

# THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT POLICY IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS FROM A SUBALTERN LENS

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## ABSTRACT

*There is a close association between Climate Change and disaster risk reduction. Various studies have predicted a rise in the number and scale of disasters in the near future due to extreme weather conditions. In this backdrop, it becomes imperative for nations to have effective disaster management policies in place. Several nations including India have put in place their disaster management policies in the form of national legislations or action plans. However, these policies often suffer from the vices of inequity and tend to neglect the special needs of the marginalized communities. In this paper, the author critically analyzes the disaster management policy in India to understand how well it serves the interest of the Dalits.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There are definite indications that climate change would increase the frequency and intensity of natural disasters like cyclones, floods and droughts in the years to come.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between climate change and climate extremes<sup>2</sup> has also been established.<sup>3</sup> Disasters are likely to become even more unpredictable, giving rise to newer vulnerabilities.<sup>4</sup> These events have had and will continue to have an increasing impact on human health, security, livelihoods, and poverty, with the type and magnitude of impact varying across the globe.<sup>5</sup> In order to meet these challenges in a sustained and effective manner, synergies in the approach and strategies for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are needed to be encouraged and promoted.<sup>6</sup>

Several predictions have been made about the dangers of climate change-induced risks looming around the world. These projections indicate a rise in net annual temperatures in India in by 2030 from 1.7 degree Celsius to 2.2 degrees, increase in the mean and extreme precipitation during Indian summer monsoons and increase in the number of monsoon break days.<sup>7</sup> Further, the coastal areas are at greater risks due to a projected rise in the sea level, especially in South and Southeastern Asia.<sup>8</sup> According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change *SREX*,<sup>9</sup> the interaction of climate, environment and human factors bring about impacts and disasters. The intensity and severity of these impacts is determined not just by the extremes themselves but also exposure and vulnerabilities. These are further influenced by certain other factors such as natural climate variability, anthropogenic climate change and social, economic and cultural factors.<sup>10</sup> The extreme weather events have put the many societies' adaptive capacities to test. India is already among the top 10 countries that are prone to disasters.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CLIMATE CHANGE 2014: SYNTHESIS REPORT, (R. K. Pachauri, Leo Mayer, & Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change eds., 2015).

<sup>2</sup>MANAGING THE RISKS OF EXTREME EVENTS AND DISASTERS TO ADVANCE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION: SPECIAL REPORT OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE, (Christopher B. Field et al. eds., 2012), <http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ref/id/CBO9781139177245> (last visited May 30, 2020). *According to the Report, Climate extreme refers to the both extreme weather events and extreme climate events.*

<sup>3</sup>*Id.*

<sup>4</sup>CLIMATE CHANGE 2014: SYNTHESIS REPORT, (R. K. Pachauri, Leo Mayer, & Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change eds., 2015).

<sup>5</sup>*Id.*

<sup>6</sup>Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs.(2009), *National Policy on Disaster Management*. Available at: <https://ndma.gov.in/images/guidelines/national-dm-policy2009.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Jemima Rohekar, *What IPCC says about India*, DOWN TO EARTH (May 15, 10.04 AM)

Available at <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/climate-change/what-ipcc-says-about-india-47230>

<sup>8</sup>*Supra* at 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Supra* at 2.

<sup>10</sup>*Id.*

<sup>11</sup>National Dalit Watch of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights & Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development. (2003) IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON LIFE & LIVELIHOOD OF

## II. THE SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES OF DALITS TO DISASTERS

In a country like India, where caste-based discrimination has not ceased to exist, despite legal protection<sup>12</sup> against the same, the existing societal vulnerabilities of the Dalit tend to magnify the climate change induced vulnerabilities or in other words, the former has a threat-multiplier effect on the latter.<sup>13</sup> To illustrate, in most parts of rural India, ‘the geography and the caste system run parallel.’<sup>14</sup> The Dalits are forced to reside far from the non-Dalits on marginal areas such as floodplains, unsafe coastal tracts and hillsides that are hazard prone and are weakly connected with mainland which makes it difficult for relief to reach them at the time of distress. According to the caste-census 2011, more than 43% of Dalit houses are semi-permanent or temporary structures. The same is true for more than 50% Dalit households in rural areas.<sup>15</sup> In urban area further, due to unplanned urbanization<sup>16</sup>, these communities occupy unauthorized slums with exceedingly poor drainage and sanitary conditions.<sup>17</sup> Hence, when a disaster like flood hits such a region, people are prone to water-borne diseases like cholera and diarrhea and vector-borne diseases like malaria,<sup>18</sup> as contaminated urban flood waters have been shown to cause exposure to pathogens and toxic compounds.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Dalits also have limited access to resources such as land, credit, technology and skills etc. Due to landlessness, most people from this community work as farm laborers. Due to non-possession of land, they usually have nothing they can apply for claim once hit by a disaster.<sup>20</sup> Most of those living in poverty are dependent on livestock that is likely to be lost to floods and cyclones as was

