

"Participatory Policy Dialogue on Prosperity for Dalit"

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of this report is to share the activities undertaken under the project entitled "Participatory Dialogue on Prosperity for Dalit." In this project, Dignity Initiative held intense discourses- one in each province- to fetch the ideas of the people in the ground and fit them in the aspirations of Dalit in the broader prosperity dialogue. The findings of these discussions are also believed to influence the policy making process in favor of Dalit at the both federal and provincial level.

As 'Prosperity' has been taken as an overarching dream enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal 2015 and as a main focus of the current National Plan, this Project aims at exploring what it means for the Dalit and communicate their perceptions and perspectives to the policy makers. Participatory dialogues were organized in seven provinces involving representatives from Dalit activists, politicians, newly elected members of local bodies and other like-minded people based on the discussion paper on the agenda of prosperity. Thus collected findings were also shared with the policy makers at the national level policy dialogue held in Kathmandu. After incorporating the feedbacks, a detailed policy paper has been developed.

Altogether 330 participants actively took part in these discussions throughout the country. Among them, 216 were male and 94 were female. 20 of the participants were among the members of the parliament in the province. In province 2, the chief minister was invited and provided with a set of recommendations to be incorporated in the future policies.

The structure of the report is divided into three different parts. The first chapter will give the overview of the entire report, followed by the major findings of the provincial dialogues. After that, challenges and lesson learned will be shared and in the conclusion section, concrete recommendations are made to strengthen the voice of social justice in the ongoing mainstream prosperity discourse.

2. Major findings

"Prosperity" has become the highly prioritized agenda of the current government. This project has contributed to sensitize the stakeholders and the public about the importance of ensuring social justice while achieving prosperity. Based on the discussions, a comprehensive policy paper has been developed to further strengthen the efforts being put forwarded by the Dalit lawmakers and other policy influencers. On top of that, this paper will be further extended in the form of proper book by including the scholarly articles on different themes pertaining Dalit and prosperity. This will certainly make the ongoing prosperity dialogue inclusive.

In province 2, the Chief Minister was invited as the chief guest during the concluding ceremony. This 2 day long program concluded with "22- Point Lahan Declaration." One of

the demands of the declaration was to set up hostels for poor Dalit students." The state government has allocated NPR. 10 million budget to this effect.

An effort was also made to publish two op-ed articles on prosperity and Dalit in the 2 leading dailies in the country. This has also contributed take the discourse to the wider public. Following are the short description and major findings of the discourses held in each province.

2.1 Provincial Dialogue held in Biratnagar



Dignity Initiative organized a discussion program in Biratnagar of province 1 on 22 Sep, 2018. Altogether 37 participants attended the program. The participants include the member of the parliament, elected local officials representing Dalit community, members of the political parties, intellectuals,

journalists and the local civil society leaders.

The program began with the presentation of discussion paper by the Dalit rights activist Mr. Bholu Paswan. Discussing about the mainstream prosperity discourse, Mr. Paswan mentioned that the debate is trying to suppress the agenda of equality and social justice. He presented couple of cases to support his arguments. He further told that the existing electoral system seems to have brought many Dalit women in the political forefront; however in reality, there is a less representation of Dalit in comparison to the previous elections. He also highlighted other problems faced by Dalit such as refusal to accept their leadership, discriminatory laws, challenges to access to justice etc.

All participants univocally urged that this prosperity campaign should empower Dalit with more political rights and economic opportunities. Hon. Umeeta Baraila, member of the parliament of province no. 1, demanded that the parliamentarians elected through the first-past-the-post system should be given equal rights as directly elected parliamentarians in resource allocation as well as exercising the power. There are no

directly elected Dalit parliamentarians in province 1 and this is causing problem in raising the issues of Dalit in provincial parliament. Likewise, Honorable Jasmaya Gajmer, member of the parliament of the same province, believed that the outcome of this meeting would help them to influence the policies in favor of Dalit.

Similarly, Meena Lamichhane, who is also the member of Judicial Committee in one of the Gaunpaalika in Damak, Jhapa strongly expressed that the prosperity without dignity is not acceptable to Dalit. Another participants added, "There is a need of modernizing Dalit's traditional occupations and the state should make investment accessible. This only brings prosperity to Dalit in the long run."

