

## Private Sector

Early in 2011, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) published the results of a caste census done among a selection of its members throughout India. The first of its kind, the survey shows that Dalits are seriously underrepresented in the workforce in many states compared to their share of the population. While the census shows regional differences with the highest proportionate representation of Dalits in the most industrialised state Tamil Nadu, with a concentration of textile industry, and the lowest in Bihar, there is no correlation between industrialisation and employment of Dalits.

The survey does not differentiate between the types of jobs Dalits fill, which would have given a more accurate picture of the ability of Indian business to give equal opportunities to Dalits. As documented most recently by Professor Ashwini Deshpande in "The Grammar of Caste" published in 2011, Dalits are still disadvantaged in the modern economy solely because of their caste status both in terms of recruitment discrimination at the work place and possibilities of career advancement.

The caste census is, however, a sign of cautious opening of corporate India to look inward, in terms of caste discrimination. The CII also followed up with an encouragement to its members to employ more Dalits, which is a much needed process, as caste discrimination and exploitation of Dalits in the private sector was again documented in a number of reports in 2011.

The ILO Global Report 2011<sup>16</sup> on Equality at Work highlights caste discrimination as a labour issue facing Dalits in South Asia, with specific references to India, Nepal and Bangladesh. For some time, IDS N has discussed with the ILO in India about the publication of a Dalit resource guide for companies and investors in India. It will reflect current debates on reservations, employment of Dalits and tools to eliminate caste discrimination in business operations, drawing in current developments in India, international and national legislation and existing tools and remedies to counter caste discrimination. Efforts to complete the guide were undertaken in 2011 and it will be published in 2012 as a joint product of the ILO India and IDS N.

After lobbying by the Dalit Network Netherlands (DNN), a majority in the Dutch parliament adopted a motion on discrimination of Dalits requesting the government to promote that "combating caste-based discrimination becomes an integral part of the CSR policy of Dutch and European companies, including in their supplychain, who are active in countries where caste-based discrimination is practiced." The Minister of Foreign Affairs endorsed the motion.

## The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) highlights caste

From the report on Core Labour Standards in India for the WTO September review of India's trade policies.<sup>21</sup>

**"Indian society is structured across caste lines, even if the Constitution has abolished the caste system. The Dalits, a self-designation for a group of people who are considered to belong to the "lowest" caste face extreme discrimination in several aspects of life, including employment and access to public services. Dalits are also the most usual victims of bonded and forced labour. Many crimes against Dalits, including crimes related to employment, remain unpunished because the authorities are indifferent to Dalits or because Dalits do not report them due to fear of retaliation. Many Dalits are engaged in scavenging manually, a practice which is prohibited under the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993. The CEACR "found the continuing existence of manual scavenging, and that it was practiced by municipal employees belonging to particular castes." The CEACR is concerned at the "apparent weak enforcement" of the Act and that "the practice even continues in employment under the Government's authority."**

After engagement by the DSN Finland, The Finnish Business Partnership programme, FinnPartnership, which provides assistance to Finnish business activities in developing countries, now include the Ambedkar Principles and the Caste Discrimination Check in its ethical directions and its material and tool bank for the enterprises. This is in addition to similar recommendations by the Dutch and Danish Governments in their advice to companies operating in caste-affected countries. A number of DSNs also promoted the Ambedkar Principles and the Dalit Discrimination Check in their ongoing work with private companies and other CSR stakeholders.

Appalling conditions in the cotton industry in India were documented in several reports. The report *Captured by Cotton*<sup>17</sup> on the exploitation of girls, primarily of Dalit background, under the so-called Sumangali scheme was published by DNN member The India Committee of the Netherlands and SOMO, Centre for Research on Multinational companies. The report documents that Multinational clothing brands are sourcing from cotton spinning mills in Tamil Nadu that exploit teenage girls, subjecting them to what the ILO terms the 'worst forms of child labour'. The girls are not offered fair wages and work towards a promise of being paid a lump sum, made up of withheld wages, after three years employment. It is not uncommon that at the end of the three years the girls are not paid and have effectively been used as slaves. Even when the girls are paid, the wages are below the minimum wage and the working conditions are so hazardous that many girls must use the money they make to pay for their medical bills.

