

Best practices and realities
Dalit women's Political participation in India

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Thank you madam chair.

I am Thilagam from India representing an organization EVIDENCE which works to protect and promote the civil and political rights of dalits.

I am here to present the best practices that we have in India for the enhancement of political participation of the dalit women and its realities. The Indian constitution guarantees equality, for all Indian citizens. As , affirmative action, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments- 1992 provide 33% reservation for women in local governance as well as separate quota for dalit women.

But there is a large difference between nominal representation and real participation of women in politics. The positions occupied by the majority of Dalit women elected representatives are just nominal and many barriers exist preventing their effective participation in power-sharing and decision-making processes.

As our Prime Minister Dr.Manmohan Singh remarked, "Dalits have faced a unique discrimination in our society that is fundamentally different from the problems of minority groups in general. The only parallel to the practice of untouchability is apartheid"¹.

Given this deep-rooted exclusion and historical discrimination against dalit women, the government should take active measures for ensuring real equality. Therefore, it is extremely important to move beyond mention of quotas to actually measuring women's real participation in political decision-making and the impact this creates.

Thus I would recommend for

- Development and use of regular and comprehensive monitoring mechanisms for policy implementation in co-ordination with other government bodies. For example, after Evidence's intervention, in my state of Tamil Nadu all district heads who are the monitoring officers of local governance were directed to conduct regular meetings with the dalit elected representatives in order to identify the hurdles they face, monitoring their functioning in local governance and for assessing their needs But unfortunately this was followed up only for few districts and for only few months before being given up.
- Support structure to be built for the women to provide necessary information, tools and capacitation for the women to participate effectively.
- Regular, comprehensive evaluation of the real participation of dalit women to be done in qualitative manner to redefine and strengthen the mechanisms and tools in practice.

For civil society groups: Start a resource base with successful stories of dalit women in

- political governance with strategies that they used and the impact they could create, to serve as a useful tool to encourage further effective political participation by these women. Thank you

¹ Indian Prime Minister Dr.Manmohan Singh's address at the Dalit —Minority international conference — Dec 27, 2006.