2.2 Provincial Dialogue in Lahan (Province 2)

Dignity Initiative organized a "Madhesi Dalit Conclave" in Lahan on 25 and 26 May, 2018. The participants intensively discussed on the pressing agenda of prosperity along with the issues of health, education, women, politics and reservation from Dalits' perspective. The



recommendations were compiled and were submitted to the Chief Minister of the Province Hon. Lal Babu Raut who was the Chief Guest of the Concluding Ceremony. This particular program was organized with a support from the Australian Embassy under the Public Diplomacy Fund on top of the Direct Aid Program that Dignity Initiative has secured for the above mentioned project. This event brought together over 120 participants from eight different districts of the province No 2, including the stakeholder, Dalit parliamentarians, intellectuals, activists and officials. This event was hugely covered by the several print and online media both at the national and local level.

2.3 Provincial Dialogue held in Chautara

With an objective to figure out how the people in the grassroots have perceived prosperity, Dignity Initiative organized a discussion program in Chautara of province 3 on 4th Nov, 2018. The program was attended by the member of the National Assembly, Parliamentary Committee on the Planning and Economic Development of the province 3



including other stakeholders.

All participants unanimously emphasized to take this discourse beyond economic rhetoric. All were concerned about not to leave Dalit behind when the entire nation benefit from the prosperity. Prior to the

discussion, then Dignity Initiative president Khyam Bishwakarma presented a discussion paper on how the discourse of prosperity has started in Nepal and where it is heading. He further encouraged the participants to come up with innovative ideas to ensure social justice within the broader prosperity discourse.

Honorable Singha Bahadur B K, member of the National Assembly emphasized on ending caste based discrimination/untouchability, and demanded the expansion of National Dalit Commission to the federal units. Similarly, a leather shoe maker Arjun Nepali complained that, despite their immense contribution in the society, they are not treated with dignity and respect.

Hon. Sares Nepal, the president of the Economic and Development Parliamentary Committee of the province 3, suggested the organizer to submit the output of this dialogue and promised to make an effort to integrate the recommendations into the government policies and programs of the province 3.

2.4 Provincial Dialogue in Gandaki province

Another prosperity dialogue was conducted in Pokhara of Gandaki province on 25 June, 2018. Altogether 35 participants were presented in the discussion. The participants were include Member of Parliament, elected local officials, leaders affiliated to different political parties, intellectuals and the journalist.



Mr. Amar BK, a PhD scholar at the University of the Pittsburg, USA presented a discussion paper entitled ongoing prosperity dialogue and Dalit concerns. He explained thoroughly how the agenda of prosperity is inserted in our polity and whom it is going to serve. He also raised some pertinent questions relating to the ongoing prosperity dialogue from marginalized group's perspective.

"Prosperity for Dalit means their access to clothes, food, shelter, health, education, employment and the end of caste discrimination." said Dobate Bishwakarma, the Member of the Parliament of Gandaki province. All participants believe that prosperity doesn't only mean physical and human development, but also change in attitude and behavior.

"While revisiting the world history, the countries that touched the climax of physical development are now making substantial investment in the field of social development. Therefore, equity should be taken into account while talking about prosperity in the context of

Nepal." says Shiva Pariyar, the Government official. Similarly, Dr. Krishna Adhikari of the Oxford University urged that the Dalit community should take the non-Dalit into confidence for their solidarity and support to end this problem.

2.5 Provincial Dialogue in Butwal

On 28 July 2018, Dignity Initiative organized a prosperity dialogue in Butwal of province 5 at the Avenue Hotel. The program saw the participation of 34 individuals from different walks of life, including the member of the parliament; locally elected leaders from Dalit community; representatives of the political parties; civil society organizations & media.



Writer and the Dalit rights activist Mr. Jeet Bahadur Bishwokarma presented a discussion paper covering different spectrum of the ongoing prosperity dialogue from marginalized group's perspective. He highlighted the need of integrating the issue of social justice in the mainstream prosperity

discourse. Then the participants provided suggestions and feedback so as to make the discourse inclusive and to ensure that all community benefit equally from the outcome.