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DALITS AN EXPLORATORY STUDY FROM DISASTER RISK REDUCTION LENS Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b150/0369a1894f26f1094a10f0829ae30e56ca8c.pdf>; *Supra* at 2

<sup>12</sup>INDIA CONST. art.15, cl. (1).& art. 17

<sup>13</sup> Aisha Khan, Compounding vulnerabilities, DAWN, (Jul. 22, 2019) Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1495508>

<sup>14</sup>Mahima A. Jain, Landless Dalits Hit Hardest By Disasters Are Last To Get Relief, LSE SOUTH ASIA CENTRE (Nov. 1, 2019) Available at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2019/11/01/long-read-landless-dalits-hit-hardest-by-disasters-are-last-to-get-relief/>

<sup>15</sup>Mahima A Jain, Why disaster rehab must focus on landless Dalit farmers, SCROLL.IN (Oct. 25, 2019) <https://scroll.in/article/940503/why-disaster-rehab-must-focus-on-landless-dalit-farmers>

<sup>16</sup> Vulnerability Profile of India - National Disaster Management Authority, <https://ndma.gov.in/en/vulnerability-profile.html> (last visited May 31, 2020).

<sup>17</sup>*Supra* at 2

<sup>18</sup>CLIMATE CHANGE 2014: IMPACTS, ADAPTATION, AND VULNERABILITY: WORKING GROUP II CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIFTH ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE, (Christopher B. Field, Vicente R. Barros, & Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change eds., 2014).

<sup>19</sup>Sohan, L., B. Shyamal, T.S. Kumar, M. Malini, K. Ravi, V.Venkatesh, M.Veena, and S. Lal, 2008: Studies on leptospirosis outbreaks in PeddamandemMandal of Chittoordistrict, Andhra Pradesh. *Journal of Communicable Diseases*, 40(2), 127-132.

<sup>20</sup> *Supra* at 14.

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in the case of 2004 Tsunami and Super-cyclone in Odisha.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, displacement caused by development projects also compound the vulnerabilities. Studies have established that in general, women are more vulnerable to disasters and its impact than men<sup>22</sup> due to factors such as social and cultural norms<sup>23</sup>, the lack of lifesaving skills along with the responsibility of looking after young children<sup>24</sup>, gender-based division of labor<sup>25</sup> etc. The vulnerability of Dalit women becomes manifold as victims of caste-based violence and exploitation. The caste-based discrimination intensifies the violence and gender discrimination and the same is observed at the time of disaster relief as well.<sup>26</sup> Once the disaster hits, it causes disruption of basic services such as sanitation, water supply and energy provision, stripping populations of their assets and livelihoods and also causing mass migration to cities. Since the impact is not extended equally among socio-economic groups<sup>27</sup>, it reinforces existing inequalities and aggravates poverty and hence magnifies the marginalization further.<sup>28</sup> Hence due to their limited adaptive capacity, Dalits are almost unable to cope with the most severe climate-related hazards.<sup>29</sup>

In the light of these specific vulnerabilities of the Dalit and unequal impact of disasters on them, the disaster management strategies demand inclusivity of the concerns of the Dalit, both, in adaptation to disasters and risk reduction and relief. In this backdrop, the paper seeks to analyze whether the current disaster management strategy in India is inclusive of special needs of the Dalit. In order to do so, we first look at the institutional framework and then few case studies to understand that how much of India's disaster management caters to the interests of the marginalized.

### III. THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

The main legislative framework on disaster management in India is the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The Act provides an institutional set-up for managing disasters and building resilience. It sets up a National Disaster Management

<sup>21</sup>*Id.*

<sup>22</sup>Neumayer, Eric and Plümper, Thomas (2007) The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97 (3). pp. 551-566.

