

# **Submit Written Statements/Inputs to the UN 2023 Water Conference**

**By**

**Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) - Nepal**

Dear UN 2023 Water Conference Organizers Team,

I am Durga Sob representing Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) and today I am here in front of all of you to speak about Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities for Dalit communities in Nepal.

In Nepal caste based discrimination is deeply rooted in social, cultural, economic and political affairs. The lowest caste in the Hindu Varna system also referred to as “untouchables” or ‘Dalit’ often face many forms of discrimination in society including while collecting water. ‘Water’ is a means demarcating touchable/pure and untouchable/impure – water touched by a Dalit is seen as impure by others and hence degree of access to water is largely governed by the caste system and the issue of water and discrimination in Nepal is complex and has many sides, with caste-based discrimination and exclusion playing a significant role in limiting the access to safe water which is adversely impacting on health/nutrition and economic outcomes of Dalits.

Dalits are discriminated against and are not allowed to have fair access to water from public sources which are supposed to be meant for everyone resulting they are forced to use separate water sources, which are often unhygienic and poorer quality and are located far away from home thereby become a time burden to mostly women and limiting to perform productive/community roles and hence set obstacles for women empowerment. They are often faced with verbal and physical abuse when trying to access water in public. There is a huge risk and burden for dalit women and girls who are responsible for collecting water every day for their families.

According to a study conducted by WaterAid Nepal, only 53% of Dalit households in Nepal have access to safe drinking water, compared to 83% of non-Dalit households. This lack of access to safe drinking water has serious implications for the health and well-being of Dalit communities, as it can lead to waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, and typhoid.

The Nepalese government has launched several programs to improve access to safe drinking water, However, these programs have been criticized for not effectively addressing the specific needs of

marginalized communities like the Dalits. As Dalits are excluded from decision making process and denied to participate in management committees and other sources.

The United Nations recognizes access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a basic human right, and the Nepalese government has a responsibility to ensure that all citizens have equal access to these services, regardless of their social status or ethnicity.

UNICEF MICS 2019 data revealed that around 81% people lacks access to safe drinking water and among them majority population is from Dalit caste. Efforts are being made to promote community-led initiatives to improve access to safe drinking water for all including Dalit communities. Civil society organizations are working to raise awareness about water access inequalities and to empower communities to take ownership of their water resources.

Addressing the root causes of discrimination and to promote social inclusion and equity is a long journey but is associated with basic human rights that to be protected and promoted. Dalit civil society strongly believes that addressing the water access needs of Dalit communities in Nepal requires a joint effort by all stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, and the community. It urges international community to join hand with Nepal's efforts and accelerate the changes in a fair manner.

Thank you,

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