The participants believe that Guarantee of the proportionate representation, Access to justice, Access to resources, Equal access to opportunities and life full of dignity are some of the prerequisites that can only bring prosperity to Dalit in Nepal. However, Hon. Minister of the province Mr. Sudarshan Baral asked the participants to be hopeful for better future.

The program was facilitated by Mr. Khyam Bishwakarma, chair of the Dignity Initiative.

2.6 Provincial Dialogue held in Surkhet

Dignity Initiative, with the coordination from Surkhet based Dalit Welfare Organization, organized a participatory dialogue on prosperity for Dalit in Surkhet of Karnali province on 7 October, 2018. Karnali province is known as the province with highest numbers of the Dalit population as well as practices of severe caste discrimination and untouchability.

This program saw the participation of 35 people representing the parliament; officials elected in the local level; intellectuals; representatives of the political parties and the civil society organizations; and the journalists.

Dignity Initiative's executive officer Mr. Rup Sunar presented a discussion paper to further facilitate dialogue relating to ongoing prosperity discourse and Dalit's concerns. He also presented couple of examples on how the post federal practices have ignored the agenda of inclusion and social justice. Then the participants were asked to give their opinion on what actually brings prosperity to the Dalits in Karnali province.

All participants univocally told that the federalism has not brought any changes in their lives. According to them, all the resources and privileges in the province are still being enjoyed by the elites and so called higher caste people. Therefore, the participants strongly demanded that this prosperity should benefit the underprivileged groups the most. They further believe that Dalit should start afresh



grassroots movement, possibly from the Karnali, to claim their share both at federal and provincial level.

"As far as the prosperity is concerned in the Karnali province, it is closely linked with social discrimination. Therefore, the end of caste discrimination is the prerequisite to flourish prosperity in this province" opined Manju Sunar.

"Neither province nor the so called high caste people are responsible for untouchability, the state should held responsible for this. Therefore, such historical injustices should be compensated through government policies and programs and the prosperity discourse is an opportunity to that end." said honorable Dan Bahadur Pariyar, member of the parliament in the Karnali province.

Mr. Upendra BK, Lecturer of the Mid-western University mentioned that Dalit must have access and control over the outcome of economic growth, distribution and resource mobilization in order to benefit from the prosperity initiatives.

The program was moderated by Ms. Rachana Sunar, a local youth leader and Dalit rights activist.

2.7 Provincial Dialogue held in Dhangadhi

On 30 Sep 2018, Dignity Initiative organized a Participatory Policy Dialogue on Prosperity for Dalit in Dhangadhi of the Sudur Pashchim province. 50 participants representing different districts of the province attended the event, and the participants include Member of Parliament, elected local officials representing Dalit community, representatives of the political party, intellectuals, civil society leaders and the journalists.



Researcher and Dalit rights activists Mr. Jeet Bahadur Bishwokarma presented a discussion paper, highlighting the underlying trends of the ongoing mainstream prosperity discourse and the state of social inclusion. However, the debate of prosperity has been received with the mixed feelings among the participants with some calling it an attempt to

dilute the issues of inclusion; while others demanding dignity over prosperity. Locally elected officials that represent Dalit community also shared their lived experiences of discrimination in the changed political context of Nepal and demanded that this discourse should address such issues head on.

Honorable Uma Devi Badi, member of the parliament in the Sudur Pashchim province mentioned that reservation system alone can't cover all Dalit. Therefore, the government should also launch other socio-economic and cultural empowerment programs simultaneously to benefit all.

Another participant Kumar Singh Tailor mentioned that Dalit should have access to economic opportunities, education, political and health facilities. He further opined, "Access to justice is critical to ensure social justice in the country."

"During my 11 years student life in Dhangadhi, I changed my room for 22 times due to the caste discrimination. Therefore, reservation and scholarships are secondary aspects; the primary concerns of Dalit should be dignity." said Tej Parki.

At the end of the program, all the member of the parliament mentioned that they really need a backstopping from civil society to formulate laws and policies in favor of Dalit community.