<sup>23</sup>*Id.*

<sup>24</sup>*Id.*

<sup>25</sup> ANU KAPUR, *VULNERABLE INDIA: A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF DISASTERS* (2010), Sage Publications, New Delhi

<sup>26</sup>*Supra* at 2

<sup>27</sup>For instance, the impact of drought on small farmers, agricultural laborers, and small businessmen varies.

<sup>28</sup> UN-HABITAT, *The State of Asian Cities 2010/11*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), UN-HABITAT-Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Fukuoka, Japan, 270 pp

<sup>29</sup>*Supra* at 11

Authority<sup>30</sup> (NDMA) which has the responsibility for laying down the policies, plans and guidelines for disaster management for ensuring timely and effective response to disaster.<sup>31</sup> It also sets up a National Executive Council to assist the NDMA. Similar structure is present at the State and District levels.

Besides this fundamental institutional framework, the cabinet has also approved the National Policy on Disaster Management, 2009. It provides a more detailed framework for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness. The policy tends to address concerns around equity and inclusiveness to certain extent with its preamble acknowledging that certain socially weaker segments of the society are most seriously affected by disasters. Among the vulnerable groups mentioned are *elderly persons, women, children—especially women rendered destitute, children orphaned on account of disasters and differently-abled persons*.<sup>32</sup> However, **any specific mention of Scheduled Castes is absent**. Further, in relief, rehabilitation and recovery too, the policy fails to acknowledge caste-based discrimination as a barrier. One of the themes on which the policy is founded is Community based Disaster Management, including the *last mile* integration of policy, plans and execution<sup>33</sup>. 'The last mile' is suggestive of ensuring the measures reach to those at the margins. But again, this cannot be conclusive.

The next more comprehensive framework is the National Disaster Management Plan which is prepared by the National Executive Council<sup>34</sup> and approved by the NDMA<sup>35</sup>. The first plan was prepared in 2016. The plan is reviewed and updated annually<sup>36</sup> and its implementation is monitored by the Council.<sup>37</sup> The plan was last reviewed in 2019. What is special about the updated plan is that it recognizes the three landmark global agreements that were adopted by India in 2015, namely, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and COP21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This has led to the convergence of the approaches to disaster risk reduction and climate change with sustainable development as the overarching goal. The Sendai Framework has led to a significant shift from disaster management to disaster risk reduction. As regards inclusivity, one of the guiding principles of the is framework is that '*Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards for disaster risk reduction*'.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Sec. 3, The Disaster Management Act, 2005, No. 13, Acts of Parliament, 2005

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* Sec. 6

<sup>32</sup> *Supra* at 2, Preamble to the Policy.

<sup>33</sup> *Supra* at 2

<sup>34</sup> *Supra* Act at note 31 Sec.10

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* Sec. 6 Sub-sec. (2) Cl.(b)

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* Sec. 11 Sub-sec. (4)

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* Sec. 10 Sub-sec. (2) Cl. (f)

<sup>38</sup> Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030, 37. See Principles 7, 19(d), 19(g) and 19(j) Available at [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordren.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordren.pdf)

**By including provisions related to social inclusion, the plan seems to the principles of the Sendai Framework.** One of the 5 pillars of the NDMP is ‘*Social inclusion as a ubiquitous and cross-cutting principle*’<sup>39</sup> Taking the Indian context into consideration there is a separate chapter dedicated to ***social inclusion*** in Disaster Risk Reduction. Further, the plan prescribes for the identification of practical actions and objectives that can ensure an appreciable reduction and elimination of exclusion in every aspect of the disaster risk management. This involves building local strategies, requiring the concerned agencies to make special efforts to assess the special needs of the marginalized through vulnerability mapping etc. It also encourages of community participation of especially the marginalized communities.<sup>40</sup> Designating the SCs as Sub-thematic Area for Action, it also sets out a responsibility framework for several ministries, departments, States and Union Territories. The roles of the Centre and State are also clearly demarcated. Some are lead agencies while others are agencies with major roles. While the Centre’s responsibilities are broad and mainly supervisory such as providing support and promote research on disaster response and mitigation etc., the States’ responsibilities are more specific. The main responsibilities include conducting risk assessment that must include existing discriminatory practices creating hindrances in DRR, ensuring that shelters and relief camps are discriminatory, providing insurance to those affected and ensure that the social audit includes non-discriminatory implementation of DRM etc.<sup>41</sup> Further, the act also provides for the preparation of State Plan and District Plans in accordance with the National Plan.

