



Caste and Development:

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Tackling work and descent-based discrimination to achieve the SDGs for all



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The Bond network is made up of over 400 organisations working across the international development and humanitarian sectors. Our 44 working groups bring together international development professionals to take joint action and share learning on policy and practice areas.

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Abbreviations

CSO	civil society organisation
DWD	discrimination based on work and descent
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	non-governmental organisations
NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
NVGs	National Voluntary Guidelines
PACS	Poorest Areas Civil Society
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCSP	Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ST	Scheduled Tribes

Executive summary

Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) excludes and marginalises some of the most vulnerable groups in at least 20 countries, while privileging others. It is an important structural cause of entrenched poverty and inequality. Inherited caste status, as it is found in South Asia and its global diaspora, has been described as 'an important determinant of life opportunity for a fifth of the world's population'.¹ Those people most negatively affected often identify as Dalit. Dalit social movements are growing in strength and numbers and reaching out to groups affected by DWD around the world.

Different forms of DWD have common characteristics that perpetuate poverty and exclusion across generations, including socially enforced restrictions in marriage, discrimination in education, employment and business, restricted access to resources and public spaces, stigma associated with notions of 'impurity' or 'untouchability', and vulnerability to debt bondage and slavery. Despite this, caste and other forms of DWD are largely invisible in global development policy debates. Their implications for delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not given the same significance as other characteristics, such as sex, age or disability. Drawing on the South Asian experience, this report aims to remedy this situation and suggests some caste-sensitive approaches to development.

Agenda 2030 sets out our collective responsibility for ensuring that no one is left behind. Caste inequalities and DWD must be addressed in affected countries if SDG targets are to be met for all. This demands action to secure the human rights and respond to the needs and priorities of affected people, challenge discrimination and prejudice wherever it occurs, change unhelpful laws, policies and practices, and ensure that caste-based power inequalities are openly addressed and understood.

The available evidence challenges common assumptions – that caste is a thing of the past, is eliminated in the modern market economy, or is restricted to South Asia. Caste-based discrimination has been recently documented in the UK, where affected people report serious personal consequences and problems in seeking justice. In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues stressed the continued importance of DWD and the need for targeted attention to the situation of those affected.² In 2017, the UN published comprehensive guidance on caste-based discrimination as part of an action plan on racial discrimination and protection of minorities.³

The evidence from South Asia shows how caste reproduces poverty and exclusion in ways that often cut across SDG goals and targets. Discrimination in education and employment limit opportunity, and the lack of secure jobs, in turn, often forces parents to take children out of school. Social protection systems can be helpful, but only if they are accessible for marginalised groups. In the absence of appropriate safety nets, Dalits are often forced into exploitative forms of work, and their attempts to break out of these relationships are often met with violence that may not be adequately prosecuted because of discriminatory attitudes among duty-bearers. Caste persists, in part, because of the economic benefits it confers on privileged groups. Economic growth can increase caste inequalities, and Dalits are often disproportionately affected by its environmental impacts, including climate change. Development and humanitarian responses to disasters may exclude or fail to meet the needs of the most marginalised caste groups because development practitioners are often unaware of caste power dynamics. Finally, caste affects the dignity, status and safety of women and girls, restricting their access to education and resources, and increasing the risk of violence against them, and is, therefore, an important barrier to gender equality.

While evidence of caste discrimination is unequivocal, there is very little data to monitor progress in addressing caste-based disparities in achievement of specific SDG targets. This needs to be addressed, but efforts to do so should not detract from urgent action to respond to caste-based discrimination, exclusion and violence, based on existing evidence from human rights monitoring bodies, academic research, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations, which can shape and inform appropriate responses.

¹ Caste and development: Contemporary perspectives on a structure of discrimination and advantage, David Mosse, *World Development*, 2018, 110, pp422–436, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X18301943

² *Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues* (A/HRC/31/56), Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly, 2016, para 23, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/31/56>

³ *Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination: Key Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Combat Caste-Based and Analogous Forms of Discrimination*, United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 2017.

There is also much to be learned from existing responses of governments, citizens groups, NGOs and other civil society organisations. These include protective legislation, transformative social protection, rehabilitation of bonded labourers, affirmative action, special budget provisions, efforts to make markets more inclusive, social responsibility in the private sector, democratic action, communications and media and regional cooperation. The advocacy of Dalits and their social movements has been critical in bringing about many progressive reforms and getting good policies implemented. It will be important that their voice and participation continue to influence delivery of the SDGs. Collective efforts to end prejudice and create the conditions for social change will also be essential.

What donors and NGOs working in affected countries can do:

- Take steps to ensure staff are more representative of the diverse communities they serve and are trained on caste, non-discrimination and inclusion; ensure internal policies for non-discrimination and equality of opportunity address caste issues.
- Address caste in context analysis; involve Dalits and other marginalised groups in programme design and implementation; monitor the extent to which programmes help address caste-based inequalities and disseminate learning about effective responses.
- Support Dalit advocacy platforms and their participation in SDG delivery; promote policy changes to address caste and intersecting barriers to rights, equality and the SDGs and support community-level programmes to challenge discrimination and harmful practices.
- Support and encourage national governments to improve the collection of caste-disaggregated data in ways that are inclusive and appropriate to national contexts.
- Recognise and advocate rights-based and caste-sensitive approaches as part of rights-based development strategies in any engagement with the private sector, including to address exploitation of Dalits and other marginalised groups in global value chains.
- Promote coherent domestic policies to stop caste discrimination wherever it occurs.
- Deliver inclusive and appropriate humanitarian response working closely with representative community based organisations.

What governments of caste-affected countries can do:

- Prioritise measures to remove the caste-specific barriers to SDG Goals and targets faced by socially excluded groups, based on all available evidence including human rights data. Develop caste-sensitive indicators to monitor progress.
- Work with Dalit and rights organisations towards compliance with the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on Work and Descent.
- Deliver training and campaigns to challenge discriminatory social norms and raise awareness among public and government officials, teachers and media practitioners on caste, gender and other forms of discrimination, and of rights to non-discrimination.
- Invest in public education and discussions to help change mindsets around damaging social norms; facilitate common spaces for interaction between people of different communities on equal terms and celebrate diversity.
- Involve Dalit organisations in delivery and review of SDGs, including at subnational level. Enable citizen-led mechanisms to strengthen social accountability, so that Dalits can highlight specific barriers they face and comment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of national policies for delivery of the SDGs.
- Put in place special mechanisms to address the issues faced by Dalit women
- Ensure adequate budget allocations and effective mechanisms for utilisation of these funds

Introduction



India's brick kiln factories keep many poor Dalit communities in bonded labour, forcing them to return each year to pay off their debts. The women in this family won't even get paid for their work. Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Pratap Rughani.

Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD), which includes caste, derives from social hierarchies that enact a distinct set of human rights violations against diverse groups of people, based on their ancestry and the work they do. These systems have changed over time, but they persist and pervade many aspects of life in affected countries. They contribute to multiple inequalities and barriers to inclusive development, yet they have received limited recognition among development practitioners and the global community and its institutions.

The Bond Caste and Development group of UK-based international development agencies was established following a 2014 Bond motion recognising DWD and caste as contributing to structural causes of poverty. In 2015 members organised the conference, Caste – Out of the Shadows, with Dalit activist groups.⁴ The Caste and Development group brings together organisations to collaborate on advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building to overcome barriers of caste in development.

Our report aims to inform policy makers, civil society organisations and governments and invite them to critically engage with the issue of caste and its implications for sustainable development. We argue that a focus on DWD and caste is vital in order for the development community to achieve development goals and human rights. With a view to the 2019 regional and global forums on the SDGs, we examine some of the barriers caste presents to the achievement of selected SDG goals and targets and propose a 'caste-sensitive' approach to sustainable development.

⁴ Caste – out of the shadows, SOAS, 5 September 2015, www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/events/caste-out-of-the-shadows

The widespread problems of caste and DWD

Among the many challenges to the achievement of the SDGs, caste and DWD have received little attention, despite being an important structural cause of poverty in at least 20 countries and among communities practising all major religions.

Systems of DWD and caste hierarchies are perpetuated through norms that restrict marriage between groups associated with 'hereditary' occupational identities or social relations involving economic dependence, forced labour or other forms of slavery. Affected groups have begun to mobilise around a common agenda to address their exclusion and exploitation by social systems that discriminate on the basis of 'who you are and the work you do'.

Structures of DWD and caste are inherently unequal because they assign people graded identities at birth. There is evidence that they also contribute to rising inequality by blocking economic and social mobility for some groups,⁵ while reserving opportunities and privileges for other groups, particularly in education, employment and the enjoyment of economic benefits.⁶ There is widespread consensus on the characteristics of DWD (see box).

DWD and caste have long been a source of humiliation, oppression, protest and resistance, and a cause of entrenched poverty, but are not mentioned in Agenda 2030 and are still not widely addressed in development discourse. This report highlights why this should be addressed, focusing on the socioeconomic and human impacts for South Asia, which has the largest affected populations.

Characteristics of discrimination based on work and descent (caste)

There is widespread consensus on the characteristics of DWD:

- inability or restricted ability to alter inherited status
- socially enforced restrictions on marriage outside the community
- private and public segregation, including in housing and education, access to public spaces and public sources of food and water
- subjection to dehumanising discourses referring to pollution or untouchability
- limited freedom to renounce inherited occupations or degrading or hazardous work
- subjection to debt bondage
- generalised lack of respect for human dignity and equality.

Source: CERD General Recommendations No 29 on Descent-based Discrimination (2002)

Untouchability, Dalits and class – caste in South Asia

Caste in South Asia is often associated with the four varnas – broad social categories recognised in the Hindu tradition – but those most discriminated against comprise a fifth group excluded from this system. Caste is not necessarily a Hindu phenomenon and caste-based prejudice remains an issue among South Asian Christians and Muslims, for example, despite being rejected by their religions.

The most excluded and subordinated caste groups are considered 'impure' and treated as 'untouchable' because of their occupations and history of subordination, economic dependency and enslavement. Most now identify themselves as Dalits, a term that means broken or crushed in Marathi.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, India's first law minister, described caste as 'enclosed class' because it prevents social and employment mobility. As he put it: 'The caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers.' Caste tends to stigmatise and undervalue jobs generally done by Dalits, such as sanitation and waste management.

⁵ Gail Omvedt: Mobility and caste are antithetical, Forward Press, 8 May 2018, www.forwardpress.in/2018/05/gail-omvedt-mobility-and-caste-are-antithetical

⁶ See note 1, Mosse.

⁷ Dalit: the making of a political subject, P Muthukkaruppan, *Critical Quarterly*, 2014, 56, pp34–45

Terms used and scope of this report

Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) is the term used in international contexts to refer to caste and similar structures. The focus of this report is primarily on South Asia, so we have frequently used the term caste in this report.

Different terms are used by governments. Scheduled Castes (SC) is the term the Indian Government uses for people acutely affected by caste-based discrimination, although this is itself exclusionary because it does not include Muslims and Christians, many of whom are also affected. India also recognises another category, Scheduled Tribes (ST) as among the most vulnerable groups.⁸ Unlike 'tribe', caste does not necessarily mark a difference of ethnicity. People of common language, region and culture are divided by caste.

In Africa, DWD is sometimes referred to as caste and can include systems of slavery. There are different caste or slave groups with distinct titles and cultural identities. DWD/caste structures are less prevalent in South America, but Brazil's Quilombolo, the descendants of people who escaped slavery in the colonial era, continue to face DWD, as do the Burakumin (Buraku) people of Japan.⁹

Dalit, a unifying political category, is now preferred by many people with various caste identities who are subordinated and excluded in society. Although not all such people actively self-identify as Dalits, we have used this term in relation to caste in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora, where it is most widely used. Dalits are not a homogenous group, and we have sometimes used the names of specific castes or social groups.

In discussing social interactions, and mindful of the psychological impacts on individuals and communities, we have avoided reinforcing perceptions we seek to change. We use terms such as 'privileged castes' or 'dominant castes' rather than 'upper caste' and 'subordinated', and 'excluded' rather than 'low'. We have tried to refer to communities by the names by which most members call themselves, but recognise that caste identities are complex and context-specific.

⁸ Come indigenous peoples, especially in India, experience caste-like forms of discrimination, although not usually 'untouchability'. As indigenous peoples face other distinct sets of issues, often involving land dispossession, and as they are recognised to some extent in Agenda 2030 and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), we have not included them in this report.

⁹ What is Buraku Discrimination?, Buraku Liberation League, www.bll.gr.jp/eng.html

DWD, caste and the Sustainable Development Goals

Exclusion and marginalisation related to caste and DWD are largely invisible to policy makers. Agenda 2030 provides an opportunity for bold and transformative steps to address this. The Political Declaration envisages 'a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity'. The emphasis is on reaching the poorest and most vulnerable as a priority, in order that we leave no one behind, and the creation of inclusive societies and shared prosperity so that inequality is reduced. In practice, this means enabling people and groups who are left behind to progress at a higher rate than those who are better off; understanding what they want, need and prioritise; focusing on places where they live; and targeting additional support to their needs.¹⁰

The need to identify and track progress of those groups who are furthest behind or most at risk of exclusion and marginalisation has spurred global efforts toward improved data collection and disaggregation to measure progress in reducing disparities. Despite appeals from civil society groups,¹¹ Agenda 2030 does not specifically mention caste, but the monitoring framework highlights the need for data disaggregation by 'characteristics relevant in the national context' (Target 17.18).

Systems of DWD including caste must be recognised as characteristics for data disaggregation in the countries where they happen. This will make related disparities in development outcomes visible and enable a more 'caste-sensitive' delivery of the SDGs

Agenda 2030 also articulates a vision of collective responsibility for delivering the SDGs, and the need for a 'spirit of global solidarity, in particular, with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations'. While acknowledging that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, it recognises the role of development assistance in achieving the goals for all.¹² Some of these responsibilities are set out in SDG 17, but the targets could go further, for example by encouraging a greater focus on the quality of development assistance (rather than just the quantity), including to better address entrenched inequality and its structural causes.



Courtesy of National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, New Delhi.

¹⁰ Defining 'leave no one behind', Elizabeth Stuart and Emma Samman, Overseas Development Institute, 2017, www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11809.pdf.

