World Social Forum Polycentric 2006 Karachi  
24-29 March, 2006  
A Report on NCDHR’s Participation

Key Highlights

- 11 member NCDHR team participated in WSF Polycentric 2006 at Karachi.

- The cultural team showcased the vibrancy of Dalit culture through songs and nukkad natak (street play). Impressive performance led to large participation in all the events (self organized as well as events organized by friendly networks).

- Large number of campaign materials on Dalit rights was distributed.

- The posters and banners put up at the stall and also at the events venue ensured very good participation by people.

- It also generated curiosity and interest among people about Dalits in the South Asian context.

- There were very good participation by Dalit groups and even individuals from Karachi, other parts of Sindh Province and other places in Pakistan.

- WSF Karachi turned out to be coming together events for Dalit groups/activists from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India.

- The need to work together for promotion and protection of Dalit rights was reaffirmed.

- South Asia Dalit Rights Forum launched in WSF Karachi.

- Big boost to National Dalit Platforms in South Asian region.

- The need to take up Dalit rights issues at SAARC level and at UN generated lot of support.

- The need to train young Dalit men and women in South Asian countries for advocacy intervention at various national, regional and international levels got strong support.

- Convening of a SAARC Dalit Assembly in near future was also announced.
The role played by NCDHR in World Social Forum (WSF) since its inception in Brazil in 2001 and subsequently in Asian Social Forum – 2003, World Social Forum (WSF) - IV, and World Social Forum (WSF) - V enabled the campaign to raise visibility to the Dalit cause. Dalit sector had been the single largest group in terms of participation and organizing events and programs and NCDHR was recognized as the prime player in this, besides its organizing and theme setting roles. The Swadhikar Rally, that was organized during WSF IV in Mumbai and the Seminars and Workshops organized by NCDHR in all WSFs, including the vibrancy created by the performance of the cultural teams, enabled many Civil Society organizations inside and outside the country as well, to understand the plight of Dalits and the core need to give prominence to the issues and rights of Dalits. The experience of WSF V added another feather to NCDHR’s cap when it was able to generate a broad public consciousness about Dalit rights and that they are being violated in a traditional society which is on the path of modernization yet there are exclusion and discrimination faced by Dalits and other vulnerable sections. Also the rapport established with the Quilombos community in Brazil, Via Campesina and No Vox in Europe, MST in Latin America has set a platform for all excluded and marginalized communities to oppose both Neo liberalism and casteism and other forms of oppression. It was in this background that NCDHR team reached Karachi on 24 March 2006 to further strengthen the Solidarity Building process of National Dalit Platforms in the South Asian region.

Objectives of Participation in WSF Process

1. To raise the visibility of Dalit Rights violations in the Globalization process further so as to influence and extend the paradigms of development discourse.

2. To further strengthen collaboration with other movements and networks in India, other Asian and Global regions.

3. To strengthen and further broaden the alliances in countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and other Asian Countries.

4. To further strengthen the capacity and skills of Dalit activists from South Asian countries through exposure, sharing and through articulation.

5. To strengthen the process of consultation and the study to be undertaken by the newly appointed Special Rapporteur’s, who have been entrusted to study Work and Descent based Discrimination and propose Guidelines and Principles in this regard.

Programmes during WSF 2006 Polycentric Karachi (24-29 March 2006)

NCDHR had registered three major events for the forthcoming WSF 2006 Polycentric events at Karachi. The basic idea is not only to highlight the issues related to Dalit rights but also forge solidarity links with other
discriminated groups in Asian countries, especially the South Asian region. The programmes were as follows:

- Gender and Caste based Discrimination
- Building A South Asian Dalit Rights Forum
- Land Rights and Dalits

Gender and Caste based Discrimination

Date – 25th March 2006 (2 to 5PM.)

Started with Song by cultural team: Mr. Bishnu, Ms. Shakila, Ms. Josephine and Mr. Babu

Mrs. Jyostna Chaired the session.

Carol Geeta & Dr. Umakant facilitated the session. The speakers were –
Ms. Saima Hasrat from Lahore.
Gyanchand – Tharparkar, Sindh Province
Bhuromal Kolhi – Tharparkar, Sindh Province
Ms. Safura Begum - Bangladesh
B.G. Murthy - Bangladesh
Mr. Surender Valasai - Pakistan
Advocate Kishore Kumar - Sindh province

Cultural team performed two Nukkad Natak (Street Play) on the theme of Violence against Dalit Women & two songs.

Mrs. Jyotsna started the discussion with sharing on Dalit women situation in India and the discrimination against Dalit women on the basis of caste and gender.

Ms. Saima Hasrat – Programme Development officer centre for Education & consciousness, Lahore shared her study about the condition of marginalized women in Pakistan. She told the level of education is very low and women do not have any freedom for political participation.