The report was shared with officials and press contacts of IDSN, particularly through DSNs, who were also part of dialogues on the issue within the Ethical Trading Initiative in the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark. The report was widely covered in national and international media and led to a group of the sourcing companies pledging to work actively for the abolition of the Sumangali scheme and similar forms of labour rights abuse in the affected districts.

Research Associate, the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, released a report on what they call an agrarian crisis in India where farmers in alarming numbers are committing suicide when they can no longer sustain their livelihoods<sup>18</sup>. The report found that caste discrimination exacerbates the problem and identifies the dominance of the cotton market by multinational corporations and the use of expensive GM cotton seed as key contributing factors.

The International Trade Union Confederation<sup>19</sup>, furthermore released a report referring to vast exploitation of predominantly Dalit and Tribal children under the age of 14 in the cotton industry in Andhra Pradesh. The children produce hybrid cotton seeds and do not receive payment as they are working to pay off family debt. Gross exploitation of children, mostly Dalits, in the carpet weaving industry was also described by the Goodweave campaign in a report from North India<sup>20</sup>. The research found children as young as 10 years of age are coerced to work 16 or more hours a day weaving carpets for export to Europe and North America. All of these children are poor, low-caste or Dalits who receive negligible payment or are exploited through outright bonded and forced labour.

The documentation of labour violations against Dalits produced within and outside the IDSN membership have been shared with officials and individual companies by IDSN and DSN members, as well as communicated through newsletters and websites.

Important new tools made available in 2011 for companies in dealing with caste-based discrimination are the UN-endorsed Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by Prof. John Ruggie and the revised OECD Guidelines. Both emphasize a pro-active due diligence to tackle human rights violations by companies, in their value chain and in co-operation with their business partners.

A key development in India was the decision by the Indian Government to make it mandatory for all central bodies to make at least 4% of their annual purchases from small scale industries owned by Dalits or tribals. The decision came as part of the new public procurement policy which mandates ministries to make 20% of their purchases from micro and small enterprise. Of this, 20% will be done from companies owned by Dalits or tribals.

## Communication and networking

2011 has seen a flourish of new projects within communication and networking. New websites are being developed for the Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe, a new introductory video and thematic videos on caste discrimination are being produced, and a public survey was carried out in Europe to measure public knowledge and opinion on caste discrimination.

New developments included an increased focus on social networking tools Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. IDSN also engaged in spreading IDSN and network news on CNN I-Report, Reuters Trustlaw and the Minority Voices Newsroom. This significantly increased the reach of IDSN news and information. The IDSN Facebook channel now has 460 fans, had 75,000 page views in 2011, and a network reach of 210,000. The Facebook page has furthermore been integrated to automatically update the Twitter channel IDSNupdates.

The IDSN website continues to be a very popular source of information on caste discrimination and the amount of unique visitors to the site in 2011 increased by 26% compared to 2010 and the number of page views increased by 12%. Visitors spend longer time on the IDSN website than on other NGO websites that it is benchmarked against through Google Analytics statistical analysis. Additions to the IDSN website in 2011 included expanding the EU section, new issue papers on Dalit women and on access to education, Facebook integration on all key pages and news items, and an improved RSS feed function that enables IDSN news to be fed into social media channels and the website of members and associates.

The IDSN Newsletter was redesigned into a template that made it possible to partially track its use and also integrate social media channels. The monthly newsletter now has over 800 subscribers and the number of subscribers continues to increase. The newsletters are an important record of developments and are also read by non-subscribers who receive news of them through the IDSN website or social media outlets.

IDSN continued to provide informational and analytical news articles on emerging news and events on caste discrimination throughout the year, as well as new tendencies. News and new publications sent to us by members and associates was also communicated through all relevant IDSN channels including the website, newsletter, social media, emails and listservs.

A new arrival on the scene in 2011, was the IDSN YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/idsnvideo](http://www.youtube.com/idsnvideo). This channel