This brief analysis of the National Plan reveals that there isn’t complete policy blindness on the question of social inclusiveness of Dalits, especially in case of disaster risk reduction. But as far as relief and rehabilitation is concerned, which is currently the main facet of disaster management in India<sup>42</sup>, the plan doesn’t specifically mention prioritization of the most affected, which in most cases are the marginalized. Whether or not the same is adequate and how well are these implemented on ground are questions that can be answered by case studies of selective regions that are generally prone to disasters.

#### IV. CASE STUDIES

##### 4.1. Floods in Dhemaji, Assam

Assam is hit by floods almost annually between June and August due to the flooding of Brahmaputra River. It has been scientifically established that climate change has been aggravating the floods in the State in the recent years, especially

<sup>39</sup> National Disaster Management Authority, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, *National Disaster Management Plan, 2016, Revised Edition 2019* Available at <https://ndma.gov.in/images/pdf/NDMP-2018-Revised-Draft-1-2018OCT16-A.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

post 1950.<sup>43</sup> A field study in Dhemaji, which one of the affected districts of Assam has revealed that frequent flooding, has altered the land-use and at the same time, the poor Dalits of the villages have been given lands near the river banks, more prone to floods. The poor communities in the region are Hajong, Mishng, Sonowal, Bodo, Dewri, Koibarta, and Mallahs. The most affected households are that of the Dalits. A majority of Dalit households are deprived of both education and employment. They mostly depend on earnings from agricultural labour, livestock rearing and other labour that forests and common lands provide. The lack of assets makes them more vulnerable and most of them have to migrate post the floods. The primary economic activity in Dhemaji is cultivation of paddy, rapeseed, mustard and sugarcane. Frequent floods in the region increase the sand content in the soil thereby deteriorating the soil quality. This affects the farm productivity. Also, traditionally, floods have been used to improve the quality of soil, which is no longer useful given the severity of floods at present. And since most Dalits' livelihood is connected with these farms, the same is severely affected forcing them to migrate to Southern States of Karnataka and Kerala. Policy discourses have ignored this problem.

In 2013, Simen River which flows through the middle of Dhemaji, changed its course at Somkong village and flooded around 29 of 48 villages in the region. People at the other side of the bank had been opposing the channel cutting work due to fears of floods in their region. The cutting of channel could have protected the affected side. Majority of the communities residing in the affected 29 villages are Dalits. Very little has been done to rehabilitate and compensate the communities including a meager compensation of Rs. 2000-3000 per year. The government has been mainly responding with structural solutions such as construction of embankments and dams etc. but the same is revealed to be flawed. There have been instances where the floods have been caused by the breaking of embankments themselves.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.2. The Krishna River Floods in Karnataka And Andhra Pradesh

Karnataka takes second position in the list of most vulnerable State to Climate Change in India. It is severely affected by both, floods and drought. The impact of global warming is largely observed in the northern districts of Karnataka such as Bijapur, Gulbarga and Raichur. The State was hit by floods in the Krishna River in 2009 which took the life of around 229 people. Several people sought refuge in the shelter camps. A study was conducted in Bijapur after 5 months of the occurrence of the floods which found that about 92% of Dalits did not receive adequate compensation and relief. Further, the victims also revealed caste bias by local officials themselves in distributing relief services, wherein the officials

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<sup>43</sup>Suparana Katyaini, AnamikaBarua & Bhupen Mili, Assessment of adaptations to floods through bottom up approach: a case of three agro climatic zones of Assam, India, 2012

<sup>44</sup>*Supra* at 11

favoured their own castes.<sup>45</sup> And in most villages, the bureaucrats come from upper castes.<sup>46</sup> Further, as regards the distribution of the relief material, the same took place at the center of the villages, where buildings of the Panchayat office and temples are situated. These are also the spaces where Dalits are not allowed to mingle with the rest. Hence, when the materials were supplied, it was the upper castes that were able to acquire most of the essentials distributed. Further, discrimination was also observed in 'Gruel Centers' which were set up to serve foods to the victims. The upper castes were served first and many Dalits had to return empty-handed including women and children.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh<sup>48</sup>, a study was conducted in the districts of Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Krishna and Guntur which involved a survey of 308 villages out of the 565 affected villages to uncover discriminatory practices and loopholes in the administration. It was found that a majority of Dalits were last to get any flood warnings. Further, many families reported not getting any immediate relief of essentials as per the norms. Due to poor rehabilitation, a no. of families had to migrate to other places to look for livelihood. A no. of Dalit women had to face additional difficulties due to lack of sanitation facilities.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.3. 2007 Tsunami in Tamil Nadu

