

# **The Scenario of International Development Aid in Nepalese Dalit Movement**

**Mr. Hira Vishwakarma**

National Seminar  
on  
**"Raising Dalit Participation in Governance"**  
Organized by  
Centre for Economic and Technical Studies  
in cooperation with  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

May 3 & 4, 2004  
Lalitpur

## **Background**

As we all know Nepal is a multi-cultural and multi ethnic society in which people have lived relatively in peace for centuries that led to a feeling that Nepal does not have any problem especially social and political. Until the restoration of multiparty democracy only economic aspect of the country was addressed and Nepal received foreign aid and grants only in the field of economic and industrial development. However, after the restoration of democracy the problems of dalit and Janjati came into surface and most of the donors who were assisting Nepal in its development endeavours started to address these issues as well.

We are practicing democracy for the last 14 years in Nepal and we have not been able to achieve much on the economic front as a result of that still 38% of the total population remain below poverty line which is the government claim but we in NGO sector claim that still 50% of the population are below the poverty line. However, we all have to agree that biggest achievement of the democracy in the country is the surfacing of the immense problems faced by dalit, mahila and janjati because of the suppression, oppression and exploitation mainly by male, rulers and Brahmin over the centuries and their demand for social justice. Unlike in other parts of the world the country did not witness the social tension and communal violence but failure of system to address these problems created a fertile ground for Maoist insurgency. Though Maoist insurgency seems entirely as political problem but it used the frustration and suppression caused to dalit, janjati and mahila in their people's war which is evident in the significant numbers of dalit, mahila and janjati in their casualty lists. There is no official disclosure of percentage of deaths of dalit in this war which took lives of more than 10,000 Nepalese, but our claim is that at least 25% those died are from dalit. That means 2500 dalits have laid their lives.

Though addressing of problem of dalits by international agency was started from early nineties, right after the restoration of multiparty democracy with the aid of USAID, that was followed very slowly by other International NGOs and bi-lateral agencies. Still multi lateral agencies working in Nepal are far behind addressing the dalit problem where as INGOs are in forefront.

When we talk about international aid then three prominent players come in picture they are multi-lateral agencies, bi-lateral agencies and INGOs so this paper will describe briefly what these agencies are doing to address the immense problems faced by dalits of Nepal.

## **Multi-lateral Agencies**

We have personally experienced that it is confusing who these multi lateral agencies are and the difference between bi-lateral and INGOs, as even one leading bi-monthly magazine Nepal termed GARDEP as INGO, which is indeed a project run by a multi-lateral agency European Union (EU). The major multilateral agencies working in Nepal are the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union and UN agencies.

All these agencies provide assistance to the government and some integrated rural development programmes through NGO, out of these programme we have no knowledge of direct assistance for the upliftment of dalits. Recently it has come to our knowledge that European Union has provided a grant to OXFAM to run programmes for dalits.

The UN agencies have been playing a significant role in the development of Nepal over the last 40 years. It is also a guardian and promoter of Universal Declarations of Human Rights but neither for the dalit upliftment nor in the promotion of dalit human rights it has played a significant role. However, it has contributed greatly by conducting a nation wide research which is the first of its kind to analyze the situations of dalits. It is pity that such a important research has never been brought into public discussion and debate. In a informal way this research is being widely used as reference to depict the situations of dalits.

Likewise, ILO another UN agency has provided support to conduct a research to find out the status of dalit occupation in the country which is known to be at its final stage of completion. We hope that it will bring a true picture of dalits occupation as they are the victim of industrialization and modernization as it is displacing their traditional occupation by making them a labour and porter.

To promote peace UNDP is also providing a small grant support to a dalit NGO called Jagaran Media Centre and some other occasional support. Here we have to stress that compared to the size of funding, profile, image and influence it could make on the government policy the support of this multilateral agency is too little for dalit movement.

There are many country wide national level programmes such as PDDP which is playing a crucial role to strengthen the democratization process particularly at the district level has not contributed much to enhance the representation of dalit at the local level.

Another important UN agency the UNICEF has been playing a crucial role in the development of children both through welfare and advocacy programme but there is little knowledge on what it is doing significantly for the upliftment of dalit children within the overall children programme. However, a small support provided for the protection of Badi children through SAFE (a Badi focused dalit NGO) should be appreciated.