Ms Safura Begum from Bangladesh shared her experience with Bangladesh women and their suffering and struggle for women human rights.

Mr. Murthy from Bangladesh told about the condition of low caste people particularly the scavenger community and Mushahar community suffering in Bangladesh. He shared that they did not have idea about the word Dalit. We are being called as Harijans, but after getting contact with NCDHR we came to know about the word Dalit and have not only started using it but have also popularized it Bangladesh. Now we have an organization in the name of Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights. Mr. Murthy appealed every one to support the cause of Dalits in Bangladesh.

Mr. Surender Valasai, founder President of Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan told untouchability practice prevails in Pakistan and he told it is even in Sindh Province Chief Minister’s residence there are separate glasses for low caste people. The major scheduled caste communities in Pakistan are Koli, Bhil, Meghwal, Hari and Bhangi. Muhammad Ali Jinnah had dreamed of
a country with equality and dignity to all people but he died just after one year of creation of Pakistan and in the 1st Constitution provision of reservation for Schedule Caste People was there but in the second Constitution 6% reservation and 3rd Constitution the reservation policy was followed. We have heard about Dr.BR Ambedker’s struggle and his friendship with Jinnah but we do not have much information about him.

An informal gathering of Dalit Activists from South Asian region was also held on this occasion. Dr. Umakant described in detail the formation of NCDHR, its programmes and intervention made so far at local, national and international levels. The participation in World Conference against Racism at Durban, South Africa in 2001 and subsequent intervention in various UN bodies was also explained. The appointment of two Special Rapporteurs on work and descent based discrimination, the role of IDSN and DSNs was also made very clear to them. Paul Divakar explained the process in brief through which Dalit organizations could jointly work for addressing Dalit rights and concerns at South Asian level and also at global level. The meeting ended with a call to participate in the next programme on 27 March on Building a Solidarity Platform of Asian Dalit Communities and Movements.

Meeting with Mr. Minar Pimple, Deputy Director, Millennium Campaign, UN. MDG at Karachi on 26 March 2006

The discussion centered on the following points:
- Mobilization of CSO through GCAAP programmes
- Youth mobilization for campaign.
- Parliamentarians lobby and advocacy
- Media mobilization
- Parliamentarians-lobby and advocacy.
Operation Asia level
National level
Sub National (State level)
Asia Facilitation
Country Thematic National Campaign (WNTA)
Pilot programme for state and national level advocacy
The objectives of the campaign is to change the Law / Policy and lobby for more Resource allocation and to democratize the Relationship in governance.
The campaign should start from April so that we would able to influence the coming budget i.e. March 2007 – Budget session should be targeted.

NCDHR’s Role in this Initiative

8 States- Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala and Bihar will be covered under the programme but this is not final. Three page concept notes should reach to Minar Pimple before 7th April 06 and then final draft will reach to him before 12th April.
- Final note 12 April 2006.
- Meeting at Delhi 26th April 2006. (Meeting will be organized at NCDHR office and respective state convenors or one person who will take this
campaign will be invited for the meeting).
- The concept note should have details of activities, plan and budget.
- Activities, State plan, Budget with Time Plan. Decision will be taken after consulting Vincent and other at NC.

South Asia Dalit Rights Forum
Date: 27 March
Venue: E 304, WSF Karachi
Time: 6.00 – 9.00 P.M.
Chairperson: Dr. Sono Khangharani, Tharparkar, Sindh, Pakistan
Main Facilitator: N. Paul Divakar, NCDHR, India

List of Speakers:
1. Mr. N. Paul Divakar, NCDHR, India
2. Dr. Sono Khangharani, TRDP, Pakistan
3. Mr. B.G.Murthy, BDHR, Bangladesh
4. Mr. Surender S. Valasai, SCFP, Pakistan
5. Mr. Omprakash Swarnakar, DWO, Nepal
6. Mr. Ashok Bharti, NACDOR, India
7. Mr. Manas Jena, NCDHR, India
8. Mr. Satish Kumar, NCDHR, India
9. Sister Carol Geeta, NCDHR, India

The programme started with a cultural presentation by the NCDHR cultural team. Dr. Umakant welcomed the guests explained the purpose of convening the meeting in WSF Karachi with a focus on South Asian Dalit communities and invited the speakers on the dais.

Dr. Sono Khangharani spoke about the significance for organizing such events on the question of raising Dalit rights and invited Mr. Paul Divakar to introduce the aims and objectives of this meeting. Mr. Paul Divakar started by saying that it is not a seminar for raising the visibility on Dalit issues, rather it is an occasion to share the experiences of Dalit Platforms in each country. At the same time it was also stressed to make effective intervention in various UN bodies and SAARC collectively, if it is necessary? If so then how to proceed. Exploring of various ways of strategizing on building and strengthening of a South Asian Dalit Rights Forum was also pointed out.

