

# FEMINIST DALIT ORGANISATION

*For a Just and Equitable Society*



## FEDO Organises Province-Level Conference

Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) in a collaboration with Ministry for Social Development, Sudurpaschim Province and Dhangadi Metropolitan organised two-day province-level conference on "Act and Laws Related to Protection of Women's Right and the Development of Policy." The conference took place in Dhangadi, the capital of the Sudurpaschim Province on April 30-May 1.



The conference was formally inaugurated by the Minister for Social Development of Sudurpaschim Province, Krishna Subedi. The opening session of the conference witnessed remarks by the different guests presented on the occasion including Minister for Social Development of Sudurpaschim Province, Krishna Subedi; Special Guest Chief Attorney of Sudurpaschim Province Kulananda Upadhyaya; Mayor of Dhangadi Sub-metropolitan Nripa Bada; Founding President of the FEDO, Durga Sob; various members of Provincial Assembly, Sudurpaschim Province, Representatives of various NGOs/INGOs and government entities among others.



The conference that aimed at reviewing the roles, responsibilities, authority and jurisdiction of locally elected Dalit women in addressing the various issue of Dalits as well as in conducting various development activities in their respective local units, was attended by more than 90 locally elected Dalit women from all 9 districts of the Sudurpaschim province.

The conference was divided into various sessions; each of the session aiming at widening the knowledge of the participants on the selected issues through presentation, discussion and interactions. In one of the sessions, the participants were oriented on “Criminal and Civil Code.” The participants were made aware of types of criminal and civil offence, newly introduced acts and laws related to these how they as an elected representative could deal with these within their jurisdictions. During the session, it was found that among the participants there was no or very limited knowledge about criminal and civil offence due to which, in many occasion, they have tried to solve the cases of criminal offence within themselves rather than going through the required legal process. The session made them aware of criminal and civil offence and their roles, responsibility and jurisdictions, in this connection.



Likewise, the other session focused on orienting the participants about Structures, Functions and Practices of the three-tier government of Nepal with special focus on the local government. In this session, the participants were provided information on how the three-tier government of Nepal works, what are their duties, functions and jurisdictions; how does the decision making the process take places; roles and responsibilities of locally elected representatives in developing policies, making laws, budgeting among others at the local level. In this session, it has been found that the participants have no or very limited knowledge on the function of the local-level government and their authority and jurisdictions within it. Most of the participants shared how they are left out in the decision making process just because they are from the Dalit Community: the so-called low caste. They also complains that they are also excluded in the process of budgeting. This session made them more aware on the process of budgeting and their roles, responsibility and jurisdictions, in this connection.

The conference opened out spaces for critical discussions among the locally elected Dalit Women. It provided a unique opportunity for them to build a network among themselves to realize their own strength and weakness collectively build resilient trajectory for the future. It not only widened the knowledge and expanded the capacity of the participants but also gave them proper space to share their knowledge and experiences and stories so as to inspire and motivate others.

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY?



### Meaningless Participation

"We are barely given with any responsibilities. First of all, we are not informed about the meeting being called. Moreover, by any chance, we happened to attend the meeting then nobody listens to our idea, opinions or proposal. Our roles in the meeting is more or less limited to sign in the minute of meetings. We feel we were there as if just to have snacks served. Thus, we don't feel like attending meetings.

Sometimes, minute of the meeting, of which we are totally unaware of, is send to us to have our signature on it. And if we dare to deny to sign on the minute or ask any question in this connection, then we get various sort of threats in return. We are actually holding a meaningless position."

### Capacity Building Is Must

"Unfortunate but true. Most of the elected Dalit women are not capable to perform their duties as required by the position they held. Some of them are illiterate while some has achieved education upto primary level only. The number of the elected Dalit women who holds the degree of higher studies is very less. Thus, the tasks like financial and budget management are challenging and trainings in these would help them perform better at work. Moreover, there is need for leadership and empowerment training, training and information on law, the constitution, and government policies. Building capacities and supportive environment for women's leadership in local governance is must."



## Challenges Ahead

"Following the long and the continuous struggle, finally, we have been able to have our representation and the participation in the decisionmaking. The record number of Dalit women i.e 6567 have been elected as a ward member. This is an historic achievement which has provided Dalit women to have their role in policy deliberation, reform and implementation for the first time. However, the task is not easy as there are so many obstacles on the way. First of all, this is our first exposure to the formal politics and thus we lack experience in exercising political power. Thanks to the deeply rooted patriarchy, our male counterparts do not support us. In some cases, even our spouse and the families are against of our participation in political and public affairs while the domination and the discrimination from the so-called upper caste counterparts is still remains unquestioned and unchallenged.

Moreover, issues of Dalit and women are not considered while formulating the policies or allocating the budget. With this, it is very challenging for us to meet the expectation of the people."

## Tagged as 'Quota Leader'

"We are always tagged as a 'quota leaders' from the other elected representatives. Our effort, contribution and commitments are never acknowledged. Citing that we have been elected under the 'quota allocated for the Dalit women' by the Local Level Election Act, we are not seen to be deserved for the post that we are holding and thus are not given with any responsibilities."



## More Training Required

"We are lucky to be the part of this event as it provided us with so many things to improve our understanding and performance on the issues such as budgeting, various administrative works, formulation of the various policies, development projects among others. Capacity and skills constraints are the primary obstacles to effective empowerment of elected Dalit women representatives. Unfortunately, they are barely provided with the training to enhance their capacity and skills. Training on skill development, leadership development, administrative, planning and budgeting, and legal support etc would definitely empower them to have their views and opinions to be accounted for in the decision-making process."



## Change in the Way of Discrimination

"Significant decline in the practice of caste-based discrimination and untouchability has been seen, due to the introduction of various laws that makes such practices punishable. Dalits are now allowed to go to temple, use public tap, share food with the people from so-called upper caste among others. However, the discrimination is still here and what has been changed is the pattern of it. Earlier, there was direct and visible discrimination. People from so-called upper caste used to practice it openly and that too with the pride. But now, they do not practice it in direct manner as they fear being punished. Unfortunately, a new kind of discrimination has emerged which is indirect and invisible. It is practiced in such a manner that even victim is not sure whether it is a discrimination. For example, the name of the elected Dalit women is always written in the last row of the minute, despite she holds same position in hierarchy as of the other ward member." Likewise, the elected representatives who are non-Dalits make several excuses not to have food together with the elected Dalits. They do not say directly that they would not have food together with the Dalit. However, on the other hand, they never take the food together with the Dalits either."



## Struggle to Continue

"After struggling for decades and more, we have got our rights now. However, this is not enough as we are yet to exercise our right in a proper and in a required manner. Unfortunately, our rights are more confined within paper than in practice. The practice of discrimination and domination against Dalits and especially against Dalit women has been continuing till the date and elected Dalit women are no exception to this. At the time when we have to address the issues of Dalit women, we ourselves are facing discrimination and domination from our counterparts and even from the people whom we represent in the local bodies. This is very unfortunate. Issues of Dalits women are not given priority while allocating the budget. Thus, our struggle has not ended yet and it ought to continue until all forms of discrimination against us will be eliminated; not in paper but in practice."



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