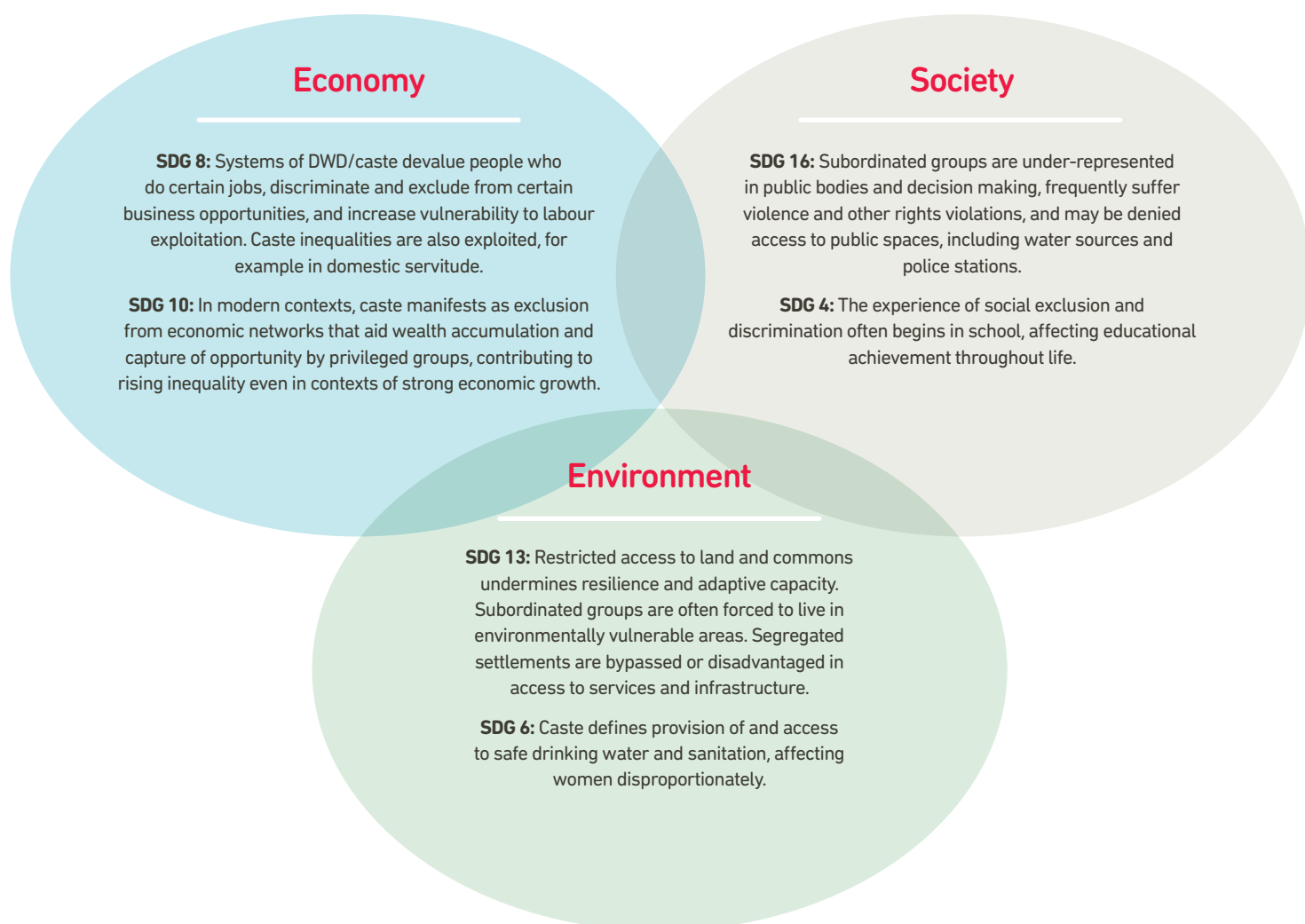
¹¹ 260 million Dalits appeal for inclusion in the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, Asia Dalit Rights Forum, www.asiadalitrightrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/1142297951123.pdf

¹² Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations, 2015.

The responsibilities of wealthy countries also extend to ensuring coherent domestic policies oriented to the achievement of goals and targets globally. For example, as well as having domestic policies to protect their own citizens from discrimination and modern slavery, governments should be vigilant to ensure businesses do not exploit marginalised groups in global supply chains. To do this effectively, they need to take heed of the structural inequalities that put certain groups at risk. The fact that DWD including caste is often invisible to outsiders or deliberately concealed may suggest it is dying out in the modern world, but while there have been changes in forms and manifestations of caste, the overwhelming evidence suggests associated discrimination and exclusion continue to pervade many aspects of life.¹³

Caste is a barrier to education and decent work, to inclusive economies, to the enjoyment of rights and representation, and therefore to sustainable development

Figure 1:
Caste structures and the three pillars of sustainable development.



¹³ See note 1, Mosse.

DWD and caste in human rights frameworks

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination as 'any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'.¹⁴

While the Convention does not explicitly mention caste, the reference to descent provides a source of international legal obligations for the eradication of caste-based discrimination.¹⁵ The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination concluded in 2002 that discrimination based on descent covers caste and analogous systems of inherited status, which are thereby covered by the Convention.¹⁶ A 2004 review of issues associated with DWD and caste highlighted that the problem was 'more widespread than might have been envisaged'.¹⁷

The 2009 Draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent propose general and special measures, including adoption of specific anti-discrimination legislation and relevant policy measures for governments and their agencies, UN and other international agencies, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. These were developed from a UN study on discrimination based on work and descent undertaken by the former UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.¹⁸

A 2016 report by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues stressed the continued importance of DWD, its relationship with inequality, discrimination and poverty and the need for targeted attention to the situation of those affected.¹⁹ In 2017, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published comprehensive guidance on caste-based discrimination, the first of its kind to directly address caste and part of an action plan for implementation of UN recommendations on racial discrimination and protection of minorities.²⁰

The UN's 2017 Guidance on a Rights-based Approach to Descent-based Discrimination calls for analysis of how laws, social norms, traditional practices and institutional responses positively or negatively affect the realisation of rights of affected people, referring to Agenda 2030 and populations who are 'left behind'



Dalit sweepers contribute to Dhaka's production of public goods, but get very few goods or services in return. The Dalit movement in Bangladesh is now growing in confidence. Courtesy of IDSIN. Photography by Jakob Carlsen.

¹⁴ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2106, UN, 1965.

¹⁵ Descent-based Discrimination in International Law: A Legal History, David Keane, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 2005, 12, pp93-116.

¹⁶ CERD General Recommendation XXIX on Descent-based Discrimination, OHCHR, 2002.

¹⁷ *Prevention of Discrimination*, Asbjørn Eide and Yozo Yokota, Commission on Human Rights, UN Economic and Social Council, 2004, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G04/147/91/PDF/G0414791.pdf>

¹⁸ Final report of Human Rights Council at its 11th session in 2009 (A/HRC/11/CRP.3), OHCHR, 2009.

¹⁹ See note 2, UN HRC, para 23.

²⁰ See note 3, UN.

DWD, caste and inequality around the world

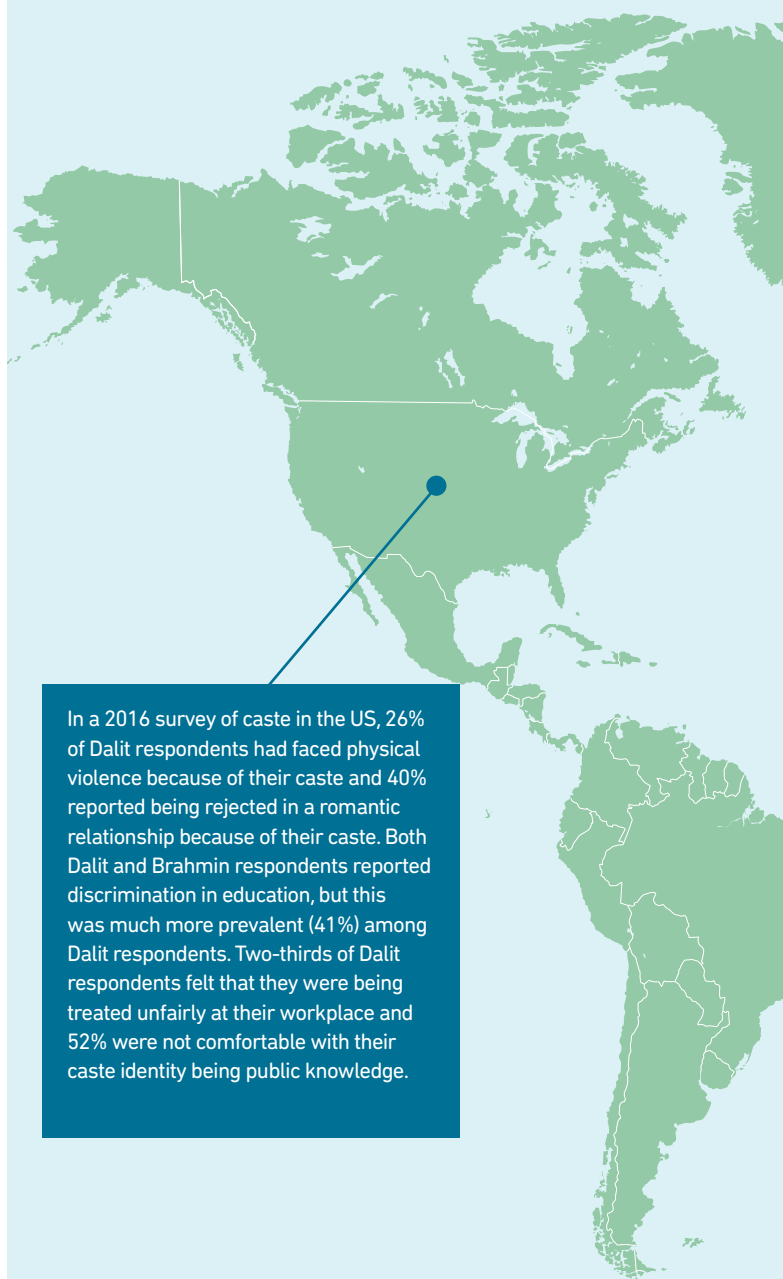
DWD hierarchies are complex and relational – they subordinate and exclude many, but also confer privileges and economic benefits upon others. Inherited caste identity has been described as ‘an important determinant of life opportunity for a fifth of the world’s population’, but it is not given the same significance in global development policy debates as gender, race, age, religion or other identity characteristics.²¹

Estimating the total number of people who are excluded by caste is difficult because of the lack of official data. In 2016, the UN cited the often-quoted figure of 250 million people, of whom 201 million live in India,²² but many more may be affected for a variety of reasons, including population growth, the existence of uncounted groups, and the invisibility of many Dalits in national statistics. For example, Pakistan only counts Dalits who are part of the Hindu minority; and in India, Dalits practising minority faiths such as Christianity, Buddhism and Islam are excluded from census data.

Caste as a form of DWD is most conspicuous in South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and its diaspora, but a review of references to similar types of discrimination in UN reports found that distinct forms of DWD are also found in Japan, Micronesia, Yemen, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Ghana, Niger, Mauritius, Mauritania, Madagascar, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Suriname – and possibly more countries. It occurs in diaspora communities in Europe, North America, Asia-Pacific and Africa.²³

Figure 2: Some examples of caste and DWD around the world

DWD is not the same as discrimination based on ethnicity, although it may be related. Some of the affected groups belong to the same larger ethnic, religious or linguistic community in which they are subordinated, while others are a distinct ethnic group. They share an inherited position in society in which they face discrimination, stigma, devaluation of their work (despite this being illegal in most cases) and restrictions on marriage that ensure their status is hereditary.



²¹ See note 1, Mosse.

²² See note 2, UN HRC, para 31.

²³ *Caste Discrimination and Human Rights: A comprehensive compilation of how caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination based on work and descent have been addressed by the UN treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review, and the Special Procedures*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 11th ed, 2018.

Caste structures among the Indian diaspora in the UK are little understood. The UK Equality Act outlaws racial and ethnic discrimination but does not specifically mention caste. Jurisprudence has established caste to be an aspect of ethnicity, but caste-based discrimination occurs within groups who share ethnicity. UK law does not offer clear guidance for people who have a duty to prevent discrimination.

The Burakumin of Japan are not an ethnic minority, but are socially marginalised by historic association with stigmatised occupations. Although their living standards and opportunities have much improved, they still face discrimination in education and employment. The notion of 'outcaste' social classes rooted in Japan's ancient feudal systems was officially abolished in 1871, yet Japan still lacks effective measures to end discrimination against the Burakumin and other minorities.

Over half Mauritania's population are Haratine, the ethnic group most strongly associated with slavery, although they are not the only group affected by DWD and caste. Children are born into slavery (which is passed through the female line) and slave ownership confers status in society. Slaves are excluded from education, politics and property ownership.

In Yemen, the Muhamasheen ('marginalised ones'), also known as Al Akhdam ('servants') are a socially and economically excluded minority, although they are Arabic-speaking Muslims like other Yemenis. Their occupational roles include garbage collection, street sweeping and cleaning toilets and drains.

Sri Lanka's ethnic groups have their own caste structures. Sinhala groups such as the Rodi suffer extreme poverty and are under continued pressure to pursue caste occupations, such as removing dead animals. Among Sri Lankan Tamils, a myriad of groups collectively labelled as Panchamar are regarded as 'untouchable'. They are disproportionately represented on the Jaffna peninsula and are among those displaced during the war and 2004 tsunami. The caste system among Indian Tamils traces its origins to their arrival as indentured labourers for plantations under colonial rule.

Caste and diaspora communities

The greatest prevalence of DWD among diaspora communities is among the South Asian diaspora, through which caste systems migrated to Africa (especially Mauritius, Madagascar, East Africa and South Africa), Europe (especially the UK), the Americas (US, Canada and Suriname), the Middle East (Bahrain, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates), Malaysia, the Maldives, Australia and the Pacific (Fiji).²⁵

People in the South Asian diaspora frequently face racial discrimination as well as caste discrimination. This is compounded by a lack of understanding in the wider population about caste and how it differs from race or ethnicity. A 2006 report on the experiences of Indian people settling in the UK found that while caste identity was a source of solidarity, human and material support, and access to information about economic opportunities and skills for some, it was much less positive for those excluded and discriminated against.²⁶

Caste in the UK

A survey that documented caste discrimination among communities of South Asian descent in the UK found evidence of harassment, violence, discrimination in employment and service delivery, and bullying in schools. It estimated the vulnerable population at between 50,000 and 200,000, from a variety of religious groups.

Some respondents succeeded in stopping discrimination or harassment after taking cases to the authorities. Others did not report it for a number of reasons. They feared the authorities were of the same caste as the perpetrators (or were the perpetrators), they could not explain the problem to non-Asians, they were embarrassed to reveal their own caste, they did not believe the authorities could do anything, or they thought reporting might exacerbate the problem. The personal consequences of caste discrimination and harassment included reduced career prospects and earnings, detrimental impacts on education, social isolation, reduced access to services, and depression, anger and loss of self-esteem.²⁷

The UK Government decided in 2018 against an amendment to the Equality Act (2010) listing caste as an aspect of race and a 'protected characteristic', on the basis of which it is illegal to discriminate in employment and access to services. While not rejecting the existence of caste-based discrimination in Britain, it was decided that the Equality Act can be interpreted to protect against caste discrimination, if caste is regarded as an aspect of ethnicity, without caste being specifically mentioned. However, many feel the inclusion of caste is necessary to raise awareness of the issue of caste discrimination among employers and service providers who have a duty under the Act.



Caste Watch UK demonstrates in London against the caste system that denies equal opportunities for all. Credit: Paul Davey/Alamy Live News

²⁵ See note 2, UN HRC, para 45.

