

Dalit Watch

Relief Camp Management: A Glance

Caste a decisive factor in relief delivery processes

An intensive assessment was undertaken by a cadre of 105 volunteers of dalit watch-anetwork of several organizations based in Bihar to monitor the quality of the arrangements and process of 204 relief camps set up in five districts in the aftermath of severe floods of 2008 over the last two weeks. The network came into being after the severe floods of 2007, end at keeping a vigil on probable instances of exclusion and discrimination faced by dalit communities and to secure the entitlements. The network is constituted by the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, Nari Gunjan, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, Lok Shakti Sangathan, Dalit Samanway, Badh Sukhad Mukti Andolan and Praxis.

While a number of issues relating to inadequacy and inaccessibility of critical relief measures emerged in the course of the monitoring exercise, the influence of the caste factor in determining ones access to relief aid and facilities emerged very strongly, for instance at the Bans Chouk Camp, located at Pratapganj block of Supaul one Bhoku Ram belonging to the Chamar community was beaten up by the security guards belonging to the socially dominant castes when he asked for food for his children. In the camp running at Maura Bharti village of Shankarpur block of Madhepura Dalit communities have been served only a suspension of rice with salt, while people from dominant castes have also been served vegetables and pulses along with rice. In camp number 43 of Madhepura, one Soni Kumari hailing from Musahar community had to first face harassment while fetching water from handpump and was later beaten up by dominant caste persons when she protested. In the camp running at Gayatri Jawahar Girl's High School located at Bihariganj of Madhepura district rupees 700 was charged from a pregnant lady belonging to the Dalit community. The camp started in Rajni village of Murliganj block of Purnia district, which was accommodating a large number of people of Musahar community, was closed down within a few days. In the relief camps running in Buari and Shinghiyan villages of Saharsa, people from socially dominant are served food in the corridor of school while Dalits are served in an open field. In the camp running at Fatehpur Middle School, in Narpatganj block of Araria one Dukhi Sada belonging to the Musahar community was denied treatment at the Medical camp, who passed away subsequently. In a camp running in ward number 8 of the same district details relating to deaths people from Dalit community are not being registered, while in the camp running at Pagraha Girl's School, Dalits are served food after people from dominant castes are served food. In the camp running at Janta High School of Narpatganj, a 14 years old Dalit girl was raped by dominant castes person while going for defecation. In Kabiyahi and Sonbarsa villages of Shankarpur block of Madhepura district, instances of looting of relief materials for Dalit communities at the behest of socially dominant section were reported.

In a camp running in Saurbajar Middle School of Saharsa district, one Nandkishore Paswan belonging to Dusadh community was robbed of rupees 2200 by dominant caste persons. A similar incident was reported from the camp in Sitapur village of Basantpur block of Supaul district where as many as 30 handpumps were looted by dominant caste persons even before their arrival at the camp. The inclusion of people from Dalit communities in the teams administering relief in various camps was found to be negligible in all the districts.

In particular, Dalit Watch demands immediate and compulsory registration of all Dalit inhabitants of relief camps, provision of basic facility including adequate food, shelter resources, medical and referral facilities, sanitation facilities, availability of female doctors and attendants preferential treatment for marginalized sections within affected communities and inclusion of members of Dalit communities in management of relief camps. Also, it demands immediate registration of cases of willful discrimination, exclusion and atrocities against members of Dalit communities under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989, initiation of necessary legal and administrative action against the culprits and preventive mechanisms to stop occurrence of such instances.

In the days to come Dalit Watch shall undertake an assessment of damages suffered by Dalit communities and their rehabilitation needs. Dalit Watch also plans to spearhead a campaign for securing their entitlements as per Calamity Relief Funds (CRF) guidelines.

For further details/assistance please contact: 'Dalit Watch', 1st floor, Maa Sharda Complex, East Boring Canal Road, Patna-800 001 dalitwatchbihar@gmail.com , 0612-22521983

