are mostly employed in decent based work, According to government statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers (a majority of them women).

International bodies such as the UN through the minority forum has initiated action orientated conferences such as this one and it is Governments now, who should comply to and act upon the recommendations put forth for ensuring inclusive, equal, effective economic life for Dalits and minorities.

Government should ensure participation of Dalits in Policy and decision making. Governments should come up with effective mechanisms to implement the affirmative action proposed by the international bodies as well as the policy recommendations made by Dalit civil society. The mechanisms should be backed by effective technology to ensure implementation. Research and development centers devoted to Dalit issues should be created and be equipped to produce publicized disaggregated data demonstrating existing inequalities and to measure and monitor the effective participation of Dalits in economic life.