### **Bi-lateral Agencies**

In Nepal major portion of the international aid comes from bi-lateral agencies and their programme and support ranges from infrastructure development to empowerment of the people. The most prominent bilateral agencies in the country are JICA, DFID, USAID, GTZ, DANIDA, FINNIDA, CCO, NORAD, SNV (although it is INGO but represents Dutch government), SDC and so on.

The door for the dalit upliftment was opened by USAID in 1992 right after the two years of restoration of multiparty democracy in the country. It provided support to Save the Children US to carry out a first ever research to analyze the situation of dalits in 6 district of the country. After the research it provided a support to run a programme called BELE (Basic Education for Least Educated) in 15 districts. It also opened a door to run a programme to the dalit and by the dalit organization called NNDSWO. Likewise it provided a large sum of around 7 hundred thousand dollar which has been used as endowment fund. The interest earned from this fund is being used to provide scholarships to dalit students from the selected districts throughout the country, which is again run in partnership with Save the Children US and NNDSWO. It has already benefited hundreds of dalit students from poor families and will continue to do so for the many years to come.

Though USAID did a pioneering work by opening its door for direct intervention on dalits problem in the country, other than the early 90s programme it is not known if it is still allocating even a small portion of its assistance for dalit upliftment.

The legacy of USAID has been followed by DANIDA another important bilateral agency of Danish government. It is providing support to dalit organizations like DNF, DWO, FEDO and JUP to carry out both advocacy and upliftment programmes. It is the largest programme ever provided for dalits in the country with a total sum of 60 million rupees for the three years which first phase is nearing completion and second phase 5 year programme is about to begin.

JICA has been the largest donor of Nepal for many years but as of now it seems to be least bothered about dalit situation. Japan itself has a community called Burakumin who are very much similar to dalits of Nepal and India and we know that in 1922 it abolished the discrimination caused to them through various legal and social measures and its experience could be used as inspiration but we do not know the reason for JICA to be silent on our problem. However, we are witnessing an increased interest of some Japanese volunteers on dalit problem and one student is known to have done a Ph.D on Gaine music and one volunteer worked with FEDO and we are hopeful that in the future JICA will allocate some of its resources for the dalit upliftment.

Another important bilateral agency is CCO which is providing continuous support to DWO for the last 6 years. Its assistance is very short term in nature and grant relatively small, however, contrary to its norms it is providing support to run programme in one of the hard hit area of Maoist insurgency Salyan district. It has also provided support for the human resource development of dalit by providing partial funding to attend internationally recognized development management course at Coady International Institute Canada.

The oldest friend of Nepal the United Kingdom has been providing foreign aid to Nepal for many decades, however, like most other bi-lateral agencies the DFID is not known to be providing direct support for the dalit upliftment. Now through its Enabling State Programme it is going to provide the largest ever direct assistance for the dalit

empowerment and integration project amounting 150 million rupees over the period of three years. This amount is going to be used to continue the national level advocacy programme run by 5 national level dalit NGOs and some upliftment programme in districts in the country.

Rest other bilateral agencies who are active in Nepal are not known to be doing any significant work for the upliftment of dalits. Most of these agencies are providing assistance in the rural development and we can assume that dalits living in such areas are benefiting from their programme. However, unless we know the dalit segregated data it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of their programme. Likewise some of the bilateral agencies are providing support on and off basis to dalit NGOs which ranges from income generating programme to attend international conference related to dalit issue.

### **International Non Governmental Organizations (INGOs)**

These organizations are the key players in the development of country with focus on poverty eradication through various approaches. Indeed they are the trend and approach setters in the development sector. Be it the participatory approach, empowerment, advocacy or rights based approach it is them who coin these term and introduce in the poverty market. During eighties majority of these INGOs started working in Nepal through direct implementation, however, after the restoration of multiparty democracy they shifted from direct implementation to funding to Nepali NGOs. This approach has also benefited greatly the dalit NGOs as well as it created an environment to work for dalits and by dalit. According to the latest report produced by ActionAid and CPWF the contribution of INGO is about 6% out of total foreign aid to Nepal. Therefore, one can easily imagine a significant role they are playing in Nepal's development. It is INGOs support which is reaching the poorest of the poor in the remote areas of Nepal. Even from the employment point of view after government they account the second largest employment sector. Likewise they are in the forefront to bring up the issue of dalits be it Save the Children US, ActionAid or The Asia Foundation. Now we would like to describe briefly what they are doing for the upliftment of dalits of Nepal.