3 National Level Policy Dialogue held in Kathmandu

On 17 Dec, Dignity Initiative organized a national level policy dialogue on prosperity for social Justice in Kathmandu. The main purpose of this program was to share the outputs of the provincial dialogues and further collect the feedbacks of the policy makers. Australian ambassador to Nepal his Excellency Peter Budd attended the program as the chief guest. Around 42 participants representing different background showed up in the event. This program was also live-broadcasted by the Indigenous Television.

At the beginning of the program, Dignity Initiative member Mr. JB Bishwakarma shared the output of the provincial dialogues. He actually shared how people have perceived prosperity in the local level and what are their expectations in return. Couple of case studies was also presented in the program to amplify the local voices. After that, a Sociologist Ms. Bidya Bhattarai talked about the sociological perspective on prosperity. In her presentation, she strongly urged that the debate of prosperity must direct towards benefiting the traditionally marginalized groups the most. She further emphasized on enhancing individual capacity, distributing growth equally and ensuring inclusion in the state mechanism.

Dr. Purna Nepali, the associate professor of the Kathmandu University mentioned that this debate should go beyond the populist rhetoric and should address the fundamental needs of the people at the margin. He further suggested developing some social indicators and measuring Dalit's perspective against them.

Mr. Bishnu Bahadur Bishwakarma, who works for Nepal Rashtira Bank, emphasized the need of availability of the data to see how Dalit are being benefited from prosperity and also increasing Dalit's access to loan and other economic resources.

In his welcoming remarks, Australian ambassador to Nepal his Excellency Mr. Peter Budd mentioned that the discourse of prosperity is required to get the voice and concern of people such as Dalits in a national agenda. He further believed that the event such as this will bring about positive outcome that could further contribute towards participatory and inclusive development of Nepal.

4 Challenges and lessons learned

This is a first-of-its-kind program of the Dignity Initiative after Nepal was federated into seven provinces. Therefore, while implementing the project, DI made all efforts to board on

local government and civil society organizations. In that sense, this project was both challenging and rewarding to Dignity Initiative.

4.6 The government is quite restrictive in approving the software-natured development programs and this caused some delayed in getting approval from the social welfare council. This also affected the timeline of project implementation.

4.7 The initial idea of the project was to incorporate aspirations of the people in the form of publication. To this end, we also sought additional three months no-cost extension. It didn't go as planned because it requires a lot of rigorous academic work, expert's availability and the sufficient financial resources. Therefore, we decided to publish a policy paper for the time being. Further efforts will be made to publish the book.

4.8 During the provincial dialogues, people were asked to provide their idea on what actually brings prosperity to Dalit. The participants would often tend to share their personal experiences of caste discrimination in their day to day life. Therefore, it was quite challenging to stick on the topic and follow the frame.

4.9 Leaders, activists, and researchers are interested to participate in the provincial level dialogues from different districts, but, due to the budget limitations, Dignity couldn't invite them from all districts of the provinces.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

It is obvious that the prosperity has dominated the mainstream discourse for sometimes now. Nevertheless, it has not been adequately discussed from social justice perspective. However, this attempt of Dignity Initiative and the Australia embassy has sensitized the stakeholders and the broader public on the need of ensuring social justice while marching forward for prosperity. To this end, Dignity Initiative conducted provincial dialogues, met and interacted with the parliament members, intellectuals, Dalit leaders, civil society groups and other stakeholders to fetch their ideas on what actually brings prosperity for Dalit.

By incorporating these ideas and feedbacks, a policy paper has been developed on Dalit and their quest for prosperity. The Member of Parliament in all provinces expressed their commitment saying that they would use the outcome of these discussions as a guiding document for devising policies and programs for Dalit in their provinces. Therefore, this project has given Dalit representatives some solid ideas to debate in the parliament on what actually brings prosperity to Dalit.

The policy paper has also tried to define prosperity in broader fashion, highlighting the need of social justice with economic opportunity. The government has just finalized the 15th five

years plan. This policy paper could be used as a reference document while translating plans into action. On top of that, an initiation to publish a book has already begun and it will further contribute to promote social justice in the country. The policy paper is attached in a separate email, which has concrete set of recommendations.