²⁶ *No Escape: Caste Discrimination in the UK*, Dalit Solidarity Network UK, 2006, <http://dsnuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/No-Escape-Report-Caste-in-the-UK.pdf>

²⁷ *Caste discrimination and harassment in Great Britain*, Government Equalities Office, 2010.

Caste and gender

Unequal gender relations are inextricably bound up with caste discrimination, which affects the dignity, status and safety of women in all aspects of their lives. Dalit women have less power and restricted access to resources, increasing the likelihood that they will face poverty and be subjected to violence.²⁸ In the workplace, caste and gender hierarchies are amplified and exploited, trapping affected women in low-status jobs with a high risk of verbal abuse and physical and sexual violence.²⁹ Many Dalit women working in domestic servitude are also isolated and vulnerable. Caste inequalities shape relationships between different groups of women, including women participating in development programmes, disempowering those from subordinated castes.³⁰

An emerging Dalit feminist movement has been critical of mainstream feminism for ignoring the impact of caste on women's lives. Conversely, women have complained of being marginalised within Dalit organisations.³¹ The voices of Dalit women need to be more strongly heard and their diverse experiences better understood if we are to genuinely leave no one behind. Many Dalit women face multiple types of discrimination and disadvantages because of their caste, class, gender, ethnicity, religion and migratory status, factors that intersect to be mutually reinforcing (see box).³²

Action to end violence against women and girls needs to be informed by a greater understanding of DWD and caste as contributing factors. Entrenched poverty and social exclusion can increase the risk of family violence, as well as practices such as forced or early marriage, which are a response to poverty and concerns about girls' safety and security. Women are especially vulnerable to violence perpetrated by more dominant castes and people in positions of authority.

In South Asia, this takes many forms, including rape and public humiliation meted out as a form of social sanction against perceived transgressions from ascribed status and role, and to publicly reinforce caste hierarchies by humiliating women, their families and communities.³⁵ Violence may also be opportunistic – sexual violence against Dalit women and girls is common, but often goes unreported because women

Multiple axes of discrimination

Female municipal cleaners in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka face multiple forms of exclusion and stigma associated with their gender, caste and 'traditional' occupation. Additionally, many are descended from communities taken under British colonial rule from other parts of India to work in Dhaka before partition. Therefore, they also face isolation and disadvantages because of their different language and ethnicity, their status as a Hindu minority in a predominantly Muslim population and their lack of a home village in what is now Bangladesh, which limits their housing options and is a further barrier to escaping their occupation.³³

Muslim Dalit women in India may experience exclusion and marginalisation due to their stigmatised occupations (or their families working in these jobs), even though Muslims are not supposed to practise 'untouchability'. Their status as a religious minority and gender norms in their communities may add additional layers of exclusion. Many of India's Muslim Dalits are descendants of Hindus who converted to Islam to escape caste, but the stigma has not necessarily gone away. Despite this, they are not afforded the special provisions made for Hindu Scheduled Castes, including quotas in education and employment, and they remain one of the poorest groups.³⁴

²⁸ *Dalit Women Speak Out: Caste, Class and Gender Violence in India*. A Irudayam, JP Mangubhai and JG Lee, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2011.

²⁹ The U-shaped female labor force function in economic development and economic history, C Goldin, NBER Working Paper No 4707, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1994.

³⁰ Microcredit self-help groups and Dalit women: Overcoming or essentializing caste difference?, I Guérin and S Kumar, in S Anandhi and K Kapadia, eds, *Dalit Women: Vanguard of an Alternative Politics in India*, Taylor & Francis, 2017.

³¹ Introduction, S Kapadia, in S Anandhi and K Kapadia, eds, *Dalit Women: Vanguard of an Alternative Politics in India*, Taylor & Francis, 2017.

³² From more examples, see *Leave No Woman Behind: Learning from Christian Aid's programmes in Asia and the Middle East*, Manisha Majumdar and Nadia Saracini, Christian Aid, 2017.

³³ *Trapped in Poverty: Caste-based discrimination and employment*, Christian Aid, 2014.

³⁴ Public Affairs Index: Governance in the States of India, CK Mathew, Udita Dutta, Architha Narayanan and Shulka Jalodia, Public Affairs Centre, 2017, pp126, www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Public%20Affairs%20Index%20Report%202017%20-%20Governance%20in%20the%20States%20of%20India.pdf

³⁵ UN Rights Council: End Caste-Based Rape, Violence, Human Rights Watch, 17 June 2014, www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/17/un-rights-council-end-caste-based-rape-violence

are deterred by the associated stigma and fear of harassment by police and the fact that conviction rates for these crimes are low. In India in 2014, cases of rape against Dalit women reportedly had a 2% conviction rate, compared to 24% for rape cases against all women, although action by civil society has been helping to change this.³⁶

There are also intersections of exclusion and inequality associated with caste, gender and sexuality. The discrimination and disadvantage LGBT people face may be compounded by their caste. The campaign for decriminalisation of same-sex acts in India has been criticised for not including Dalit rights organisations or perspectives, and, in its demand for decriminalisation in the private sphere, for being insensitive to the extreme poverty that leaves many people homeless or unlikely to enjoy 'private spaces'. Gender-based discrimination may also be associated with caste hierarchies. For example, India's hijras have been referred to as a 'socially and educationally backward class' or compared to 'untouchables'.³⁷

The intersection of caste and gender cannot be ignored in action towards achieving gender equality and SDG5 in caste-affected countries.

The various ways in which caste intersects with gender and other axes of discrimination need closer attention. Women's experience of caste discrimination may be compounded; for example, by ethnic discrimination that renders them more vulnerable to violence, or faith or other group-based gender norms that impose restrictive customs or personal laws upon them.

Honour killings (murders, often perpetrated by the victim's family due to the belief that the victim has brought shame to the family by marrying outside of caste or religion) are widely prevalent in South Asia and other countries where caste structures exist, including the UK and Canada. They may be perpetrated against a woman or a man, and are often to prevent a woman exercising her choice in love and marriage.

Religion is an important force in Dalit women's lives and often a source of strength, but it also perpetuates practices such as that of 'dedicating' girls (90% of whom are Dalits) to temples under the Devadasi/Jogini systems in India, a form of forced prostitution; and the kidnapping and forcible marriage and conversion to Islam of Dalit Hindu minority women in Pakistan.³⁸

Understanding unique contexts and individual experiences is essential in putting the conditions in place for all people to achieve the SDGs. Failing to take DWD including caste into account will limit the impact of agendas to transform gender relations.

Policies and the way they are implemented often fail to adequately address intersecting vulnerabilities, something that also poses challenges for development practitioners, because a wide variety of responses may be needed, reflecting the diversity of lived experiences, and these tailored approaches may reach only a relatively small number of people. It is important that the cost effectiveness of policies and programmes is assessed, not only in terms of numbers reached, but also in relation to the depth of exclusion and marginalisation being addressed and hence the level of benefits for individual recipients.³⁹ Another challenge lies in moving beyond approaches that focus on marginalised women and their immediate needs, towards interventions that have a wider impact on social norms and attitudes, challenge hierarchies and question privilege or perceived entitlements associated with masculinity or caste. Finally, the deep psychological impacts of caste on women and men also need attention. Affected people live with stigma and negative stereotypes that can undermine their aspirations, sense of belonging in wider society and confidence. People from subordinated castes have been found to perform worse in tests when their caste identity is revealed to others, but to perform as well as participants from privileged castes when caste identity is kept hidden,⁴⁰ highlighting the importance of social relations and the need for interventions that challenge norms and attitudes, including perceptions of status.⁴¹

³⁶ How India's Dalit women are being empowered to fight endemic sexual violence, Rahila Gupta, New Statesman, 16 December 2014, www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2014/12/how-india-s-dalit-women-are-being-empowered-fight-endemic-sexual-violence

³⁷ Law at the intersection of caste, gender and sexuality – the invisibility of 'other' Dalits and the silence about them in India, S Baudh, Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, 2016.

³⁸ Against Purity: Rethinking Identity with Indian and Western Feminism, Irene Gedalof, Routledge, 1999. Equity Watch 2015: Access to Justice for Dalits in India, Swadhiakar/National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, 2015. Input by Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) and International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) for 90th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination for its examination of Pakistan 16–17 August 2016, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, 2016, <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Alternative-report-CERD-Pakistan-final.pdf>

³⁹ How Christian Aid Assesses Value for Money in its Programmes, Christian Aid, 2012, www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-03/value-for-money-briefing-jul-2012.pdf

⁴⁰ Making up people – the effect of identity on performance in a modernising society, K Hoff and P Pandey, *Journal of Development Economics* 2014, 106, p118–131.

⁴¹ *Leaving No One Behind: Social Inclusion Programming in South Asia*, JP Mangubhai, B Bennet and M Majumda, Change Alliance, 2016.

Dalit women and SDG 6: water and sanitation

In South Asia access to water and sanitation are strongly mediated by caste norms, something that particularly affects women and also has implications for achieving SDG 6, including 6.1 towards universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, 6.2 towards adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene (which focuses on women's access), and 6.3 towards improved water quality

Because they are regarded as 'impure', Dalits are generally barred from communal water sources used by more privileged castes, and they are designated cleaning and sanitation work not undertaken by more privileged groups. Dalit men are regularly sent to clear sewers without proper safety equipment and many hundreds die as a result, while it is mostly Dalit women who are coerced into the debasing manual cleaning of faeces from latrines, termed 'manual scavenging', a form of slavery that still affected almost 1 million people in India in 2011.⁴² The problem persists, despite a national movement that campaigned for the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (2013).⁴³ Wages are extremely low or work may be done in return for food or 'privileges', such as somewhere to live or the right to collect firewood (which can be withdrawn by privileged castes); often based on traditional relations between landed and 'service' caste households, sometimes termed *jajmani*.⁴⁴

Dalits' access to water sources reserved for more privileged castes is often prevented through threats or actual violence. Where public water provision is lacking, Dalits depend on private providers, often from more influential caste groups, reinforcing power imbalances. These issues disproportionately affect women who are the main fetchers and users of household water and are more vulnerable to violence.⁴⁵

Notions of caste purity contribute to many people's reluctance to have a toilet or latrine in their home or to clean or empty it themselves, a factor in the persistence of open defecation which in turn is a cause of disease and pollution of water supplies and a constant threat to women's dignity, safety and health.⁴⁶ The dangers associated with lack of safe sanitation in India came to international attention in May 2014 when two young Dalit girls were raped and murdered after they had gone out to the fields to defecate.⁴⁷ Caste-based discrimination and violence are perpetuated in provision and practice around water and sanitation and ending of caste prejudice essential to the achievement of SDG 6 on water and sanitation.



Ex-manual scavengers symbolically burn the baskets they were forced to collect human waste with. Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Pratap Rughani.

⁴² Manual Scavengers: Bonded to Caste and Humiliation, Safai Karmachari Andolan, www.safaikarmachariandolan.org/crisis Census raises stink over manual scavenging, Umesh Isalker, Times of India, 30 April 2013, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/Census-raises-stink-over-manual-scavenging/articleshow/19794299.cm>

⁴³ We Want Freedom, Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan (Struggle for Eradication of Manual Scavenging), www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM2NoEQ2Agw

⁴⁴ *Cleaning Human Waste*, Human Rights Watch, 2014, <https://idsn.org/portfolio-items/cleaning-human-waste>⁴⁵ *How Christian Aid Assesses Value for Money in its Programmes*, Christian Aid, 2012, www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-03/value-for-money-briefing-jul-2012.pdf

⁴⁵ Dalit Women and water, Janice Lazarus, *WH20 The Journal of Gender and Water*, 2017, 4, p82-93, <https://repository.upenn.edu/wh20journal/vol4/iss1/10>

⁴⁶ "We Are Hindus, So How Can We Clean It?": How Caste Prejudices Promote Open Defecation in Rural India, Diane Coffey, Caravan, 25 July 2017 www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/caste-prejudices-open-defecation-rural-india Open defecation: a prominent source of pollution in drinking water in villages, AV Rajgire, *International Journal of Life Sciences Biotechnology and Pharma Research*, 2013, 1, p238-246, http://new.ijlbr.com/ijlbradmin/upload/ijlbr_50e55d24590f6.pdf

⁴⁷ Two girls died looking for a toilet. This should make us angry, not embarrassed, Barbara Frost, Winnie Byanyima, Corinne Woods and Nick Alipui, *The Guardian*, 1 June 2014, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/01/girls-toilet-rape-murder-anger-embarrassment

Caste leaves communities behind: Evidence from South Asia

How does caste block the achievement of development outcomes? In this section, we look at some of the available evidence from South Asia in relation to selected SDG targets that will be a focus of global discussions in 2019. While official data is largely lacking, there is considerable evidence from academia, NGOs and human rights monitoring bodies. Although it is very difficult to make generalisations across the region or even in relation to specific countries, we highlight some of the many barriers caste-affected people face and how these cut across different goals and targets, so that progress in one area is undermined by discriminatory practices in others.

Education

SDG 4.1: Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



Dalit girls face the double discrimination of gender and caste. Karuna's work in village schools supports girls to stay in school by forming girls groups and engaging teachers and parents. Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Amy Edwards.

In South Asian caste systems, education has been regarded as the preserve of more privileged castes, and Dalit households still face many challenges in educating their children. A 2014 study in Bangladesh found that 28.5% of Dalit children were registered in school, in contrast to the national average of 96.7%, and reported that poverty, poor health and discriminatory practices within schools contribute to very high drop-out rates for Dalit children.⁴⁸

Surveys of more than 100,000 households in India conducted over four periods between 1983 and 2000 found a declining gap between Dalits and the wider population in access to primary education, but still in 1999/2000 36.75% of Dalit men aged 24–29 had never enrolled in school, compared to 17.08% among more privileged groups. For Dalit women in the same age group, the figure was 67.39%.⁴⁹ Access to education has since improved markedly in India, yet there is evidence that socially excluded groups are still being left behind.⁵⁰ In Pakistan, a 2008 study found literacy rates were commonly below 30% in areas where the majority of Hindu Dalits reside, including Tharparkar and Umerkot in Sindh province.⁵¹ In 2014, national school enrolment for girls in Pakistan was 48%, but just 10% of Dalit girls were in primary school and less than 1% of Dalit women had studied up to eighth grade.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Challenges and Prospects for Dalits Securing their Rights to Education in Bangladesh*, Equity Watch, Naggorik Udyog and the Bangladesh Dalits and Excluded Rights Movement, 2014.

⁴⁹ Changing educational inequalities in India in the context of affirmative action, Sonalde Desai and Veena Kulkarni, *Demography*, 2008, 45, p245–70.

⁵⁰ *Exclusion in Schools: A Study on Practice of Discrimination and Violence*, National Dalit Movement for Justice, 2017.

