

## **Social Exclusion and Inclusive Local Governance**

*By democratising knowledge and the production of knowledge, we can change power relations and make a more equal, just and democratic world. ---Dr. John Gaventa*

Inclusive growth has remained a prime concern for the Government of India as a way to reduce poverty and disparities. It has been stressed specifically in the Eleventh Plan. Inclusive growth demands equal opportunities for upward social mobility and equal access to the services provided by different service providers including the state. A precondition to inclusive growth is improvements in governance. Especially, in the context of India, where there is a constitutional provision of local governments, it becomes obvious that institutions of governance should be made more inclusive by making them more transparent and accountable. The historical 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993 were a big leap towards strengthening the local government structure. They helped Panchayats and Municipalities to emerge as an important level of government within the federal structure, playing a more determining role in state politics and the capacity to carry out development at the local level. They also opened up opportunities for mainstreaming marginalised sections in political, social and economic decision-making processes.

The Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are communities that have been traditionally subjected to social exclusion from the mainstream society. Indian Constitution accords a special status for the SCs and STs. Although the efforts made in the previous Five Year Plans have brought about some empowerment of SCs/STs, gaps still exist in almost all social and economic dimensions between SCs/STs and the general population. Despite affirmative actions like reservation for the welfare of Dalits and tribals, the government itself lags behind in implementing the various schemes meant for SCs, STs and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and building leadership of the SC/ST leaders in local governance institutions.

Even after the various constitutional provisions, the caste-based hierarchy and power rules the traditional social order and the political dynamics to a great extent. The law enforcing agencies and state machineries treat Dalits as unequal citizens and fail to protect their constitutional rights. At the same time, there are disparities among the SCs/STs, as they are sub divided into various castes, placed in definite order of subordination. Untouchability and discrimination are often observed in relation to each other. As a result their participation in electoral politics has been misinterpreted, manipulated or else ridiculed.

There is thus a need to build the capacities of SC and ST grassroots leaders to perform effectively in units of local governance. Special training components are required to be introduced in State Institutes for Rural Development (SIRDs) Administrative Training

Institutes (ATIs) and institution for urban self-governance to build the skills and capacities of the SC/ST elected representatives. This is needed so that they could gain confidence, provide leadership and play a proactive role in the development of their communities, villages and municipal areas in their jurisdictions. Alongside, government officials should be adequately sensitised and made aware of the constitutional safeguards and mandates about mainstreaming of SC/STs in the society and political sphere, so that they can play an important role in enabling effectiveness of SC/ST elected representatives. State governments as well as the central government are required to take initiatives in generating awareness about the schemes and entitlements like the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP), Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), Special Central Assistance (SCA) among the SC and ST communities and elected representatives.

### **Bridging the Gap: Research and Practice**

Apart from constitutional mandates and their implementation, demands for inclusive citizenship require recognition of citizens' knowledge and voice. The challenges of poverty, inequality and exclusion necessitate people's reality be understood from their vantage point. There is, however, a gap in knowledge development of issues related to inclusive citizenship. Academic research pursuits are overtly theoretical and offer limited opportunities to improve the well being of these communities. Practice research of practitioners, on the contrary, lacks a theoretical knowledge base to articulate their work as opinion and to influence policy for well being of the marginalised communities.

There are many civil society organisations (CSOs), which are working on Dalit and tribals and their human rights issues. It is evident that these civil society groups were able to bring the most vulnerable people to the forefront and have pressurised the government to register their opinion. These civil society groups are also the knowledge banks on the issues of SC/ST communities. On the other hand, Centres for Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy/Ambedkar Study Centres/Dr. Ambedkar Chairs are foremost institutions carrying out research on marginalised communities, through which they can address the problem of social exclusion by studying, understanding and transcending the phenomena for policy evolutions on the issues concerning the social exclusion. These centres are multi disciplinary research centre established to carry out research and teaching in the areas of social exclusion, discriminatory studies and inclusive policy. The key objectives of the centres are to conceptualise and problematise discrimination, exclusion and inclusion based on caste, ethnicity and religion. The centre proposes to focus on developing understanding of the nature and dynamics of exclusion and discrimination at both theoretical and empirical levels. These centres can bring together diverse individuals, groups and institutions to help understand the causes and consequences of social exclusion, and suggest remedies to fully include the excluded communities in the process of modernisation and development of the country.

There is a need to bridge the gap between the knowledge, which lies with the practitioners working with the marginalised communities and the centres for

knowledge that help in giving this knowledge a theoretical shape by bringing them on a single platform.

The specific objectives of the consultation were to bring together academic researchers and practitioners to:

- Develop new knowledge, concepts, insights and practical innovations in knowledge building to foster ways for strengthening leadership of marginalised communities in institutions of local governance.
- Using this knowledge for practical purpose of policy change and developmental interventions, as for contributing to the theoretical elaboration.
- Developing a roadmap of ways for collaboration between CSOs and academic centres for strengthening SC leadership in local governments.
- Working together at state level on the issues of social exclusion and inclusive local governance on the basis of the key action agenda emerged between CSOs, Ambedkar Study Centres and Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policies (CSSIP).