The coastal state of Tamil Nadu has provided livelihood to fishermen for many years. However, the traditional occupation of fishing is confined to a particular caste. The *Meenavar Community* is the major fishermen caste and inhabits the coast. Each caste fishermen community has around two Dalit communities that work for the fishermen or as agricultural laborers. The Dalit communities have been facing severe discrimination. Their houses are segregated; they are not allowed to become official fishermen and hence are prohibited from owning any means of production. Dalits are allowed to own only small boats on inland waters only. Also, sea fishing is claimed as a customary right by the upper-caste fishermen. Further, the caste fishermen have very powerful representative organizations such as the *Caste Panchayats* known as *Catholic Councils* in Catholic areas. These organizations have been vested with the power to grant fishing licenses. These organizations don't include the Dalits and are hostile to their needs. Hence, the Dalits are often denied fishing licenses. In the hinterland also widespread discrimination and exploitation is prevalent by the landlords. When the Tsunami hit the state in 2007, the Dalits were already vulnerable than

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<sup>45</sup> Hiremath, S., 2010. *Exclusion of Dalits in The Flood Rehabilitation Bijapur District, Karnataka*. [online] Bangalore. Available at: <[https://www.indiawaterportal.org/sites/indiawaterportal.org/files/exclusion-of-dalits-in-the-flood-rehabilitation-in\\_bijapur-karnataka-2010.pdf](https://www.indiawaterportal.org/sites/indiawaterportal.org/files/exclusion-of-dalits-in-the-flood-rehabilitation-in_bijapur-karnataka-2010.pdf)> [Accessed 30 May 2020].

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> National Dalit Watch & Dalit Watch-Andhra Pradesh, 'The Excluded in Relief and Rehabilitation' Survey of post-flood situation of Dalit victims" access to relief and rehabilitation in Andhra Pradesh floods of 2009. Available at <https://www.indiawaterportal.org/sites/indiawaterportal.org/files/the-excluded-in-disaster-reliefrehabilitation-ap-floods-2007.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*



other communities due the existing segregation, lack of assets, meager savings, pre-existing debts, unstable settlements and ineffective representation in local bodies as explained earlier etc.<sup>50</sup> Further, the Dalits are not considered fishermen despite actually engaging in fishing while the caste fishermen even when don't actually fish. This distinction has been one of the major causes of exploitation which has been deepened by government closing eyes to caste-based distribution of licenses. Further, the government agencies and other organizations have used this distinction while implementing relief measures. During the relief measures, there are reports of Dalits being denied entry into the emergency shelters. Further, there was also a denial of food, water and other essentials. The Dalit manual scavengers who were victims of the floods were made to do clean-up work without fulfilling their own needs because they were 'Dalits'. They were also made to collect dead bodies.<sup>51</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

As far as the question of inclusivity in disaster management is concerned, the analysis of case studies above shows that discrimination continues to be deeply entrenched in disaster management. Several other studies have given similar findings. For instance, the surveys in flood hit Bihar<sup>52</sup>, Cyclone hit Odisha<sup>53</sup> and earthquake hit Gujarat have accentuated that social exclusion has magnified the vulnerabilities and impacted the relief and rehabilitation of the Dalits. Disasters deepen these fault lines and expose these exploitative social structures. Certain gaps have been identified in the policy framework itself such as lack of prioritization, poor risk assessment and absence of specific framework for Dalits. Further, there is also a huge gap between what the legislative and policy framework provides and what is seen on ground, something the studies on ground show. Although social inclusion runs through the National Plan of 2019 as a cross-cutting theme, there is still much less attention paid on the Dalits specifically. There is a lack of prioritization in the measures taken. Be it flood warnings or

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<sup>50</sup>Dalit Network Netherlands, MAKING THINGS WORSE: HOW 'CASTE BLINDNESS' IN INDIAN POST-TSUNAMI DISASTER RECOVERY HAS EXACERBATED VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION. ( 2007)