⁵¹ *Long Behind Schedule: A study on the plight of Scheduled Caste Hindus in Pakistan*, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2008, https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/asia/pdf/RR_Pakistan.pdf

⁵² *Scheduled Caste Children in Pakistan*, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network and the International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2015, <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IDSN-and-PDSN-alternative-report-on-Scheduled-Caste-Children-in-Pakistan-July-2015-CRC-Pakistan.pdf>

Economic hardship and the need for children to do paid work or unpaid household work frequently keep children, especially girls, from going to school, and Dalit girls face additional challenges – in Bangladesh, for example, sexual harassment at school or during the journey to school has been found to be a constant risk contributing to high drop-out rates and early marriage.⁵³ The location of schools can also be a factor. A study in India found that in areas where schools are near the homes of more privileged communities, Dalits may face difficulties, not only because of geographical distance, but also because of ‘social distance’ (ie, power imbalances and rules about where Dalit children can go without fear of harassment).⁵⁴ A study in Pakistan found that this disproportionately affects girls.⁵⁵

Low enrolment and high drop-out rates among Dalit children in India are strongly associated with poor experiences at school.⁵⁶ Discrimination discourages enrolment and attendance, and reduces the quality of education Dalits enjoy and their educational outcomes. A survey of 41,550 Indian households revealed that Dalit children in primary schools achieve lower grades in basic reading and arithmetic, even after controlling for other factors such as parental socioeconomic and educational status, and that while factors such as parental resources and enrolment rates are associated with educational disadvantage among other marginalised groups, it is what happens to Dalit (and Muslim) children in schools that mainly suppresses their attainment.⁵⁷ The list of discriminatory practices documented includes segregation, use of demeaning caste names, being forced to clean toilets for other children, and being excluded from extracurricular activities or leadership roles.⁵⁸

Discrimination against Dalits in education persists, despite constitutional guarantees in caste-affected countries and international human rights treaties⁵⁹

Similar practices and attitudes prevail in other countries in the region. In Sri Lanka, teachers have been found to hold negative perceptions and stereotypes relating to the academic ability of Dalit children, as well as notions about the ‘nature of the student’ being determined by their parents’ occupation (a signifier of caste), and while there is no caste-based quota system in Sri Lankan schools, it is a common practice to enter caste and family occupation on school and job application forms, because these are considered to be an indicator of one’s potential performance.⁶⁰

The progressive privatisation of education also tends to exclude people on low incomes. Private schools tend to have a better quality of teaching, as well as facilities (such as safe and clean toilets) that are a key factor in drop-out rates, especially for girls. In India, recent sharp growth in private schools in the education system has left the children of Dalit families concentrated in government schools.⁶¹ Lack of provision in community languages may also be a barrier for Dalit children from migrant communities, such as the tea-garden workers of Assam, India, who do not have Assamese as their mother tongue.⁶²

⁵³ *Dalits in Bangladesh: Life in Agonies and Deprivation*, Civil Society Joint Action Programme to Promote Dalit Human Rights in Bangladesh, 2014.

⁵⁴ *National Infrastructure Equity Audit – Phase 1*, Social Equity Watch, www.socialequitywatch.org/images/Files/niea-final.pdf

⁵⁵ *Crossing Boundaries: Gender, Caste and Schooling in Rural Pakistan*, Hanan G Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri, World Bank, 2011, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/941421468073730366/pdf/WPS5710.pdf>

⁵⁶ What it means to be a Dalit or tribal child in our schools: A synthesis of six qualitative studies, Vimala Ramachandran and Taramani Naorem, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 2013, 48, 43–52.

⁵⁷ Segmented schooling: inequalities in primary education, S Desai, C Adams and A Dubey, in S Thorat and K Newman (eds), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, OUP India, 2010, pp230–252.

⁵⁸ Exclusion and discrimination in schools: experiences of Dalit schoolchildren, GB Nambissan, in S Thorat and K Newman (eds), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, OUP India, 2010, pp 253–286.

⁵⁹ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination prohibits racial discrimination in teaching, education, culture and freedom of thought (Articles 5 and 7), while CEDAW calls for the gendered challenges girls and women face in education to be addressed. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognise the right to education. Article 26 of UDHR specifically mentions the right to education for all based on merit, and the need for education to promote respect for rights, and tolerance and understanding between racial or religious groups.

⁶⁰ *Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict. “Don’t tell them where we live” – Caste and access to education in northern Sri Lanka*, A Lall, Centre for Poverty Analysis, 2016.

⁶¹ *Exclusion in Schools: A Study on Practice of Discrimination and Violence*, National Dalit Movement for Justice, 2017.

⁶² See note 56, Ramachandran and Naorem.

Target 4.3: Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

A World Bank study in India found that discrimination is continued in students' access to hostels and scholarships, with significant impact on motivation for further study.⁶³ These types of issues contribute to caste-based disparities in higher education and employment opportunities. The gap between Dalits and privileged castes in access to higher education in India has widened since 2004.⁶⁴

To support more equitable access to higher education, India and Bangladesh have committed to special measures for people from socially excluded communities, including quotas for places in higher education institutions and jobs in education. However, implementation and take-up have so far been poor. Eligible students may not apply under these schemes because of associated stigma. About half of the teaching posts reserved for SC and ST are vacant in India's central universities.⁶⁵ These progressive policies remain important, however. Additionally, the evidence points to a need for continued action to root out discrimination in education systems and among teachers.

Disparities in educational attainment shape the opportunities available to young people as they enter the labour market. Education, particularly to graduate level or to build vocational skills, is now more important than ever for accessing formal and better-paid jobs.

Caste-based humiliation on Indian university campuses

Attitudes in many Indian universities remain hostile to Dalits, who are not perceived to deserve access to higher education, or to have access only as non-meritorious 'reservations quota' students. In January 2016, hundreds of students from several Indian universities protested to demand an enquiry following the suicide of Rohith Chakravarti Vemula, a 26-year-old Dalit scholar. He left behind an eloquently written note that exposed persistent caste-based humiliation and ridicule as reasons for his tragic death. Rohith was the 23rd Dalit student to commit suicide since 2006.⁶⁶

A survey conducted at one of the technology institutes at Banaras Hindu University on student perceptions of caste and its influence on campus confirmed negative attitudes in relation to caste and ethnicity. Most dominant caste respondents believed that students from socially excluded groups have inferior intellectual abilities. The study concluded that such beliefs and perceptions created a psychological barrier to academic performance of students from 'lower' caste groups, especially Dalits.⁶⁷

⁶³ *Poverty and Social Exclusion in India*, World Bank, 2011.

⁶⁴ See note 1, Mosse.

⁶⁵ *Progress Towards Inclusive Sustainable Development in India: A study of Dalits and Adivasis in 2030 Agenda*, Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2017.⁵⁶ What it means to be a Dalit or tribal child in our schools: A synthesis of six qualitative studies, Vimala Ramachandran and Taramani Naorem, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 2013, 48, 43-52.

⁶⁶ Rohith is the 23rd Dalit student suicide in institutes like AIIMS and IITs, S Rahman, 14 February 2017, Catch News, www.catchnews.com/national-news/blood-on-books-rohith-vemula-s-is-the-23rd-dalit-student-suicide-in-under-a-decade-bandaru-dattatreya-abvp-bjp-rahul-gandhi-thorat-committee-caste-1453210563.html

⁶⁷ Survey at an IIT Campus Shows How Caste Affects Students' Perceptions, P Pandey and S Pandey, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 2018, 53(9).

Decent work

SDG 8.5: Inclusive growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Rolling beedis - a thin cigarette made of unprocessed tobacco rolled in green leaf - and making incense sticks are some of many informal sector jobs that exploit women across India, particularly Dalits. Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Amy Edwards.

Caste limits the bargaining power, aspirations and opportunities available and traps many in forced labour or stigmatised jobs.

Various forms of exploitative labour relationships affect Dalits. These persist, despite legislation to stop them, because those who benefit often operate with impunity and wield considerable power over people whose precarious livelihoods depend on them. For example, in Nepal's haliya system, an estimated 20,000 Dalits do agricultural work for wealthier landowners, often without pay or in return for a small crop share, an arrangement purportedly for repayment of a historic 'debt' incurred generations ago by families. The monetary value of work the descendants do is invariably far greater than the original sum of money borrowed. Those affected are vulnerable to physical and sexual violence by landowners, but are generally too poor and marginalised to escape.⁶⁸

Caste is also visible in labour markets more generally. Dalits are under-represented in formal employment and over-represented in dangerous, dirty or exploitative work. In India, wages are particularly low in areas where populations include a large proportion of Dalits and other socially excluded groups.⁶⁹

The unequal power relations inherent in caste systems mean that economic growth does not necessarily improve the lot of those worst affected. Recent research in India showed how growth has often displaced Dalits and other marginalised groups from land and resources, increasing their vulnerability and perpetuating their exploitation as agricultural labourers and in other low-paid jobs, including tea picking, crab fishing and brick manufacturing, many of which are critical to regional and national economies. Caste relations and a surfeit of people desperate to work combine to prevent workers from unionising and suppress wages, often well below the legal minimum. Among Dalit workers, indebtedness and dependency on more powerful groups persist.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Context analysis conducted by Lutheran World Federation, Action for Advancing Freedom of Freed Haliyas, Ex-Kamaiyas and Kamlaris (AAFreedHAKK) Project (2015-2017).

⁶⁹ Some implications of regional differences in labor market outcomes in India, A Ahsan and C Pages, in D Mazumdar and S Sarkar, *Globalization, Labor Markets and Inequality in India*, Routledge, 2008.

⁷⁰ *Behind the Indian Boom: Inequality and Resistance at the heart of economic growth*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017.

'Traditional' employment and caste

Caste-based employment segregation is an ancient practice but also a changing phenomenon. Some 'traditional' caste-based jobs are becoming less prevalent but many people continue to do jobs associated with their caste. For example, in Bangladesh, 43% of the estimated 5.5 million Dalits do cleaning jobs, 22% work in agriculture and 14% work in tea gardens.⁷¹ Some caste-based jobs are modern versions of occupations passed down through families, but new caste-based employment categories are also emerging.⁷² Often it is the conditions under which the work is done, rather than the job itself, which are a barrier to dignity and rights. In construction, low pay, long hours and lack of facilities or protective equipment are common features. The sector has been slow to mechanise because using Dalits for manual labour is often a cheaper alternative.

'Traditional' caste-based occupations generally ascribe a title to those who do them. In Bangladesh, sweepers (Methor), and cobblers (Mochi) are examples. In India, Madigas, Valmikis and Arunthathiyars are those most associated with sanitation and 'manual scavenging'. Among Sri Lankan Tamils, the most subordinated groups traditionally accorded untouchable status are collectively known as 'Panchamar' and include several groups that offer manual services, such as Vannār (clothes washers), Pallar (landless labourers), Malayakathor (plantation workers) and Parayars (sanitation workers).⁷³

Economic and social development have certainly contributed to a degree of social mobility in caste-affected countries in South Asia, but longstanding caste-based inequalities in pay and opportunities persist. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has highlighted the extent to which the Indian labour market remains segregated along caste lines.⁷⁴ Dalits face many barriers in accessing emerging job opportunities.

The ILO estimated that real average daily urban wages for SC men and women were around half those for people in more privileged groups. While this is partly a reflection of a growing premium on education and skills, discrimination is

Urban labour market discrimination in India

Addressing discrimination in recruitment remains a huge challenge. Discrimination in urban labour markets in India was demonstrated by research that looked at responses to 4,808 job applications prepared and submitted by the research team for 548 formal private sector jobs.

Four applications were submitted for each job: three from identically qualified candidates with either a dominant caste Hindu, or Muslim or Dalit name, and one that was either from an underqualified candidate with a name suggesting a high-ranking individual, or a highly qualified candidate with a Dalit name. People with a Dalit or Muslim name were significantly less likely to receive a positive response.⁷⁶

a contributing factor.⁷⁵ In India and across South Asia, much more needs to be done to stop discrimination, support equality of opportunity (for example, through skills development for excluded groups) and secure employment rights (especially for informal sector workers and the self-employed).

Data from India shows that Scheduled Castes are more likely to be working than more privileged groups, but this is not necessarily an indicator of economic wellbeing.⁷⁷ Rather, it is likely to reflect the need to work, even if employment options are limited to low-paid and stigmatised work. For Dalit women, employment options are even fewer, yet their participation in the labour force is often higher than for other women. Again, this does not necessarily reflect their economic empowerment. Many Dalit women in India face high levels of deprivation, lack education and skills and work in unsafe and undignified conditions.⁷⁸ Across the region, Dalits face very limited employment options. Improved access to social protection (addressed by targets under SDG 1 and SDG 10) would go a long way towards alleviating the conditions that force Dalits to take up the most exploitative forms of work.

8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour

⁷¹ *Dalit Communities in Bangladesh: Situation of Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability*, Altaf Parvez and Mazhar Islam, Nagarik Uddyog and BDERM, 2014.

⁷² See note 1, Mosse.

⁷³ *Casteless or Caste-blind? Dynamics of Concealed Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Protest in Sri Lanka*, Kalinga Tudor Silva, PP Sivapragasam and Paramsothy Thanges, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2009, pxvi, https://slidelegend.com/queue/casteless-or-caste-blind-international-dalit-solidarity-network_59e2be7b1723dd752bc41441.html. Ilankayil sāthiyamūm atharkethirāna porāttankalum [The struggles against casteism in Sri Lanka], Vegujan and Raavana, Chennai: South Vision, 2007, pp61–62.

⁷⁴ *India Wage Report: Wage policies for decent work and inclusive growth*, International Labour Organization, 2018.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Urban Labour Market Discrimination*, S Thorat, P Attenwell and FF Rizvi, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2009.

⁷⁷ See note 63, World Bank.

⁷⁸ *Where the Path Leads: The Role of Caste in Post-university Employment Expectations*, A Deshpande and K Newman, in S Thorat and K Newman (eds), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, OUP India, 2012.

Caste-based barriers in business

Dalits compete in business under very unfavourable terms. They are often unable to obtain the credit, amenities or resources needed for production, or forced to pay higher prices or interest rates for them than more privileged groups.⁷⁹ They may also be excluded from markets through 'untouchability' practices that make it difficult for them to sell produce for a good price, instead having to depend on middle men to access markets in relationships characterised by power imbalances, exploitation and forced 'distress sale' of produce.