Mr. B.G. Murthy, Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights, spoke about different nature of Dalit Platform in India and Bangladesh and stressed that they need to work in a much more organized way so as to raise the issue of Dalit rights effectively. There are about 35 lakhs Dalit in Bangladesh and their situation is really precarious. We have started mobilizing for Dalit rights against all odds. We face lot of problem in organizing our own people. We have submitted a set of demands to the Government of Bangladesh. There has been no response from the Government so far, Government of Bangladesh says that there are no Dalits in Bangladesh. There are Mehtars (Manual Scavengers), and Harijans but no Dalits. Atrocities and untouchability is rampant in Bangladesh. I invite my Indian Dalit brothers and friends to pay a visit to Bangladesh and help us in taking up our cause effectively. In various places
in Bangladesh, our people are being humiliated, even killed and our Dalit women raped and molested. When we started raising the issue of Dalit Human Rights violations, I lost my job in Municipality. Our situation is very bad. Some of us have come to Karachi with great hardship. Our Nepalese Dalit brothers provided some help in recent times and we are thankful to them. I take this opportunity to appeal to every one to support our cause in whatever way possible.

Mr. Omprakash Swarnakar, Dalit Welfare Organization & Dalit NGO Federation of Nepal, said that there are about 5 million Dalits in Nepal. We are participating in WSF Karachi under the banner of DNF Nepal. Earlier we were not aware about Dalits in Pakistan and other countries in South Asia. We have got encouraged by participating and sharing of experiences in this WSF Karachi. We are more than 20% of the population in Nepal but the Census figure shows less population. The Government of Nepal says that Dalits have been accorded equal status, but the ground realities are different. We face different kinds of discrimination. In Kathmandu also various kinds of caste based discrimination is prevalent. There are no representation of Dalits in higher Bureaucracy, Judiciary and even no senior Minister. There are some assistant Ministers, but they are actually powerless. Government and Political parties have been talking about inclusive democracy, but so far Dalits have not been provided with any safeguard in the country’s political setup. Multi party democracy process has also not been initiated. Unless and until we get justice, we will keep fighting.

Mr. Ashok Bharti, National Conference of Dalit Organization, stressed on the need for mass mobilization. There is also a need to follow up judicial pronouncements, Party whips against Dalit Member of Parliaments and Member of Legislative Assemblies. There is a reduction in plan allocation by the United Progressive Alliance Government in India. The experiences of development planning have been discriminatory so far. The SAARC Charter (Social, Economic and Political) has no mention about Dalits. Respective Governments in SAARC have not shown any interest in development of Dalits. Globalization is further depriving Dalits in the region.

Mr. Manas Jena, National Co-Convenor of NCDHR, shared the experience of Dalit organizations and their work in India. In order to hold the State accountable NCDHR is engaged in training of Dalit activists, both men and women, and so far more than 736 activists have been trained, and these trained activists are engaged in taking up human rights violation of Dalits in their respective areas. Non-implementation of law, programmes and policies is a big problem in India and it is through Monitoring, legal intervention and Advocacy NCDHR is trying to promote and protect Dalit rights in India. NCDHR raised the issue of caste discrimination in Durban Conference in 2001 and created visibility at global level. It is because of the interventions carried out by NCDHR, IDSN and other DSNs that UN has now appointed two Special Rapporteurs to study work and descent based discrimination. NCDHR has also been raising the issue of Dalits being affected by the Globalization process. Training for Dalit Human Rights Defender for taking up socio, cultural, economic and political rights was also stressed.
Mr. Paul Divakar spoke on the need to make interventions at the UN (including ILO) and also the need for intervention at SAARC level. We must see to it that Dalit organizations in South Asian countries are ready to train young Dalit men and women who could be utilized for taking up interventions with different UN Human Rights mechanism. That is why the role of Monitoring and Advocacy is very important. We also need to take up lobbying and advocacy in CERD, CEDAW, CRC and other UN Treaty bodies in order to force the Governments in South Asian Countries to address the Dalit rights issues. The formation of South Asia Dalit Rights Forum is very important and in close association with IDSN, it can take up various issues related to Dalit rights in a much more effective way. At the same time there is a serious gap at SAARC level. So far the SAARC countries have not addressed these issues at all. That is why we must work together to make this happen at SAARC level too.