### **Save the Children US**

It was USAID among the bi-lateral agencies to start support direct dalit programme in Nepal so as it is Save the Children US which started dalit programme through NNDSWO the oldest dalit NGO of the country. As stated earlier it is Save the Children US which did a country wide small research and help start BELE programme and continuing scholarship for dalit student as well. It is both surprising and encouraging to know that out of its total budget of 2.59m US\$ total budget it has allocated 12% for the dalit programme. The support ranges from direct income generating activities to advocacy through national dalit organization such as FEDO and DWO. It was Save the Children US which helped the birth of DWO in the early nineties. The dalit movement of Nepal is indeed very grateful to Save the Children US who set a trend to initiate direct dalit programme in the country.

It also gives us pleasure to bring out here that it is SCUS which has employed the largest number of dalits in its staffing structure ranging from lower level support staff to one of the highest level decision making person. Whenever there is the issue of dalit advocacy and empowerment programme it never hesitates to join hands with others be it the Siraha Saptari Chamar movement or strategy formulation for dalits for National Planning Commission.

### **ActionAid Nepal**

It has also followed the track of Save the Children US and has contributed significantly in the rights movement of dalits. Be it the chamar movement of Saptari and Siraha or the establishment and nurturing of the dalit NGOs of Nepal it has always been in the fore front. It has emphasized mainly on the policy advocacy and influencing work such as preparation of dalit bill or formulation of dalit strategy for NPC. Its DA (Development Area) programme are also dalit focused which are in Saptari, Baglung Parbat and Kanchanpur district. More recently it is going to support dalit focused issue based programme in Baitadi and Badi women focused in Kailali district. It is encouraging to note that 6% of its total budget out of 310 million rupees is allocated for dalit programme. It has a dedicated dalit staff to look after the hill dalit issue and going to recruit another dalit to oversee the Terai dalit issue. It is also a pioneering organization to coin a term dalit activist by appointing a full time activist to work with eastern terai dalit.

### **The Asia Foundation**

During the early stage of dalit NGO movement it provided crucial support such as in the birth and nurturing of FEDO the first ever dalit organization run by dalit women of Nepal. It also played significant role in the establishment of Dalit NGO Federation by formulating strategy and initial grant support. Though it played a crucial role in the mid nineties, it is discouraging to note that support to dalit cause did not continue in any form which is a matter of concern for all of us engaged in dalit movement.

### **Lutheran World Federation**

It is another INGO which has been providing its relentless support for dalit cause, be it the radio programme or campaigning for dalit human rights. It has even provided a endowment fund for three organizations DWO, JUP and FEDO and interest earned from it are being used in management support and advocacy programme. Its relentless support to run Dalit awareness radio programme run by DWO is highly appreciable. Most of the support to run these programme by other donor or INGOs have been occasional but it is LWF who has provided continuous support as a result of that Dalit Janjagan programme aired every Wednesday between 8:30 and 8:45 pm has created an environment both to aware about dalit cause and deaware against the taboos and prejudices towards dalit. A greater significance of this programme can be highlighted through an incident. In Achham district where discrimination to dalit is rampant has witnessed reduction in such atrocities. When an upper caste person misbehaved a dalit on caste ground was reported to the radio programme with the name of perpetrator as a

result of that he had to leave the village. This incident indeed helped realize other people that morally and socially such behaviour is wrong.

### **CARE Nepal**

It is also one of the leading INGOs of Nepal and has been providing support to those leading dalit organization to run grass root level programmes for dalits. It has also joined hand with Save the Children US, ActionAid to formulate strategy for dalits. It has also provided support in various advocacy initiatives of Jagaran Media Centre, DWO etc. In its own strategy where it has coined a term DAG (Disadvantaged Group), it has been focusing some of its programme to dalits where ever it works.

### **OXFAM**

This INGO is known for its advocacy and influencing programme throughout the world on global policy which affects the poverty in the third world country. However, its profile in Nepal seems to be low compared to major INGOs in Nepal.