Although barriers in access to education, skills or assets may make it more difficult for Dalit businesses to increase productivity, this is not always the case. Research in India suggests that in some states, particularly in the construction sector, Dalit businesses are strongly represented and successful – but that Dalits are nonetheless 'consistently disadvantaged' in the trade, transport, food, hospitality and service sectors which are driving Indian growth.⁸⁰

Caste not only upholds hierarchies, but also enables closed caste networks that economically benefit privileged groups.⁸¹ Researchers who analysed data relating to 88,000 rural roads constructed under the Indian Government's nationwide rural road development scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, suggested that contracts were often awarded on the basis of caste networks. The researchers also discovered that almost 90,000 roads valued at \$540 million (4% of the total budget) were contracted and paid for, but never built, depriving many rural villagers of improved access to economic opportunities, education and health services.⁸²

Slavery and bonded labour continue to be closely associated with caste and the high levels of indebtedness resulting from exploitative employment relationships.⁸³ There is insufficient information about caste-based slavery, but in 2011 the ILO established that caste-based discrimination in employment is most widespread in the case of the Dalit population in South Asia.⁸⁴ Examples include bonded labour in tea plantations in Sri Lanka, where Dalits constitute 83% of the total of 3.6 million workers.⁸⁵ Pakistan has an extremely high incidence of bonded and forced labour, particularly in agriculture, brick-making, carpet-weaving, mining, tanning, cotton seed production, handicraft production, production of glass bangles, and domestic work with a large proportion of those affected belonging to socially excluded groups.⁸⁶

In relation to India, experts have noted that the persistence of the caste system is a fundamental reason for the prevalence of slavery and the fact that the problem is too often regarded as the norm.⁸⁷ Also that 'caste maintains the exclusion from power for hundreds of millions of South Asian citizens in a way that is important for elite groups who benefit economically from systems of exploitation, such as sumangali that enslaves young women and girls (often Dalits) in the manufacture of textiles, including for western markets'.⁸⁸

The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery has highlighted how a weakening of labour regulation, driven by globalisation and liberalisation, has contributed to a lack of decent work opportunities and to modern slavery. She noted the disproportionate impacts this has had on women and people affected by caste discrimination and how 'the vulnerability of persons of slave descent was not recognized in the sustainable development framework in the same way as that of other minority groups'.⁸⁹

⁷⁹ Understanding complexity of excluded groups: a case for social exclusion framework, S Thorat, *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 2014, 1, pp 49-75

⁸⁰ Dalit and Adivasi Participation in India's Business Economy, B Harriss-White, K Vidyarthi, and A Dixit, *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 2014, 1, pp 76-105.

⁸¹ *Everyday Communicative Practices of Arunthathiyars: The Contribution of Communications Studies to the Analysis of Caste Exclusion and Subordination of a Dalit Community in Tamil Nadu, India*, M Shanmugavelan, SOAS University of London, 2018.

⁸² Building connections: Political corruption and road construction in India, J Lehne, JN Shapiro, OV Eynde, *Journal of Development Economics*, 2018, 131, pp62-78.

⁸³ *Arrested Development: Discrimination and slavery in the 21st century*, Mike Kaye, Anti-Slavery International 2008

⁸⁴ *Equality at Work: The continuing challenge*, Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, International Labour Office, Geneva, p43, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_154779.pdf

⁸⁵ For more information, see: Caste-based Slavery in Sri Lanka, International Dalit Solidarity Network, <https://idsn.org/key-issues/caste-based-slavery/caste-based-slavery-in-sri-lanka>

⁸⁶ For more information, see: Caste-based Slavery in Pakistan, International Dalit Solidarity Network, <https://idsn.org/key-issues/caste-based-slavery/caste-based-slavery-in-pakistan>

⁸⁷ The challenge to Britain's anti-slavery ambitions: India, Aidan McQuade and Meena Varma, Thomson Reuters Foundation, 7 November 2016, <http://news.trust.org/item/20161107134144-51h7z/>

⁸⁸ *Slavery on the high street: Forced labour in the manufacture of garments for international brands*, Anti-Slavery International, 2012, www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/1_slavery_on_the_high_street_june_2012_final.pdf Don't mention the apartheid: caste discrimination and poverty in South Asia, Aidan McQuade, Equal Times, 15 February 2015, www.equaltimes.org/dont-mention-the-apartheid-caste#.XAVeSmj7TIV

⁸⁹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Urmila Bhoola, UN, 2017, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/216/32/PDF/N1721632.pdf?OpenElement>

Inequality

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



Incense making is a laborious and toxic job which exploits women across India, particularly Dalits. Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Amy Edwards.

While our focus has been on caste inequalities within countries, caste is also a factor in inequalities between countries. Colonial rule in South Asia exploited caste hierarchies, reserving high-status roles in colonial administrations for the privileged, while uprooting many Dalits to work as labourers, often in plantations. The descendants of many of these workers continue to produce goods (such as tea) for global markets, often under very unfavourable conditions.⁹⁰

Over the last two decades, South Asia (particularly India and Bangladesh) has seen economic transformation, strong growth, rising per capita incomes and significant reductions in the proportion of people defined as poor, but economic inequality has widened in most countries of the region.⁹¹ Agriculture has declined as a proportion of GDP, but continues to be the main source of income for the poorest groups. Growth has not created enough jobs and most new jobs have been informal and low paid or skill-intensive and therefore inaccessible to all but a few. Governments' capacity for public spending has been constrained by relatively low tax efforts, and South Asia ranks lowest among all regions for depth and breadth of social protection coverage.⁹²

The exploitation of Dalit labour in global value chains warrants more attention from the international community in delivery of SDGs.

⁹⁰ *Human Rights Grievance-Handling in the India Tea Sector*, Kat Macdonald and Samantha Balaton-Chrimes, 2016.

⁹¹ *South Asia Economic Focus, 2013: A Wake-Up Call*, World Bank, 2014.

⁹² See note 91, World Bank. *The Social Protection Index: Assessing Results for Asia and the Pacific*, Asian Development Bank, 2013, p108, www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/30293/social-protection-index.pdf

Against this backdrop, systems of social exclusion perpetuate inequality, and these have strong economic as well as social dimensions.⁹³ Academic Jayati Ghosh has argued that in India growth is based on private accumulation – which has relied on existing social inequalities creating segmented labour markets that keep wages low for certain social categories – as well as policies that have allowed for displacement of some of the most excluded groups for development projects without adequate compensation.⁹⁴

10.2: Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin or economic or other status

This is an important target that appears to recognise the social, economic and political dimensions of discrimination and exclusion. However, the proposed indicator fails to measure social and political marginalisation. This is important, because for people affected by caste discrimination, it is these factors that often underpin economic poverty. The disaggregation suggested in the global framework (sex, age and disability) also fails to make caste disparities visible, something that has been highlighted by civil society organisations.⁹⁵

Caste contributes to multi-dimensional deprivation that excludes people from enjoying economic benefits. The economist Ashwini Deshpande aggregated caste-based disparities in occupation, education and assets to develop a caste development indicator. This demonstrated how the degree of caste inequality in several Indian states was not reduced (and sometimes worsened) with greater wealth or growth.⁹⁶ The Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative found that 48% of the world's multi-dimensionally poor live in South Asia.⁹⁷ However, social and political marginalisation are not included in calculating the index.

10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action

Among the starkest manifestations of discrimination in caste-affected societies are restrictions on freedom of movement, 'untouchability' and exclusion from public spaces, and the confinement of workers to designated housing settlements or 'colonies'. Discrimination in housing rental markets is another manifestation; a study in Delhi found that Dalits were much less likely to receive a positive response from landlords than those from privileged castes.⁹⁸ In a 2015 survey in Pakistan, 79% of Dalit respondents faced discriminatory treatment.⁹⁹

Caste discrimination is prohibited under the constitutions of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and constitutional provisions have helped pave the way for legislation. India adopted the Protection of Civil Rights (Anti-Untouchability) Act in 1955 and the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act in 1989, while an Anti-Discrimination and Equality Bill introduced in 2016 provides clear evidence that caste continues to operate as a barrier to access employment, education and public resources.¹⁰⁰ Nepal passed the Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act in 2011. In Bangladesh, a campaign for an anti-discrimination law helped give voice to an emerging Dalit movement. The law covers areas such as discrimination in access to housing, government services and medical treatment, access to religious spaces, discrimination in employment and practices of untouchability.¹⁰¹

Despite considerable progress in terms of protective legislation, more needs to be done to tackle prejudice and discriminatory practices which violate rights and undermine the implementation of protective measures. Human rights lawyer and academic Smita Narula has highlighted vested socioeconomic interests as a cause of discriminatory practices and pointed out the need for 'measures and initiatives that step out of the formal legal realm and into the social spheres'.¹⁰²

⁹³ See note 63, World Bank, p18.

⁹⁴ Growth, industrialisation and inequality in India, J Ghosh, *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, 2015, 20, pp42-56, www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13547860.2014.974316

⁹⁵ *Leave No One Behind: Do we ensure inclusion of 260 million people discriminated based on caste and work and descent?*, Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2016, <http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/935952270Leave%20No%20One%20Behind-%20Indicators.pdf>

⁹⁶ *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*, A Deshpande, Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁹⁷ Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2017, Sabina Alkire and Gisela Robles, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative, 2017, www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/B48_Global_MPI_2017_2-pager_online.pdf

⁹⁸ Discrimination in the Urban Rental Housing Market: a Spatial Analysis in the Delhi Region, A Banerjee, V Kumar, M Firdaus, et al, *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 2014, 1, pp135-147.

⁹⁹ See note 51, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.

¹⁰⁰ Anti-Discrimination and Equality Bill, 2016, <http://164.100.47.4/BillsTexts/LSBillTexts/Asintroduced/2991.pdf>

¹⁰¹ *Practices of Change: Addressing Equity and Inclusion for Dalits in South Asia*.

¹⁰² *Benchmarking the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on Work and Descent: India Report*, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 2014.

10.4: Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

Civil society groups monitoring Dalit rights in India have reported that schemes for their welfare, social protection and other benefits have been cut in recent years.¹⁰³ These are mostly financed by special components in the budgets of central ministries and state departments, but implementation has been very problematic, with just over 50% appropriately allocated, according to recent estimates; and a lack of accountability and inadequate targeting to Dalit women.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that this provision exists in India is an important acknowledgement of the need for targeted measures for socially excluded groups. India also has a Public Distribution System, which provides subsidised food and fuel.

However the uptake of social protection schemes is often low among Dalits, because they may lack information about what is available or how to apply, face unresponsive or discriminatory officials, or their migration status or lack of a permanent address may be a barrier. The impacts cross generations. A survey of 458 Dalit households in Bangladesh found that very few owned enough land for livelihood or food security and 91% had fluctuating income, with the main consequence being that their children were forced to drop out of school (reported by 62%).¹⁰⁵ When they are unable to access safety nets, Dalits are forced into low-wage, informal labour and bonded labour arrangements, which offer no employment-based social protections.



Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Pratap Rughani.

¹⁰³ *Progress Towards Inclusive Sustainable Development in India: A study of Dalits and Adivasis in 2030 Agenda*, 2017.

¹⁰⁴ *Dalit Adivasi Budget Analysis 2018-19*, National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights/Dalit Arthik Adhikar Andolan, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ *Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for evidence base for the Dalit population in Bangladesh*, Christian Aid, RDC, Naggorik Uddyog, 2017.

Climate vulnerability

SDG 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries



After floods in Uttarakhand, India, state houses in this Dalit community were half buried in silt and debris.

The degree of harm caused by extreme weather or incremental impacts of climate change depends to a large extent on the factors that render people vulnerable to risks or enable them to adapt.¹⁰⁶ People with few assets or options are worst affected, and may find themselves plunged further into poverty.¹⁰⁷

The effects of climate change must be considered in relation to the forms of vulnerability that exist in different contexts, as well as the severity of physical risks and the numbers of people exposed. The situation is most acute in South Asia, based on a variety of indicators, including multi-dimensional poverty.¹⁰⁸

Caste discrimination is an important but overlooked factor in vulnerability, depriving people of power and resources and often confining Dalit communities to isolated settlements without infrastructure or services and very exposed to hazards. In 2014, a drought in Sindh province in Pakistan resulted in the deaths of 100 children, most of whom were Dalits. Lack of infrastructure and assistance were blamed, along with the precarious livelihoods and limited employment options for Dalits in the area.¹⁰⁹ Being able to find alternative work is often the key to coping with disaster, and being unable to do so after a catastrophe renders people vulnerable to debt

¹⁰⁶ COP23: Focus on the most vulnerable, focus on 'loss and damage', Christian Aid, 2017, www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Time-for-climate-justice-briefing-J39201-oct2017_0.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The Climate Vulnerability Monitor, 2012, <https://daraint.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CVM2ndEd-TheMonitor.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ Scheduled Caste Children in Pakistan, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) and the International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2015, <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IDSN-and-PDSN-alternative-report-on-Scheduled-Caste-Children-in-Pakistan-July-2015-CRC-Pakistan.pdf>

or exploitation.¹¹⁰ Material deprivation is only part of the picture. The fact that Dalits are under-represented and lack opportunities to voice their needs or influence responses are key issues. Addressing their vulnerability and building resilience is as much a political challenge as it is a technical one.

For example, climate change and its impacts on resource availability have important implications for people who are dependent on natural resources for necessities such as fuel, water or animal fodder. Access is becoming increasingly contested, with Dalits and other less powerful groups worst affected. It is often women who are worst affected because of their household responsibilities, and Dalit women who most often bear the threat of insults or sexual harassment to obtain water and ultimately may be denied it.¹¹¹ Caste hierarchies are important in agriculture and their implications for access to food, water, land and irrigation, and the use and abuse of natural resources, need to be better understood.¹¹²

Migration associated with climate change impacts is set to increase dramatically in South Asia, with many people heading for urban centres where the availability of land for housing is also often limited, with the poorest groups often displaced from city centres to live in marginal areas with fewer services and infrastructure, and more exposed to climate impacts such as floods and storms.¹¹³ Urban poor communities are also at risk from heat waves and disease if they lack decent housing or live in overcrowded conditions.

As more people are displaced by climate-related impacts, the situation of vulnerable migrants needs greater attention. Migration sometimes enables people to break out of oppressive caste hierarchies,¹¹⁹ but for Dalits labour migration is often a response to distress and brokered by intermediaries through caste/kin networks that may involve highly exploitative conditions. Vulnerable migrants, particularly those belonging to socially excluded groups, may face challenges in accessing housing, services and entitlements, and families left behind may be made more vulnerable. For example, after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, marginalised people who had household members working away from home were unable to demonstrate their citizenship status to obtain rehousing or other support.¹²⁰

Exclusion of Dalits in humanitarian response

Experience of disasters in South Asia has repeatedly highlighted how Dalits and other excluded groups are marginalised in humanitarian response and rehabilitation programmes, struggle to access social safety nets and face discrimination in the context of disaster response.¹¹⁵ The exclusion of Dalits from rescue and relief provision, and discriminatory behaviour (such as segregation in camps, or more powerful groups refusing to share water sources) are insufficiently recognised. In rehabilitation and rebuilding efforts, providers also often overlook the different levels of access to resources or social support enjoyed by different groups, so that Dalits and other socially marginalised groups are often left behind in camps while others have been able to return home and start rebuilding.

Caste exposes affected groups to risks and prevents their access to services. This demands greater attention in climate change action.

Discrimination is also a barrier to accessing support from governments and humanitarian agencies in the event of disasters, because it restricts people's access to information and their opportunities to take part in decision making. Experience in South Asia has shown that Dalits are frequently excluded from sources of assistance and are also invisible in or underserved by national disaster management plans. India's national plans have been criticised for not always addressing the additional vulnerabilities of socially excluded groups, and Nepal's plans have been found to be inadequate in providing for participation of excluded groups in decision making.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Inequality and Urban Climate Resilience in Asia, Christian Aid, 2015, www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/inequality-urban-climate-resilience-asia-february-2014.pdf

¹¹¹ See note 45, Lazarus.