Available at [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/Ind/INT\\_CERD\\_NGO\\_Ind\\_70\\_9034\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/Ind/INT_CERD_NGO_Ind_70_9034_E.pdf)

<sup>51</sup>*Id.*

<sup>52</sup>Dalit Watch, FOR A MORSEL OF LIFE!: A 'DALIT WATCH' REPORT ON THE FLOOD RELIEF CAMPS IN BIHAR. (2008) Available at: <https://www.indiawaterportal.org/sites/indiawaterportal.org/files/for-a-morsel-of-life-kosi-floods-2008.pdf>

<sup>53</sup>NIBEDITA S. RAY-BENNETT, AVOIDABLE DEATHS (2018), <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-66951-9> (last visited May 30, 2020).

<sup>54</sup>Unmesh Patnaik, Prasun Kumar Das & Chandra Sekhar Bahinipati, *Analyzing Vulnerability to Climatic Variability and Extremes in the Coastal Districts of Odisha, India*, 18 REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE 173–189 (2013).

distribution of relief post the disasters, it reaches the Dalits in the end or never reaches at all.

Besides a comprehensive framework that recognizes social inclusion, several other steps can be taken towards building adaptation and resilience of the Dalits to disasters. To begin with, there is a need to develop mechanisms for diversifying the means of livelihood of the Dalit. Our analysis shows that in most cases the Dalits in the rural areas are employed as agricultural laborers by the upper caste farmers. Diversification coupled with skill development will make them self-reliant. This should be especially done in areas with high population of Dalits. Further, there needs to be inter-connectedness in most of the social and economic welfare programs for Dalits. Social protection policies for Dalits must be informed by disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.<sup>55</sup>

Community-based programs involving different stakeholders have proved to be an effective method. The Government of India-UNDP Disaster Risk Management Programme 2002-2009 was an initiative specifically targeted at developing community-based preparedness to disasters with a special focus on women and other marginalized groups. This highly ambitious programme was quite successful especially at the State and District levels.<sup>56</sup> A programme specifically targeting the Dalits on similar lines could go a long way in improving their position post the disasters. Also, in community-based disaster management, the Panchayat is given a major role to play and if the representative body is dominated by the upper castes as in the case of Tamil Nadu, the participation of the Dalits cannot be ensured. Hence, some form of check is necessary. Social audits can play a major role. For conducting social audits, the government should involve Civil Society Organizations that have a credible record of working with the Dalit.<sup>57</sup> Also, Dalit rights groups should be adequately represented in the Task Force/ Committees constituted by the various disaster management authorities in the Act. The response becomes more effective with active participation of marginalized communities as was seen post the Surat Floods where members from the marginalized communities played an important role during the response. Dalits have also organized themselves to fight for equal rights during relief and rehabilitation. This was seen in Gujarat after the earthquake wherein the Kutch Dalits formed an organization called the **Lok Adhikar Manch or Citizen's Rights Forum**.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, effective risk assessments and surveys can help to ensure that relief reaches the Dalits well. The lack of such assessments was in fact one of

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<sup>55</sup> *Supra* at 11.

<sup>56</sup> Government of India-United Nations Development Programme, Disaster Risk Management Programme (2002-2009), Evaluations and Review of Lessons Learnt, Available at: [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/14421\\_DRMReport01.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/14421_DRMReport01.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Bureaucratic Rationality, Political Will, and State Capacity, 52 ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY 7-8 (2015).

<sup>58</sup> Disaster Management Community, Solution Exchange for the Disaster Management Community, Consolidated Reply to Query on the Inclusion of Marginalized in Pre and Post Disaster Management Activities - Experiences (Mar. 2008) Available at: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/cr-se-drm-15010801.pdf>

the reasons why relief could not reach the Dalit post Tsunami in Tamil Nadu. Also, large scale corruption particularly at local levels needs to be checked.<sup>59</sup>

***Disasters don't discriminate***, but by adequate prioritization and assessment of specific vulnerabilities, increase in community participation and representation in administrative bodies, we can make sure that the response is equitable. There is a need to model the strategies for both adaptation and response to disasters on the '***Antyodaya***' ***Approach*** which by uplifting those standing at the margins.

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<sup>59</sup>*Supra* at 51.

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