It has been providing support to create a movement at the grass root level especially in Parbat district through the work of Dalit Jansamaj and SLF (Sustainable Livelihood Forum). It is indeed a model work which needs to be followed by rest of the NGO movement to create a social movement which would eventually empower dalit and lead the movement. Though OXFAM is known for its global advocacy work, it seems least bothered about the policy level in Nepal as it has not established strong linkage with leading dalit NGOs to create a synergy. It is just known that it has been successful to seek a large scale fund from European Union to run dalit related programme but we have least knowledge what it is going to do with such large funding for dalit movement.

According to the CPWF and ActionAid report on foreign aid in Nepal the largest INGO both in terms of funds and programme are UMN and Plan international and other INGOs are SNV with a list of 96 INGOs according to SWC and 106 according to Ministry of Finance. They mobilized 31 billion rupees in 2000 alone most of which are outside the government regular budget. The same report states that to what extent they have been successful to address the poverty issue it is not clear. When we see the dalit programme by most of these major INGOs they do not seem to have strategic programme to address the dalit problems, however, they have been providing occasional support for dalit upliftment. Both due to time constraint and unavailability of dalit segregated data it is difficult to analyze what percentage of their total budget or programme has been set aside for dalit issue, however, being the poverty major issue of all these organization we can say that dalits living in their programme areas must be benefiting one way or other.

### **Dalit NGOs**

When we talk about International Aid we can not ignore the work and movement created by dalit NGOs of Nepal. As we all know the work of these organizations are solely

dependent on the grant assistance of multilateral, bi-lateral or INGOs their work needs to be examined carefully.

According to Dalit NGO Federation it has 100 to, for and by dalit NGOs affiliated with it but not all of them have been successful to mobilize funds for the dalit upliftment. According to a research carried out by DNF over the last 10 years the 82 dalit NGOs have spent 520 million rupees for the dalit upliftment and empowerment and report also states that all the money spent could not reach at the grass root where most deprived and poorest dalit live. There are few leading dalit organizations whose work and programme needs to be mentioned here.

DWO is the biggest dalit NGO both in terms of funding, programme and district chapters. It has the largest number of donors (about 12). In the year 2000 alone it has a budget of 14 million rupees and second in row is DNF with a budget of 12.5 million, FEDO 8.5 million, JUP with 5.9 million and Jagaran Media with 4 million. Their work ranges from national level advocacy and influencing to grass root level empowerment and upliftment programme.

Though dalit movement of Nepal is more than 5 decades old it gained momentum only after the restoration of multiparty democracy in the country and it is dalit NGOs who have sustained the movement and contributed significantly to establish the issue both at the national and international level. As a result of that problems and issues of dalit is not only a national concern but an international as well. Since these NGOs are run by young and energetic dalit they have both spirit and commitment but they lack competency to do the job with efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The national budget of 2059-2060 clearly states out of Nepal's total budget of 96.12 billion rupees 54.8 billion has been allocated for general administration and 42 billion for development of which almost 100% of development budget is dependent on international and national loan and grant as Nepalese taxpayer's money is hardly enough to meet the expenses for general administration. This situation has created both opportunity and threat to the dalit movement.

The opportunity is that most of the donor countries want to sustain democracy in Nepal by encouraging the participation and representation of all section of Nepalese society in the governance. Be it the property rights issue of women, rights of indigenous people or dalit empowerment agenda it is international bodies who are encouraging government to include these agenda in Nepal's policy and programme. Though Nepalese society is highly structured and rigid to give up its discriminatory practices, because of its dependence on international aid and grant can not deny what it is ought to do to address the problems of dalits and other marginalized communities of Nepal.

The threat is that it has increasingly become the concern of international agencies only to address the problems of dalit letting the government of Nepal to relieve it from its responsibility of welfare of its people. Likewise, other than allocating some funds to Dalit Development Committee and National Dalit Commission which is too little to address the

immense problems of dalit government does not seem to be serious enough to allocate budget necessary to address the problems of dalit who are not accessible by NGOs and INGOs. Therefore, there is an immediate need to seek a balance and make the state responsible and accountable towards dalit and other marginalised communities of Nepal.