¹¹² *Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics*, M Sharma, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2012, 47, pp46-52.

¹¹³ Groundswell: preparing for internal climate migration – Internal Climate Migration in South Asia, World Bank Group. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29461/GroundswellPN2.pdf>

¹¹⁴ India's plan to tackle disasters neglects women, disabled and lower castes: aid workers, Nita Bhalla, Reuters, 5 June 2016, <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-nationaldisaster-plan-idINKCNOYU1BR>
Did The Humanitarian Response To The Nepal Earthquake Ensure No One Was Left Behind?, R Barber, Save the Children, 2016, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/9901/pdf/nepal_earthquake_gesi_report_march_2016.pdf Sustainable and Resilient Communities: A Profile of Dalits in Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia, Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2018, <http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/1724299862Regional%20Report%20on%20SDG%20and%20DRR.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Equality in Aid: Addressing Caste Discrimination in Humanitarian Response, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013, http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Key_Issues/Disaster_response/EqualityInAid_web_version.pdf

¹¹⁶ *Making Things Worse: How 'caste blindness' in Indian post-tsunami disaster recovery has exacerbated vulnerability and exclusion*, Timothy Gill, Dalit Network Netherlands, 2007, www.indianet.nl/makingthingsworse.html

¹¹⁷ *NGOs, Human Rights and the Contentiousness of Caste: Dalit Rights and the Framing of Development in South India*, D Mosse and N Nagappan (in press). *Factors in changed sexual practices after the 2004 tsunami in India*, John Dalton, Mathivanan Ramachandran, Sakkubai Sadasivan and A Vijayalakshmi, 2009, Bangalore: NES. See note 116, Gill.

¹¹⁸ *Waiting for "Justice in Response"*, 2015, <http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/REPORT-OF-IMMEDIATE-ASSESSMENT-Relief-for-Dalits-in-NEPAL-2015.pdf>

Humanitarian responders need ensure they 'do no harm' and ensure aid is effectively targeted. Understanding caste power dynamics is critical. After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, caste inequalities were reinforced in parts of Tamil Nadu state in India where responders failed to recognise this. Assistance was provided to people describing themselves as 'fishermen', who were a dominant caste group employing Dalit fishers. The Dalits, who were the most devastated by the disaster, were not recognised as fishermen and overlooked in relief efforts.¹¹⁶ More recent research has found that Dalits were sheltered separately because upper-caste spaces such as marriage halls refused them. Their land was used for the burial or cremation of victims of the disaster, while it was Dalits who were called upon to handle the corpses. Later it was apparent that Dalit women were subject to routine sexual exploitation (and HIV infection) by post-tsunami construction workers.¹¹⁷ Similarly, caste discrimination was found to be a significant barrier to relief materials reaching Dalit communities after the devastating 2015 Nepal earthquake.¹¹⁸

Humanitarian responders need to understand caste power dynamics in affected countries to ensure they 'do no harm' and ensure aid is effectively targeted

Responses to climate change must support the resilience, livelihoods and choices available to socially excluded groups. This is supported by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which points to the need for more attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.¹²¹ More research may be indicated to better understand and address the specific vulnerabilities of Dalits and other socially excluded groups in the face of climate change.

¹¹⁹ Contrast in Development in Bihar: A Tale of Two Villages, Amrita Datta, Gerry Rodgers, Janine Rodgers and BKN Singh, *Journal of Development Studies*, 2014, 50, pp 1197-1208.

¹²⁰ South Asia Disaster Report 2016, Duryog Nivaran Secretariat, 2017, p 31, www.gndr.org/images/newsite/News_items/SADR_2016_Final.pdf

¹²¹ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework

Rights and inclusion

SDG 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere

SDG 16.3: Ensure equal access to justice for all



The segregation of Dalits is complete in this teashop in Karachi, Pakistan. Men from the scheduled castes are not allowed into teashops owned by dominant caste groups. Courtesy of IDSIN. Photography by Jakob Carlsen.

Violence against Dalits in South Asia is widespread. Persecution of Dalits who may also be religious minorities is one feature, while another is the displacement of Dalits from land or other resources.¹²²

Violence is often perpetrated to preserve caste hierarchies. In India, caste is often most visible when violence is directed against Dalits whose choices or achievements threaten the relational standing of adjacent caste groups.¹²³ Violent hate crimes correlate with a narrowing gap between the standard of living of Dalits and dominant castes.¹²⁴ This 'backlash violence' frequently takes the form of sexual violence perpetrated against Dalit women, who are least able to seek redress due to pressure from privileged castes as well as

their own families not to prosecute to avoid social stigma. India's National Crime Records Bureau reported that violence against Dalits increased by 44% between 2010 and 2014.¹²⁵ This is despite India's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989), which provides for special measures to prevent and address violence.

The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues has pointed out that caste represents a barrier to claiming rights and justice in relation to violence, highlighting discrimination within criminal justice systems, fear of reprisals (contributing to under reporting) and notions that caste-based discrimination needs to be solved within the community rather than treated as a crime, with refusal to register such cases as criminal offences justified as preserving 'social harmony'.¹²⁶

¹²² Pakistan must act immediately to protect Dalits against forced disappearances, slavery and discrimination, Minority Rights, 13 November 2017, <https://minorityrights.org/advocacy-statements/pakistan-must-act-immediately-protect-dalits-forced-disappearances-slavery-discrimination/>

¹²³ See note 1, Mosse.

¹²⁴ Caste-based crimes and economic status: Evidence from India, S Sharma, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 2015, 43, pp 204-226.

¹²⁵ See note 34, Mathew.

¹²⁶ See note 2, UN HRC, paras 60 and 61.

Claiming human rights is often considered 'forbidden' and deserving of punishment. Inter-caste and inter-group marriages, demands for land rights, increased wages and political participation, and refusal to perform traditional occupations may trigger not only economic retaliation by those most threatened by changes in the status quo, but also unleash violence¹²⁷

Barriers to access to justice highlighted by civil society groups include inadequate capacities and facilities for investigating and filing cases, slow resolution of cases, shortcomings of judgements, and the lack of budget for implementation of protective legislation. Some good practices have also emerged, most of which have been designed by Dalits themselves, establishing the importance of their voice and representation in governance.¹²⁸

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Caste-affected communities are often politically marginalised and under-represented in decision making, and programmes to respond to their needs may be under-resourced. Dalits may face threats, violence or harassment if they run for election.¹²⁹ Despite this, there is evidence from India that the election of Dalit leaders at local government (panchayat) level (supported by electoral reservations since 1993) has brought benefits to marginalised groups.¹³⁰ Political representation for Dalits has also been supported in India by electoral reservations in the lower house of parliament (the Lok Sabha) and in state legislative assemblies, and there has been an emergence of Dalit political parties, although the arithmetic of voters and the scattered and remote locations of Dalit settlements are often not in their favour, and the votes of very poor Dalits can often be bought in exchange for material benefits because their levels of deprivation are very high.

In a survey of the districts of Pakistan that are home to most of the country's Hindu Dalits, 91.5% of Dalit respondents said they do not think any political party gives importance to Scheduled Castes, and only 7% were affiliated with any political party.¹³¹

Bangladesh has no measures in place to enhance the political representation of caste-affected groups. Its Dalit movement is still emerging, and many caste-affected people identify more strongly with their specific hereditary or clan groups. The majority are not aligned to a political party or actively represented in local government structures.¹³²

Nepal has established several institutional mechanisms to promote Dalit rights and development, although their authority and budget remains limited. It provides for the inclusion and participation of Dalits in its 13th National Three-year Plan, and is resourcing targeted educational and scholarship programmes, schemes to address bonded labour and promote inter-caste marriage, provisions for Dalits under national housing policy, and nutritional support for Dalit schoolchildren.¹³³

¹²⁷ See note 2, UN HRC, para 58.

¹²⁸ See note 38, Equity Watch.

¹²⁹ CERD/C/CAN/CO/19-20

¹³⁰ See note 1, Mosse, p431.

¹³¹ See note 51, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.

¹³² See note 105, Christian Aid et al.

¹³³ *Benchmarking the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on work and Descent: Nepal Report*, Samata Foundation, 2014.

Addressing the data gaps

The evidence presented above indicates that caste-based discrimination and exclusion are serious and inter-connecting barriers to the SDGs, but there is very limited official or national level data disaggregated to inform responses or to measure and monitor progress in addressing caste-based disparities in achievement of specific targets.

India and Pakistan both count Scheduled Castes in census data and India also disaggregates by caste in household surveys. Nepal also collects census data to monitor the status of different caste groups.¹³⁴ Bangladesh has made no systematic attempts to gather disaggregated data to measure the size of Dalit communities or inform policy responses (although some quotas in public employment and welfare schemes for certain Dalit communities are in place).¹³⁵ For the purposes of monitoring the SDGs overall in Asia, there are very few data sets, disaggregated or otherwise, for any of the SDG 10 targets and other targets that are key for addressing inequality, such as SDG 1.4.2 on land tenure rights, 10.3.1 on levels of discrimination and harassment, and 16.7.1 on population representation in public institutions.¹³⁶

The need to address the 'disaggregation gap' to increase the visibility of marginalised social groups was highlighted by civil society at the 2017 meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.¹³⁷ This position is supported by the UN, which recommends monitoring the progressive reduction of inequalities between social groups by gathering disaggregated data for all SDG indicators.¹³⁸

Monitoring of caste-based disparities and closing the gaps are not small challenges, but Agenda 2030 demands that governments do just that

Improving national data to internationally agreed standards is necessary, but will take time. In the interim, this should not detract from the urgent need to act on what is already known about caste-based marginalisation in order to 'reach the furthest behind first' and address caste as a violation of human rights. Targeted measures to secure rights and accelerate development outcomes among caste-affected groups can be informed by data and recommendations in Universal Periodic Reviews and other human rights reports, NGO and academic literature, and data generated by marginalised citizens and civil society (which may provide some of the best insights into the nature of barriers and appropriate responses).

Where necessary, focused surveys of affected groups should be carried out, even if the sample size is not statistically significant, to obtain a picture (for example, of experiences of discriminatory treatment). Qualitative data is just as important as quantitative, to inform who is most left behind and why. The Inclusive Data Charter launched in 2018 is a helpful initiative to encourage governments to draw data from all available sources and improve their disaggregation, inclusivity and accountability.¹³⁹

Focused surveys of caste-affected groups can give a picture of experiences of discriminatory treatment, even if the sample size is not statistically significant. Qualitative data is just as important as quantitative, to inform who is most left behind and why

¹³⁴ Nepal Human Development Report 2014: *Beyond Geography, Unlocking Human Potential*, UNDP and Nepal National Planning Commission, 2014.

¹³⁵ *Benchmarking the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on work and Descent: Bangladesh Report*, Nagorik Uddyog and Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, 2014.

¹³⁶ *Measuring SDG progress in Asia and the Pacific: Is there enough data?*, Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, 2017.

¹³⁷ *Stakeholder Statement on Agenda item 10. Data disaggregation*, UN 2017, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-06/10.%20Stakeholder%20Statement%20on%20Data%20Disaggregation.pdf>

¹³⁸ *Integrating Human Rights into the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Addressing inequalities and discrimination in the SDGs*, 2015.

¹³⁹ The Inclusive Data Charter, www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/inclusive-data-charter

Sector-specific UN agencies are well placed to disaggregate data to reveal caste-based and other horizontal inequalities. For example, UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, which gather and analyse data on women and children in relation to a comprehensive set of indicators, ask questions about household characteristics including ethnicity and religion and could be developed further to address caste and social exclusion issues with the cooperation of national agencies. The ILO, which gathers data against a range of SDG indicators, could also consider more disaggregation by caste, where relevant.

What is being measured is also important, as it shapes understanding of the nature of the problem and what needs to change. The Agenda 2030 monitoring framework does not always describe the totality of changes needed to remove the DWD/caste-related barriers that cut across goals and targets. Indicators that are more sensitive to DWD/caste are needed. Countries should continue to develop their own targets and indicators to measure progress in relation to context-specific challenges. In India, civil society organisations have already been making proposals to address this.¹⁴⁰

The majority of SDG targets are linked to human rights. Data gathered and recommendations made by human rights monitoring mechanisms can be used to guide SDG implementation, identify priority issues and at-risk groups and recommend specific measures at national, regional and global levels¹⁴¹

Agenda 2030 provides an important opportunity to galvanise political will and direct resources to addressing caste inequalities. However, many challenges require consideration, including the social or political risks associated with gathering and potentially misinterpreting data on certain groups of people; the need for informed consent from people participating in surveys; the fact that caste is not a simple demographic category; and the rights of people to choose whether they identify with a particular category and/or to identify with more than one category or axis of discrimination.¹⁴² Addressing these issues will require a focus on meaningful participation of caste-affected people in decisions about what data is needed and how it is collected.

¹⁴⁰ See note 95, Asia Dalit Rights Forum.

¹⁴¹ *Connecting the Universal Periodic Review to the SDGs*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2018.

¹⁴² Leaving no-one behind? Persistent inequalities in the SDGs, Inga T Winkler and Margaret L Satterthwaite, *International Journal of Human Rights*, 2017, 21, pp 1073-1097.

Positive responses to caste in South Asia

This section looks at some policy and practical responses and what can be learned from them to help inform action against caste and DWD. Putting caste on the development agenda, and listening to Dalit voices are prerequisites for positive action in support of those whose life chances are negatively shaped by the effects of caste. In South Asia and the diaspora, Dalits themselves, through their social movements, NGOs, campaigns, research and political parties, have done much to draw attention to issues of caste discrimination, exclusion and humiliation.

Protective legislation

National policies, laws and constitutional provisions that make a specific reference to caste have been critical in securing rights. India's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989) is an important example designed to prevent and prosecute caste-based violence and rights violations. However, civil society groups monitoring its implementation have been concerned about low conviction rates and the challenges faced by Dalits seeking justice, including inadequate police responses and humiliation of survivors during trials.¹⁴³ In 2009, a broad civil society national coalition was formed to strengthen the Act and its implementation and support organisations and individuals to utilise its protective and justice mechanisms. The coalition also trained lawyers, including those from Dalit and other marginalised communities. At the end of 2015, an Amendments Bill was passed establishing the National Prevention of Atrocities Authority to oversee implementation and provided for new categories of offences, special courts to 'fast track' cases, and protection for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims, who had previously been excluded.¹⁴⁴

Transformative social protection

Social protection often fails to address caste and other structural causes of vulnerability, but can be transformative if designed in such a way as to help to change social relations, give poor people a voice and protect their rights, for example, by reducing their vulnerability to slavery and forced labour.¹⁴⁵

One example is India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which guarantees 100 days' employment to households who request it.¹⁴⁶ Civil society and political parties called for NREGS to be established after liberalisation reforms, when it became apparent that burgeoning growth was leaving marginalised groups behind and not fulfilling the right to work.¹⁴⁷ NREGS has been overwhelmingly accessed by Dalits and other socially excluded groups, often in the agricultural lean season when they would otherwise survive by migration or borrowing. It has a participatory governance structure, has reportedly helped to increase the bargaining power of marginalised workers and push up overall wage rates in areas where it has been implemented and has also enabled more women to take up paid work.¹⁴⁸ NREGS has also provided important lessons. A study of its implementation in Madhya Pradesh state found that as NREGS paid women and men equally, it benefited women more than men in terms of increased wages, but household power dynamics and the fact that only one member of each household can participate determined the distribution of benefits. The research also found that the impact on distress migration was minimal, because 100 days is not enough in a state where work is unavailable for three-quarters of the year. NREGS was not found to have changed caste relations among participants, and practices such as Dalits eating and cooking separately from others continued on worksites.¹⁴⁹

Freeing bonded labourers

Enabling people to break out of exploitative caste-based employment relationships is often complex and needs targeted interventions that address the multiple barriers. Affected people usually have no alternative employment or housing options. They may not see themselves as enslaved and even if they do, may fear reprisals or coercion if they try to change long-established practices.

