

## DALIT ADVOCACY IN NEPAL SPURS THE UN TO INVESTIGATE DISCRIMINATION AT THE WATER PUMP

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Kathmandu, Nepal and Washington, DC: Responding to allegations raised by Dalit advocates, the UN Development Program (UNDP) is adopting more stringent safeguards to ensure that low caste Dalits are not forced to drink from separate water taps in villages.

Through the new policy, UNDP seeks to boost efforts aimed at empowering traditionally excluded groups, like Dalits. It will use small agricultural grants to encourage community groups to include Dalits in managing water wells and taps.

The agency is also in the process of sensitizing its own staff in Nepal with an improved human rights “orientation package” and training, so as to focus the agency more on social as well as economic inequality in Nepal.

The new policy was recommended by UNDP evaluators who recently visited UNDP-funded water projects in the Dipayal-Silagadhi municipality of Doti District, western Nepal. Doti is one of many regions where Dalit are routinely forced to use separate water taps, or wait until non-Dalits have drawn water. This adds significantly to the time spent fetching water and is also in violation of Nepal’s Constitution.

The UNDP mission was undertaken after the Jagaran Media Center (JMC), a prominent Dalit advocacy group and partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), reported in its September 2005 bulletin that UNDP was funding separate water taps in the municipality. JMC also reported that a 10-year-old boy in one village, Bagthata, was beaten after drinking at a non-Dalit well. The Dalit well was then defiled with feces and stones. This case was even raised by NGOs at a meeting in Geneva.

The UNDP team visited five of the 13 water sources funded by UNDP’s Rural-Urban Partnership (RUUP) program in Doti district. While it found no evidence that UNDP had funded separate taps, the team did confirm that serious discrimination persists in the region, and even observed cases of Dalits who were forced to wait until non-Dalits had finished using water. “Caste discrimination and untouchability are still practiced in the district, and water remains an issue,” concludes the team’s report.

The team recommended that UNDP could reduce economic inequality between castes through further prevention and “affirmative action.” It also suggested that UNDP extend more support to community groups that manage the water, on condition that they do not practice discrimination.

The team visited one village well in Ekata Sama Bikas that was being managed by 27 Dalit women who had previously been forced to wait for hours for water. The community agreed to

include the women after being given a UNDP grant to improve the water source.

As well as addressing economic disparities, the UNDP mission called for more focus on “the underlying social inequalities and indignities that Dalit face.” This, it said, will require greater sensitivity from UNDP’s own staff. It noted that all seven members of the RUUP program are non-Dalit males – “hardly representative of the population they serve.”

Contacted by AP, Lisa Hiller, the UNDP’s Communications Manager in Nepal, said that the new recommendations will be broadly applied. She credited JMC with helping UNDP to scale up its efforts against poverty and disempowerment.

“We moved quickly to dispatch a team to investigate the allegations raised by JMC. These allegations concerned us deeply, as the basis of all our work in Nepal is to empower people who have been traditionally discriminated against,” Ms. Hiller said. “The 800-year-old tradition of caste-based discrimination in Nepal will take generations to dismantle. UNDP sees this issue as the most pressing national challenge in Nepal today.”

Two AP interns – Nicole Cordeau and Stacey Spivey – are working with JMC this summer. One of their jobs is helping JMC to develop a grassroots network of partners in the villages who can collect regular information to JMC and send it outside the country to partners like AP, who can use it in lobbying against discrimination.

- View the [JMC E-bulletin](#)
- [Email](#) Lisa Hiller for a copy of the UNDP report
- Read 2006 AP intern [Stacey’s blogs](#)
- Read 2006 AP intern [Nicole’s blogs](#)