

IDSN ONLINE RESPONSE TO GOALS SET IN POST-2015 HIGH LEVEL PANEL REPORT

International Dalit Solidarity Network – July 2013

During the Global Consultation on the post-2015 agenda, many civil society organisations argued that inequality (and the fight against it) should be a stand-alone goal. The High Level Panel has chosen to address the issue as a cross-cutting concern that spans a number of different goals. It also prefers to leave policies on inequality to national governments rather than formulate a universal goal.

Civil society organisations in e.g. India are highly critical towards this approach. They believe that leaving out inequality from any clear formulation is “a sheer loss of the historic opportunity that this process offered.” They consider the lack of a separate inequality goal an inadequate and ‘potentially harmful’ strategy, given that countries have different views on acceptable levels of income inequality. They make the case for a stand-alone goal and a universal definition of inequality.

The idea of a specific goal is supported by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay. She uses the term ‘equality’ rather than ‘inequality’ and includes the concepts of equity and non-discrimination. She also advocates a ‘two-track approach’ which includes a separate goal as well as the integration of equality considerations across all other goals.

The report’s lack of attention to the inequality issue may be especially harmful to marginalised groups such as the hundreds of millions of Dalits in South Asia and similarly affected people who suffer caste- and descent-based discrimination. IDSN strongly recommends the promotion of a caste-sensitive post-2015 development agenda with reduction of inequalities based on or aggravated by caste as a crucial and measurable goal ensuring that caste discrimination is explicitly addressed as a major structural factor underlying poverty, and as a root cause of structural inequalities.

IDSN has consistently argued that the principles of equality and non-discrimination must be at the heart of the post-2015 agenda and that special attention should be given to the most excluded groups. In this respect, the key messages in the report from the Global Thematic Consultation were encouraging. One message stated that “multiple deprivation and inequalities are often closely associated with and reinforced by *specific forms of discrimination* in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.” Caste discrimination was mentioned as an example.

The acknowledgement of caste discrimination as a source of inequality was recently welcomed by seven UN Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts. In a statement, they stressed that “caste-based discrimination needs to be addressed as a major structural factor underlying poverty” and expressed hope that the post-2015 agenda would include specific goals for the advancement of Dalits: “Their specific needs require tailored action to lift them out of poverty and close the inequality gap between them and the rest of society,” the UN experts underlined.

Many of the report’s 12 illustrative goals are highly relevant to the hundreds millions of victims of caste discrimination, but fail to mention them explicitly. It is IDSN’s experience that if not directly mentioned and included in development agendas, Dalits will be left out – which is certainly not the intention behind one of the five transformative shifts that are meant to drive the post-2015 agenda - to ‘leave no one behind’.

IDSN recommends that:

- Dalits and other groups affected by caste-based discrimination must be mentioned and targeted in the post-2015 development framework
- Indicators should be designed to measure the impact on people affected by caste-based discrimination and be linked to indicators for reducing inequality as a cross cutting aim.

IDSN specifically suggests that caste references be made in connection with the following goals:

1. End poverty:

This goal should take into account that there are links between inequality and various forms of social exclusion, including caste-based exclusion.

2. Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality:

This goal should take into account the various intersectionalities that confront women facing multiple forms of discrimination and make them even more vulnerable to violence, abuse, neglect and deprivation. This would include the intersection between gender and caste in the case of Dalit women.

3. Provide quality education and learning:

This goal should take into account that discrimination, i.e. based on caste, social exclusion and poverty prevent many children from attending school and young people from accessing quality education and achieving higher education.

4. Ensure healthy lives:

This goal should specifically take into account that discrimination and social exclusion severely affect the health of children and women from marginalised groups, who are often prevented from accessing health services. In India, children born into families of Scheduled Castes (Dalits) face a higher risk of dying during the first 24 hours of their lives than children from other groups.

5. Ensure food security and good nutrition:

This goal should take into account that marginalised groups face particular problems in gaining access to food. Almost half of Dalit children in India under the age of five are malnourished.

6. Achieve universal access to water and sanitation:

This goal should take into account that discrimination and social stigma prevent large groups of people, including Dalits, from adequate access to water and sanitation. Only 10 per cent of India's Dalit households have access to sanitation, and in almost half of India's villages, Dalits are denied access to a water source.

11. Ensure stable and peaceful societies:

This goal should take into account that caste violations and other forms of discrimination stratify societies and induce conflict and violence.