¹⁴³ *Practices of Change: Addressing Equity and Inclusion for Dalits in South Asia*, NCDHR, Naggorik Uddyog and Samata Foundation, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 Amendments, Campaign Process Report, National Coalition for Strengthening SC&ST PoA Act, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Transformative Social Protection, IDS In Focus, 2006, www.ids.ac.uk/files/IF1_3.pdf

¹⁴⁶ National Rural Employment Guarantee as Social Protection, DN Reddy, R Thankha, C Upendranadh, and AN Sharma, IDS Bulletin, 2010, 41, pp63-76.

¹⁴⁷ *Social Protection in Asia: research findings and policy lessons, programme synthesis report 2010*, www.socialprotectionasia.org

¹⁴⁸ MGNREGS in Tamil Nadu: A story of success and transformation? G Carswell and G De Neve, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 2014, 14, pp564-585. *India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: women's participation and impacts in Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan*, IDS, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ *Gendered Risks, Poverty and Vulnerability in India: Case Study of the Indian National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Madhya Pradesh)*, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2011.

Following Nepal's prohibition of bonded labour in 2000, and its specific 2002 prohibition of the kamaiya system, thousands of bonded labourers were evicted from their homes and their landlords deprived them of access to land and work. Without government support, many were left with no homes or means of livelihood. Weaknesses in the rehabilitation process have left former kamaiya bonded labourers vulnerable to entering into new forms of exploitative working practices including bonded labour.¹⁵⁰ Nepal legislated to abolish the haliya system of bonded labour in 2008, and introduced a package of measures to free and rehabilitate affected people, including skills programmes, low-cost housing and land grants. However, even this more comprehensive set of measures has faced problems with poor uptake (especially among women). Additional support from NGOs has been required in community-based interventions, such as establishing access to credit for new economic activities, forming local organisations to share information about rights and entitlements, training human rights defenders, supporting families to register children in school, getting verified ID cards for freed households so they can access services, and advocating for national rehabilitation plans (including securing land allocations).¹⁵¹

Supporting access to entitlements

The contribution that NGOs and community based organisations can make in supporting access to entitlements by socially excluded groups was strengthened by DFID's Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) programme (2009-2016), which helped to reduce disparities based on caste, ethnicity, gender, religion and disability. Based on the principle that poverty in India is to a large extent caused by discrimination based on group identity, PACS worked with 225 civil society partners in 90 districts across seven Indian states to help socially excluded people claim their rights and entitlements. The focus was on access to livelihood resources, including land and forest rights, and to services such as government education, health and nutrition programmes, and social protection. Dalits households were given assistance to recover land from which they had been dispossessed, claim legal title to homestead land and register for tenancy rights; to speak out against discrimination in access to land reform programmes, promote non-discriminatory control over common property resources and turn their land into productive assets. The programme's most important legacy has been to strengthen people's organisations and networks, as well as many NGOs, and enable them to better address social exclusion.¹⁵²

Budgeting for equality

For socially excluded groups and women, budget provisions for targeted measures are important. India's budget component, the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP), which is supposed allocate state and national budget lines (in proportion to the size of excluded populations) to targeted interventions is an example, but was largely notional until it became the focus of Dalit campaigning and high-profile criticism for failures of allocation.¹⁵³

The struggle to get the SCSP and its equivalent for Scheduled Tribes allocated and utilised in Andhra Pradesh state illustrates the contribution of civil society activism in the implementation of policies that are progressive, but poorly implemented. Legislation was needed to stop diversion of funds to initiatives that did not specifically support excluded groups.¹⁵⁴ A Joint Action Committee to pursue the agenda was established in 2011 and a decade-long advocacy process followed. Armed with data on SCSP budget allocations, spends and underspends, it raised awareness among grassroots organisations and pressured political leaders. The media were engaged to articulate the rights of SC and ST communities, and middle classes and employee associations were encouraged to become involved. A hunger strike helped maintain political pressure. This activism led to the passage of the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan (Planning, Allocation and Utilisation of Financial Resources) Bill in 2013. This means 16.2% of the state budget is allocated to the SC Sub-Plan and 6.6% to the Tribal Sub-Plan. If properly used, these funds will support development of SCs and STs, including education, health and livelihoods, and narrow inequalities with the wider population.

Affirmative action in employment

Over six decades, India's policy of reserving a quota of public sector jobs for SC and ST has helped address disadvantages in labour markets and ensured a degree of upward mobility (although most of these jobs were among the lowest paid, suggesting additional equity measures are needed).¹⁵⁵

Public sector jobs are declining however, while the private sector grows. CSOs in India have been calling on the private sector to adopt affirmative action policies, but few companies are doing so, often arguing that such quotas create an unfair advantage.¹⁵⁶ However, there is no waiver of essential qualifications in employment under quota policy. Also, quotas can be an effective way to address widespread bias in employment, for example, employers selecting for 'family background' and for attributes, such as work experience,

¹⁵⁰ *Forced and Bonded Labour in Nepal*, Anti-Slavery International, 2009, https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Nepal/Forced_and_bonded_labour_in_Nepal_-_ASI_July_2009.pdf

¹⁵¹ *Nepal: tackling bonded labour*, Anti-Slavery International, www.antislavery.org/what-we-do/nepal-bonded-labour

¹⁵² PACS, www.pacsindia.org.

¹⁵³ The incorporation of Dalits into India's business economy and its implications for social and economic policies (DPhil thesis), K Vidyarthi, University of Oxford, 2016.

¹⁵⁴ SCSP funds being diverted in all States, The Hindu, 23 April 2011, www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/SCSP-funds-being-diverted-in-all-States/article14693877.ece

¹⁵⁵ *Reservation Policy in India – Dimensions and Issues*, S Thorat and C Senapati, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2006.

¹⁵⁶ *Status of Affirmative Action (for SC and ST) in BSE Listed Companies of India*, Partners in Change, 2012.

that are hard for Dalits to acquire.¹⁵⁷ A study of Indian Railways (the world's largest employer implementing affirmative action) demonstrated that addressing discrimination through quotas supports productivity by enhancing the pool of available labour and addressing barriers to labour mobility and stigma associated with certain types of work, which undermines motivation.¹⁵⁸

Quotas and reservations in education

Quotas or reservations in higher education in India have enabled some Dalit students who might not otherwise have done so to access higher education. One study found that between 1993 and 2005, quotas helped narrow the gap between SC and other groups in education, occupation, consumption and wages. Improvements in school education were another important factor in this change, but caste-based disparities in length of schooling (amounting to two years less for Dalits) and quality of schooling were still clear at the end of this period.¹⁵⁹ More recent studies have found widening disparities in both higher education and access to the most prestigious jobs, but suggested these would have been greater without quotas, supported by the fact that Muslim Dalits who have not benefited from reservations have also experienced a widening of wage and education gaps.¹⁶⁰ More research into the impacts of different approaches may be indicated so that interventions can be refined and made more effective.

In Bangladesh, quotas for Dalits in higher education began in 2012. Civil society organisations such as the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement played an important role in encouraging implementation, as well as promoting better primary education for Dalit children, including special measures to address discrimination and to encourage more children to stay in school.¹⁶¹

Developing inclusive markets

The potential to transform caste relations in business is an area that deserves greater attention. With support from the Scottish Government, Christian Aid's Inclusive Markets Development Programme worked with 2,500 Dalit Hindu minority Rishi milk producers in two remote coastal districts of Bangladesh to promote their successful inclusion in mainstream value chains. Many factors which had rendered participants vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen or traders had to be overcome, such as their low incomes, small-scale production, lack of supportive institutions, few

opportunities to enhance marketing and productivity, and limited education or skills. The programme helped establish 100 producer organisations to achieve economies of scale, strengthen collective bargaining power and build skills in animal husbandry and business. It linked these to dairy companies and sweet manufacturers via 10 rural sales and service centres, which serve as collection and delivery points and help producers get a better price for their milk.¹⁶²

An initiative in India points to how the impact of small schemes such as this could be scaled up. India has recognised the need to take affirmative action beyond employment, education and politics to the business economy. In response to demands from an emerging Dalit entrepreneurial class, the government issued the Public Procurement Order in 2012, requiring that 4% of all goods and services for central government/public sector undertakings be purchased from Dalit small business suppliers, alongside credit support and skills development schemes.

Promoting a socially responsible private sector

In 2011, India launched National Voluntary Guidelines (NVGs) on Social, Economic and Environmental Responsibilities of Business, along with a reporting framework, a comprehensive and progressive measure to address key contextual issues, including the need to stop caste discrimination in employment.¹⁶³ These apply to all companies, and the top 500 companies listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange are now subject to mandatory reporting on the guidelines.

The Corporate Responsibility Watch network, which includes private sector bodies, local and international NGOs, consumer organisations, research institutions and Dalit rights organisations, helped promote and has been monitoring the implementation of the NVGs, highlighting the importance of transparency. It publishes an annual report and the Index of Responsible Business in India, which ranks India's top companies on corporate responsibility.¹⁶⁴ Monitoring focuses on five areas: community development (including the extent to which companies have identified and targeted vulnerable groups); employee dignity and human rights (living wages, safe working environment and freedoms of association); non-discrimination and inclusion in the workplace (affirmative action and inclusion at board level); accountability for community impacts; and inclusive supply chains.

¹⁵⁷ *In the Name of Globalisation: Meritocracy, Productivity and the Hidden Language of Caste*, SS Jodha and KS Newman, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2009.

¹⁵⁸ *Diversity in the workforce: why it is good for business*, Ashwini Deshpande, ILO/IDSN, 2015.

¹⁵⁹ *Caste and the Indian Economy*, Kaivan Munshi, 2016, www.histecon.magd.cam.ac.uk/km/Munshi_JEL1.pdf

¹⁶⁰ *The Changing Contours of Intergroup Disparities and the Role of Preferential Policies in a Globalizing World – Evidence from India*, Ashwini Deshpande and Rajesh Ramachandran, Working Paper 267, Centre for Development Economics, Delhi School of Economics, 2016. *Convergence Across Castes*, Viktoria Hnatkovska and Amartya Lahiri, International Growth Centre, 2012, www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Hnatkovska-Lahiri-2012-Working-Paper.pdf

¹⁶¹ *Practices of Change: Addressing Equity and Inclusion for Dalits in South Asia*, NCDHR, Nagarik Uddyog, Samata Foundation, 2015.

¹⁶² INCIDIN Bangladesh Inclusive Economic Development through integrated food production and income security, quarterly report to Christian Aid for the period 1.1.16 – 31.3.16.

¹⁶³ National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental & Economic Responsibilities of Business, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India, 2011, www.mca.gov.in/Ministry/latestnews/National_Voluntary_Guidelines_2011_12jul2011.pdf

¹⁶⁴ *Making Growth Inclusive: Analysing Inclusive Policies, Disclosures and Mechanisms of Top 100 Companies*, Praxis and Corporate Responsibility Watch, 2015, www.corporatewatch.in/images/Making_Growth_Inclusive.pdf CSR in India, 2016, Praxis, 2016, www.corporatewatch.in/images/CSR_in_India.pdf

Democratic action

The importance of democratic institutions 'at all levels, from small Dalit hamlets to state-wide social and political movements' has been highlighted as critical for promoting socially conscious public policy, tackling social inequality and in struggles for liberation from the oppression of caste, class and gender in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.¹⁶⁵ In the process, the provision of public services in Tamil Nadu became highly politicised, and public pressure for universal social protections such as free midday meals in primary schools resulted in Tamil Nadu setting the example for what was to become a model for India's national midday meal scheme. Universal access to public services (such as drinking water in government schools, and availability of essential drugs in primary health centres) in Tamil Nadu is far ahead of national averages. Despite these achievements, Tamil Nadu continues to be one of the few states with high numbers of honour killings of women (and men) when Dalits marry outside their castes.

Dalit voices, media and technology

Indian media houses are mostly owned and controlled by families of more privileged castes.¹⁶⁶ Robin Jeffrey, a media scholar, could not find a single Dalit journalist in the entire country during the 1990s.¹⁶⁷ There is still no Dalit-run mainstream media or Dalit chief editor in India.¹⁶⁸ 'Lack of qualifications' was often cited as a reason for the absence of Dalit participation in Indian mainstream media.¹⁶⁹ In 2006, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies found no Dalits amongst its list of the 315 most influential journalists.¹⁷⁰ For decades, Indian mainstream media published Dalit news of their choices without Dalit reporters and editors. This has begun to change in the last 15 years, thanks to changes in information technology.

Information technology, including mobile phones and the internet, have not only begun to shape the nature of public and political participation of Dalits, but also enabled them to create their own media presence online. Dalits have started to use

the internet and social media platforms to write their narratives and confront established media houses. Online platforms such as Velivada have enabled Dalits to articulate their politics and are now recognised as credible, a trend that was unimaginable 10 years ago.¹⁷¹ These platforms offer spaces for hundreds of young Dalit scholars and writers to share their opinions. Dalit Camera, a popular YouTube channel on Dalit issues, is now recognised as a Dalit news feed by non-Dalit mainstream media in India.¹⁷² Round Table India, an online news portal, has consistently encouraged young and otherwise-ignored Dalit writers to share their voices.¹⁷³

Regional responses

As many of the above examples illustrate, there is much to be learned from India's experience in recognising and tackling caste-based social exclusion, and while there are similarities and differences in the ways caste manifests in different countries across South Asia, there may also be opportunities for intra-regional learning to support effective responses in countries where the problem has hitherto been less recognised or addressed, including through mechanisms under the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The Asia Dalit Rights Forum has highlighted the importance of SAARC as a platform for promoting sustainable development and for strengthening a collective Southern voice on social inclusion in the SDGs.¹⁷⁴ Member organisations have also helped establish the Asia Parliamentarians' Forum on Dalit Concerns, which works towards addressing issues of discrimination and exclusion through policy interventions, negotiations and political and social action, and promotes best practices in tackling discrimination, ensuring equity and social justice.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁵ *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, Penguin, 2013.