Dr. Sono Khangharani while concluding in his chairperson’s remark thanked every one who participated in this consultation process and formally welcomed the suggestion of forming a South Asia Dalit Rights Forum. He also shared the situation of Dalits in Pakistan and the recent visit of Prof. Chung, one of the Special Rapporteur on work and descent based discrimination, to Pakistan, which was facilitated by IDSN. The Consultation in Geneva in from 12 to 18 March 2006 organized by IDSN was also shared by Dr. Sono. He also emphasized on the need to read Dr. Ambedkar and his contributions for Dalit liberation by Dalits in Pakistan. Finally Dr. Sono announced that we must have a Dalit SAARC Assembly in near future.

**Dalits Struggle for Land Rights in South Asia**

Date: 28 March, 2006  
Time: 2.00 to 5.00 P.M.  
Venue: D 302, WSF Karachi  
Speakers –  
1. Pirbhu Lal Satyani Programme officer, TRDP, Karachi  
2. B.G Murthy, President, Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
3. Mr. Munasinghe, All Ceylon Peasant Congress, Sri Lanka.  
5. Mr. Kanji Mal, Pakistan.  
6. Mr. Malji Meghwar, Tharparkar, Pakistan.  
7. Mr. Dalbahadur Sunar, DNF, Nepal  
8. Mr. Swapan Buiyan, Bangladesh.  
9. Dr. Umakant, India.  
10. Mr. Neelaiah, India  
11. Ms. Jyotsna, India  
12. Mr. Satish Kumar, India  
13. Mr. Bishnu, India  
14. Mr. Ashok Choudhary, UP, India.  
The meeting started at 2pm with song by cultural team member. Ms Geeta welcomed the participants and proposed the name of Manas Jena to chair the workshop.

Mr. Manas Jena initiated the discussion by emphasizing the relation of Dalit communities with land in India and how Dalit are being deprived of land rights historically due to untouchability and caste system and also lack of education. The feudal system in land ownership still prevails in India and in spite of various legal rights and land distribution programme, Dalit communities are still land less. Now the process of globalization is again depriving Dalits from land and livelihood. Dalit communities’ dependency on land is directly linked to their livelihood.

He urged upon the activist from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal to share about Dalit situation related to land and experience of struggle in their own countries and proposals to build an alliance of Dalit movements in South Asia taking land issue as primary concern.

Speakers from Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka shared their experience and many of the experience are very similar to Dalits experience in India.

The cultural team presented a street play on land alienation faced by Dalits in Rajasthan, which is actually a common feature in many states in India. Ms. Jyotsna shared the experiences of Dalits and especially Dalit women and their struggle for land in the state of Maharashtra in India. Mr. Bishnu and Mr. Satish Kumar shared the experiences of Dalits struggle for land in the state of Rajasthan in India.

Dr. Umakant shared the situation arising out of denial of land rights to Dalits. In Punjab Dalits were denied possession of land by law for a long time. Even now almost 74% of Dalits are landless or near landless labourers. The Land Reforms Act and the land Ceiling Act have remained farcical exercise in India resulting into majority of Dalits without land. Possession of land in a traditional set up indicates social status and Dalits being the lowest in the caste hierarchy have always been denied land. There have been massacre of Dalits for demanding distribution of surplus land by the dominant castes through their caste militias in the state of Bihar. Even the in the developed states like Punjab and Gujarat, Dalits have been given less land. The land distribution by various state Governments have not ensured possession on land by Dalits.

Mr. Paul Divakar gave emotional call to build up struggle in South Asia and to address the issue of land at different UN level. He compared the issue of land with the issue of identity. He also suggested the following measures to be taken up immediately on a priority basis:

1- Documentation of land issue and experiences of struggle in South Asia.
2- Training to youth on human rights.
3- Advocacy at SAARC level.
4- Advocacy at WB, UN , ADB and other level taking the issue of land
5- Assembly of Dalits of all SAARC counties focusing on land rights.
Participation in Other Events in WSF Karachi

• Mr. Paul Divakar spoke in a meeting organized by the Asian Women's Human Rights Council on 26 March on the situation of Dalit Women in the World of Globalization, in the programme: World Court of Women on Resistance to War: Wars of Globalization, Wars against Women.

• Six member NCDHR Team held wide ranging discussion with the French Dalit Collective on 26 March in Karachi.

• Mr. Paul Divakar participated and spoke in a meeting organized by the Dalit Welfare Organization of Nepal on 27 March.


Participation in WSF Polycentric Karachi and promotion of South Asia Dalit Rights Forum (SADRF) will have far reaching impacts on our efforts to take forward the movement for justice against caste based discrimination across the world and especially in South Asia. NCDHR looks forward to WSF VI to be held in Kenya in January 2007 as a process to further strengthen its platform and allies for evolving a programmatic interventions at all levels to oppose exclusion, discrimination, denial of access, denial of equal opportunity and for reclamation of human personality.

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