We also clearly saw that prior to the restoration of multiparty democracy there was non-existence of dalit focussed programme, but after that we have many programmes. A draft report produced by a consortium of Save the Children US, ActionAid Nepal and CARE Nepal on the situation of Nepal's dalit reveals the following picture:

<b>Indicators:</b>	<b>Value (Dalit)</b>	<b>Value (Newar)</b>	<b>Value (Nepal)</b>
<i>Life Expectancy</i>	50.30	62.2	55
<i>Adult Literacy ratio</i>	23.8	54.8	36.72
<i>Mean Years of schooling</i>	1.228	4.37	2.254
<i>Percapita income</i>	4940	11953	7673
<i>Human Development index</i>	0.110	0.289	0.179

The above data was created by citing the secondary sources as there is no country level study done to establish data on dalit. It is our claim that if a country level large scale study is carried out the figure could be more alarming.

We also believe that the problems of dalit is multidimensional and it can not be addressed with one particular approach or programme and a multi prong approaches with large scale funding needs to be carried out. As said earlier over the last 12 years a trend to address dalit problem has been set but that is too little to address the problem of 3 million dalits (according to government statistics, our claim is 4 million). It is also our firm belief that unless dalits are economically uplifted, socially empowered and politically represented the problems will remain largely the same with marginal change in their life the way the intervention is being done at the moment.

Therefore, we recommend the following actions to be taken especially by the international aid communities to address the immense problems of dalits Nepal.

- As we all know about 90% of the dalit live below the poverty line a massive economic upliftment programme needs to be carried out with emphasis on the enhancement of their traditional skill and agriculture. Most of the programmes are very much localized without the development of entrepreneurship and market linkage. All the foreign aid directed towards dalit should take this into account.
- In order to empower socially so that they can fight against discrimination awareness among dalit and de-awareness among non-dalit needs to be created. For this a social movement has to be created throughout the country. Since rights based approach are slowly being accepted by majority of the donor communities that will help create the social movement in case of dalits as well.
- With out political representation dignity of dalits and their rights in governance can not be established. Likewise most of the movement in their favour can not be

sustained as well. Therefore, it should be the integral component of all foreign aid programme to enhance the political participation of dalits both at the grass root and national level. Since *liberal democracy is the political agenda of aid community it can be realized only through the proper representation of dalits at all level of the governance.*

- A trend has already been set both by Aid communities and Dalit NGOs that it is more effective if the programme for dalit is implemented by dalit themselves. This enhances their competency and create employment, otherwise they would hardly be employed by other non-dalit NGOs. Therefore, this trend should be continued and increased. Even there are thousands Dalit NGOs for 40 million dalit it will still be inadequate.
- INGOs are in the forefront among the aid communities to advocate on dalit issue, except SCUS most of them do not have dalit in their staffing structure that needs to be taken seriously.
- Lately elitism is a growing trend at the decision making bodies of these foreign aid communities as only highly educated from aristocratic families from Nepali side are in the staffing. A due attention needs to be given to increase both the number and quality of staff from the marginalised community so that good work initiated by these agencies would be perpetuated.

As we all know during the cold war period the political agenda of the international aid community used to be propagating their ideologies be it socialism or capitalism. After the breakaway of Soviet Union the emphasis has shifted towards the poverty eradication and combat terrorism.

As long as poverty remains the terrorism finds fertile ground on it and western democracies who are the key players of aid communities will not be safe even in their own countries. Therefore, it is not only at the interest of the poor countries themselves, but the rich countries as well to combat poverty. When we talk about poverty because of social structure of Nepal and south Asian countries it is associated with dalits. In other words poverty and dalits are synonymous. Therefore, unless problems of dalits are addressed poverty in Nepal will remain for ever and we urge all international communities to prioritize dalit issue in their policy, programme and budget. Otherwise, the dream of aid communities to halve the world poverty by 2015 will remain unfulfilled.

#### **References:**

1. Telephone conversations with INGOs and bilateral agencies
2. A brief Review of Foreign Aid in Nepal – CPWF and ActionAid 2002
3. Situational Analysis of dalits in Nepal – AAN, CARE & SCUS, prepared for National planning commission, May 2002
4. Jana Utthan – monthly magazine, issue 2, Asar 2060
5. Budget speech of 2059-2060, Ministry of Finance