¹⁶⁶ When will the Brahmin-Baniya hegemony end? A Patel, *Livemint*, 2009, www.livemint.com/Leisure/3u2QUPuXBEFPaBQXU2R8mJ/When-will-the-BrahminBania-hegemony-end.html

¹⁶⁷ [NOT] being there: Dalits and India's newspapers, R Jeffrey, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 2001, 24, pp 225-238.

¹⁶⁸ Caste Matters in the Indian Media, Siddharth Varadarajan, *The Hindu*, 3 November 2006.

¹⁶⁹ See note 167, Jeffrey.

¹⁷⁰ See note 168, Varadarajan.

¹⁷¹ Velivada, <http://velivada.com>

¹⁷² Dalit Camera, www.dalitcamera.com

¹⁷³ Round Table India, www.roundtableindia.co.in

¹⁷⁴ Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda of Dalits in South Asia, UNDP India and Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2014.

¹⁷⁵ *Asia Parliamentarian's Forum on Dalit Concerns*, [http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/65643492Asia%20Parliamentarians%20Forum%20on%20Dalit%20Concerns%20\(1\).pdf](http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/65643492Asia%20Parliamentarians%20Forum%20on%20Dalit%20Concerns%20(1).pdf)

Gaps, limitations and lessons

Many of our examples illustrate the important role that civil society organisations and social movements play in the implementation of progressive laws and policies for addressing caste discrimination. Governments should continue to recognise and support the role of civil society as partners in development.

Policies and programmes are only as good as the people who implement them. More effective institutions and training for those who have a duty to deliver services or implement policies are needed. Entrenched discriminatory attitudes and practices must be challenged among all strata of society. Many programmes target Dalits, but few target people whose prejudices perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

The types of intervention delivered shape public perceptions. There is a need to go beyond remedial measures to address poverty or protect people from the worst rights violations, towards more interventions that address caste as a structural and relational problem of inequality. Policies for public education and campaigns to address discrimination, change attitudes and challenge vested interests are needed.

Moving towards 2030, it will be important that civil society voices continue to influence policy change and implementation for delivery of the SDGs for all.

Not all countries have a Dalit oversight body to support this. The existence of high level and independent bodies to monitor and promote the interests of caste-affected people can help strengthen political will and mobilise stakeholders. For example, Nepal's National Dalit Commission has a mandate to create an environment favourable to Dalit enjoyment of equal rights, including awareness programmes to end caste-based discrimination. In 2013, it launched a Ten-year Strategic Plan, in partnership with Dalit CSOs and working with media to raise awareness and generate support for implementing the Caste Based Discrimination¹⁷⁶ and Untouchability Act. Nepal's School Sector Reform Programme has also taken steps to end discriminatory practices and attitudes in schools and among teachers.¹⁷⁷

Some of the positive examples discussed in the previous section illustrate that without changes in perceptions, norms and relationships at community level, the impact of government programmes can be limited. Changing these

takes time and requires a shift in caste relations. Changing discriminatory attitudes and norms thus remains the biggest challenge, and while government action is important, everyone has a role to play.

Changing discriminatory attitudes and norms remains the biggest challenge, and while government action is important, everyone has a role to play

Challenging discrimination: A collective responsibility

Challenging discrimination and promoting inclusive societies takes time, political will, broad participation and resources. Governments and intergovernmental organisations must take a lead, with adequate legislation, policies, programmes and budgets. Above all, the conditions for sustained social change need to be created.

- **Social movements and civil society organisations** have been among the most powerful drivers of change, contributing to changing attitudes and prejudices, calling for appropriate legislation and responses, and helping to get progressive laws implemented.
- **Public servants, especially teachers, police and local leaders**, can be important change-makers if they understand their responsibilities for upholding rights for all, challenging prejudice and shaping norms and practices.
- **NGOs** have a role to play in developing effective responses, building platforms for advocacy and rights-claiming and enabling the participation and inclusion of caste-affected groups in humanitarian response and long-term development programmes.
- **Media**, when informed, representative and socially responsible, can also help to challenge negative stereotypes which nurture inaccurate and false assumptions and opinions that contribute to or reinforce discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.
- **Faith leaders** can and should do more to challenge prejudices and discriminatory assumptions and practices, build bridges between different communities, and educate the public about human rights.
- **Private sector** actors can ensure non-discrimination and inclusion in businesses and supply chains and particularly have a role in stopping slavery.

¹⁷⁶ National Dalit Commission, Government of Nepal, www.ndc.gov.np/site/cms/12

¹⁷⁷ Status Report 2014/015, Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal, 2015, www.doe.gov.np/assets/uploads/files/5d346f4a67463dc1687d1a5568b6f100.pdf

A caste-sensitive approach to achieving the SDGs

Donors and NGOs supporting projects in caste-affected countries must recognise that caste influences all spheres of social development and economic opportunities, and is therefore a potential barrier to all development organisations' vision and objectives.

Caste-sensitive planning and implementation of programmes and, where appropriate, targeted interventions tailored to specific contexts are therefore essential. Although the numbers affected by caste-based discrimination varies across countries, the cost-effectiveness of interventions should be assessed in relation to the significance of the changes brought about and level of exclusion addressed, as well as the cost and numbers of people affected.

Recommendations for donors and NGOs

Caste-sensitive programming:

- Provide training on caste, discrimination and inclusion for all staff in affected countries.
- Include Dalits directly in the design, implementation and evaluation of all programmes that aim to benefit them.
- Analyse caste issues in context analysis and address these in programme design.
- Recognise and respond to the needs of Dalits, taking a rights-based approach.
- Address caste hierarchies directly in community-based activities, for example by providing specific opportunities and support for Dalits to participate in and influence development projects.
- Employ adaptive programming approaches to respond to caste and intersecting inequality issues as these emerge, if they are not addressed in programme design.
- Collect and share disaggregated data to monitor and assess the extent to which projects include and support Dalits and help address caste-based disparities in development outcomes.
- Mobilise caste-affected groups, particularly Dalit women, and invest in building their advocacy platforms and capacities, including evidencing discrimination and other barriers they face.

Ensure representative staffing and non-discrimination:

- Put in place in-house policies that guarantees zero tolerance to the practice of caste hierarchies and discrimination within the organisation.
- Take steps to ensure that staff reflect the diversity of the populations among which they work.
- Take steps to ensure that Dalits and other excluded groups are strategically placed within the organisation to deliver its goals as project managers, planners, and field workers.
- Design employment and other internal policies to ensure equality of opportunity.
- Create a genuine culture of inclusive participation that encourages Dalits in decision making within and outside the organisation.

Although the numbers affected by caste-based discrimination varies across countries, the cost-effectiveness of interventions should be assessed in relation to the significance of the changes brought about and level of exclusion addressed

Advocacy and public education:

- Analyse policy frameworks and implementation and call for changes where these fall short in addressing caste and intersecting barriers to equality and rights.
- Support or encourage national governments to improve data disaggregation for SDG monitoring by caste, where appropriate.
- Support local NGOs and community-based organisations to run community-level programmes to raise awareness on key issues, such as rights to inter-caste marriage.
- Advocate caste-sensitive approaches to business communities and private sectors.
- Evidence caste-based disparities and successful approaches to addressing these. Ensure caste-based disparities are addressed in advocacy for delivery of SDGs .
- Support the participation of caste-affected groups in oversight and monitoring of SDG delivery.

Inclusive humanitarian response:

- Policies and frameworks for disaster resilience, risk reduction and response should map and respond to caste-based vulnerabilities. Social equity audits, Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments, and similar tools conducted in caste-affected communities can gather information about specific needs and appropriate warning systems.
- Providers of humanitarian assistance should monitor relief efforts to ensure that they are inclusive and meet the needs of the most marginalised groups, working closely with local and community-based organisations.

Recommendations for governments of caste-affected countries

SDG 4 – Ensure equality in education and access to skills:

- Review and change policies and practices in education so that they promote inclusion and non-discrimination and do not reinforce caste, gender or other stereotypes.
- Prioritise training teachers from Dalit communities.
- Enable and improve educational and professional training for Dalit children and adults to enable them to take advantage of a wider range of employment opportunities
- Take effective measures to reduce dropout rates and increase enrolment rates among children of affected communities at all levels of public and private schooling, for example by ending child labour.
- Take concrete steps to eradicate caste-based discrimination in schools, including eliminating stereotypical and demeaning references in text books. Disseminate general information about the importance of non-discrimination and respect for affected communities in the entire education system.
- Pay particular attention to providing adequate education to illiterate children and adults who have not had any formal education.

SDG 8 – Promote decent work for all:

- Design social protection policies and programmes to be accessible to caste-affected groups and transformational in challenging caste and other structural inequalities.
- Institute policies and approaches, such as labour inspectorates, that rectify wage inequality for marginalised groups and women.
- Invest adequately to mechanise and professionalise the sanitation sector.

SDG 10 – Reduce inequality:

- Raise tax revenues more effectively and progressively to help finance delivery of the SDGs.
- Design fiscal policies to narrow caste-based and other horizontal inequalities, including by providing targeted budget allocations and other appropriate and gender-responsive measures to address caste-specific barriers to achievement of SDGs, with the active participation of caste-affected people in planning and implementation.
- Uphold the land rights of caste-affected people and support measures for their security of tenure.

SDG 13 – Climate resilience and inclusive humanitarian response:

- Incorporate accountability mechanisms that enable socially excluded caste groups to seek redress for exclusion from humanitarian response into national disaster management plans
- Design policies and frameworks for disaster resilience, risk reduction and disaster management that respond to caste-based vulnerabilities. Social equity audits and Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments conducted in caste-affected communities can gather information about specific needs and appropriate warning systems.
- Implement the localisation agenda under the World Humanitarian Summit, equipping and empowering organisations representing socially excluded groups to become better humanitarian actors.

SDG 16 – Uphold human rights:

- Take urgent action to protect the full range of rights of caste-affected people, particularly to implement the recommendations of human rights monitoring bodies. Ensure adequate budgets are allocated and effective mechanism for the utilisation of these funds.
- Work towards compliance with the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on Work and Descent, to ensure that policy is effective for caste-affected groups and coherent with the principle of leave no one behind.
- Make special provision to address caste-based violence and bring perpetrators to justice. Ensure violence against Dalit women and girls, including all forms of sexual abuse and harassment, is criminalised and prosecuted, and take action support Dalit women to make complaints.
- Enact and implement comprehensive anti-discrimination laws.
- Ensure that police and judiciary are representative of the communities they serve and adequately trained in non-discrimination and gender sensitivity.
- Ensure that a comprehensive legal aid system is in place that is accessible to all, effective, sustainable and credible, in accordance with UN principles. Access to legal aid should be guaranteed without discrimination of any kind.

Leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first

Changing public perceptions and discriminatory social norms:

- Take specific measures – including internal training and public campaigns – to challenge discriminatory social norms and raise awareness among public servants, government officials and media practitioners on caste, gender and rights to non-discrimination.
- Invest in public education, celebration of diversity and discussions to help change mindsets around damaging social norms; and facilitate common spaces for interaction between people of different communities on equal terms.

Acting on data gaps:

- Address gaps in availability of caste-disaggregated data for monitoring progress towards the SDGs.
- Work towards achieving the five principles of the Inclusive Data Charter.¹⁷⁸
- Design caste-sensitive monitoring indicators and disaggregate data to make visible the progress of caste-affected and other excluded communities as *relevant in the national context*, as provided for in SDG 17.18. Global indicators should be supplemented by national indicators that measure progress in addressing DWD/caste disparities.¹⁷⁹
- Ensure that the data gathered and used for monitoring implementation of development programmes is sensitive to and addresses context-specific inequality and social exclusion based on caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and migratory status.

Localisation, participation and accountability in SDG delivery:

- Support the localisation and participatory governance of SDGs so that implementation and monitoring, is accountable to socially excluded groups. Involve Dalit organisations in planning SDG implementation and review.
- Support an enabling environment for citizen-led mechanisms to strengthen social accountability, so that marginalised groups can highlight specific barriers they face in achievement of SDGs and comment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of national policies for delivery of the SDGs.¹⁸⁰
- Include a chapter on 'Leave No-one Behind' in Voluntary National Reviews to report on efforts to reach Dalits and other marginalised groups and take action to ensure equitable uptake and reach of poverty reduction, social protection and other entitlements.

¹⁷⁸ Frequently Asked Questions, Inclusive Data Charter, www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/services_files/IDC_FAQs_0.pdf

¹⁷⁹ Indicators aimed at monitoring progress towards the elimination of DWD are proposed in Leave No One Behind. See note 95, Asia Dalit Rights Forum.

¹⁸⁰ An example is the Right to Information Campaign in India, which has been very powerful in linking information about budgets with the realisation of rights and development projects.

Useful tools and guidance

An international consultation that took place in Kathmandu in 2011 issued a Joint Declaration and Global Call to Action which remains an important document for guiding good practices and strategies to eliminate caste discrimination by governments, civil society, national and international institutions and agencies:

https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/IDSN/Consultations/IC_Declaration_and_Recommendations.pdf

For governments:

- Draft United Nations Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on work and Descent. A comprehensive legal framework to eliminate caste discrimination globally. http://idsn.org/uploads/media/UN_Principles_And_Guidelines_-_IDSN.pdf
- Benchmarking the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on Work and Descent. These reports assess status and make recommendations in relation to national implementation of the Draft Guidelines in three countries:
 - > **Nepal:** www.asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/1819514436nepal.pdf
 - > **Bangladesh:** www.asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/311337486bangladesh.pdf
 - > **India:** www.asiadalitrightsforum.org/images/imageevent/1956137726india.pdf
- IDSN Roadmap to the UNOHCHR Guidance Tool offers a quick introduction to the key recommendations covered in the tool. <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Digital-Final-IDSN-Guide-to-UN-GT.pdf>

For development practitioners:

- Leaving no one behind: Social inclusion programming in South Asia: www.changealliance.in
- Reimagining Identities: Addressing Intersectionality in Development Programming: www.changealliance.in
- An Introduction to Social Equity Audit contains a framework and set of tools that help to identify forms and levels of exclusion that might exist in the work that we do: www.socialequitywatch.org/social-equity-audit.html
- A useful summary of vulnerability mapping, inclusion monitoring and inclusive programming approaches suitable for risk reduction, emergency response and long term development programmes can be found in the Equality in Aid report: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/EqualityInAid_web_version.pdf

For the private sector:

These guidelines are aimed at companies that want to improve their responsiveness to caste discrimination in employment and supply chains:

- Ambedkar Employment Principles: http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/IDSN/Ambedkar_Principles_brochure.pdf
- Dalit Discrimination Check: http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/CSR/Dalit_Discrimination_Check.pdf

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Cover image: Dalit girls face the double discrimination of gender and caste. Karuna's work in village schools supports girls to stay in school by forming girls groups and engaging teachers and parents. Courtesy of Karuna. Photography by Amy Edwards.

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