



Strategy

2015-2018



International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION



Dalit boatman in India. Photo: Jakob Carlsen

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Introduction

The International Dalit Solidarity Network is a well-established and unique network and collective force with a professional organisation, which enjoys a productive and fruitful cooperation with key external stakeholders, in particular at the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU).

IDSN was founded in March 2000, and formally registered in 2003, to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. The IDSN network includes members and affiliates from caste-affected countries, Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe, international and regional associates including large human rights organisations, and research affiliates.

IDSN produces crucial input in the form of documentation, strategic interventions and lobby action and also supports national level lobbying. The Copenhagen-based secretariat coordinates lobby and advocacy activities in close cooperation with members, associates, affiliates and alliance partners.

The development of the 2015-2018 IDSN strategy has been informed by the findings and outcomes of an external review and an analysis of responses from IDSN members and associates to a comprehensive questionnaire, accompanied by an internal strategy development process inspired by U-theory and Theories of Change.

The strategy sets out IDSN's vision, mission, values and approach as well as priorities and opportunities for future development. Cross-cutting thematic strategic priority is given to the intersectionality of gender and caste-based discrimination and violence against Dalit women, and to caste, forced and bonded labour.

The strategy outlines with a point of departure in a result-based management frame how IDSN will pursue work in three main programme areas: 1) United Nations, 2) European Union and 3) Communication, Networking and Campaigning. The overall programmatic results are broad in scope and do not have particular time limits.

The strategy further sets out long-term organisational change objectives related to 1) gradually expanding membership and capacity of the network; 2) enhancing cross-cutting thematic work and; 3) securing long term financial sustainability.

Vision

Our vision is a world free of caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Where no human being is subjected to inequality, injustice, slavery, violence, exclusion, discrimination and suffering, because of the caste they are born into. A world where your caste does not restrict your access to universal human rights, justice, education, health and protection or determine what work you can do, where you can live or who you can marry.

Mission

Our mission is to make an effective global-level contribution to the promotion and protection of the human rights and dignity of those affected by caste-based discrimination and to promote effective measures for its elimination. We will contribute to the creation of a global engagement with caste-based discrimination where the UN, EU and key national and international stakeholders, act in solidarity with those who suffer from caste-based discrimination and take action to end it.

IDSN seeks to fulfil its mission through:

- Advocating for the human rights of Dalits by influencing legislation and the policies and practices of governments, international bodies and institutions
- Monitoring the enforcement and implementation of legislation and measures aimed at combating caste-based discrimination
- Working towards global recognition of Dalit Human Rights and contributing to the fight against caste-based discrimination globally by raising awareness, building solidarity and disseminating information about caste-based discrimination
- Facilitating and supporting Dalit rights interventions internationally, including before UN human rights mechanisms, institutions of the European Union, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and other multilateral bodies and forums
- Maintaining a resource base, communication and media platform that facilitates and strengthens advocacy, networking and solidarity functions



Young Dalit children in Bangladesh.
Photo: Matthew Becker/Advocacy Project

Definitions

The term “caste-based discrimination” as used in this strategy document is meant to include discrimination based on caste, based on work and descent and based on analogous forms of inherited status.

The term “Dalit” as used in this strategy document refers to members of communities formerly considered to be “untouchable” in South Asian caste systems, and it is meant to encompass other communities suffering from similar forms of discrimination on the basis of work and descent, with full recognition that members of these communities do not necessarily identify with this terminology.

The term “caste-affected countries” as used in this strategy refers to countries where the practice of discrimination based on caste or analogous systems of inherited status is indigenous to the country itself.

Who we are

IDSN is a secular international human rights organisation with civil society members from caste-affected countries, national Dalit Solidarity Networks and international human rights and development NGOs. The international secretariat functions as a resource hub, coordinates lobby and advocacy activities in close cooperation with members, associates, affiliates and alliance partners. Members from caste-affected countries are driving forces at the national level as well as leaders in or key contributors to interventions internationally.

Values

Human Rights

IDSN applies a human rights based approach and strategy to all aspects of its work with a firm basis in the human rights standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

Solidarity

IDSN is based on the principle of solidarity. We act in solidarity and collaborate with Dalit communities, and seek increased solidarity for the cause of eliminating caste-based discrimination at the global level.

Inclusion

IDSN ensures the participation of representatives from caste-affected communities in its global advocacy work and governing structures, with a particular focus on inclusion of Dalit women and youth.

Collaboration

IDSN is a network founded on the principle of collaboration and seeks to collaborate with network members and associates and with other relevant organisations and institutions to ensure the maximum impact of IDSN's work.

Integrity

IDSN is known for delivering accurate, relevant and reliable input to global mechanisms and processes and strives to maintain this level at all times, and ensure the integrity, accountability, transparency and high-respect for the network.

Approach

IDSN's work is based on a human rights based approach, and adheres to the values and mission set out above. IDSN is a solidarity body and at the same time a professional organisation and is not a grant-making organisation. IDSN's strategic approach includes creating visibility, keeping governments and other stakeholders accountable, pushing for new policy instruments and tools, mainstreaming caste issues in thematic areas, and strengthening the collective voice of Dalits and other communities discriminated on the basis of work and descent, particularly at the UN and the EU.

IDSN's approach in 2015-2018 is a combination of a continuation of methodologies proven to be effective within UN, EU and Communication and Networking programmes, that have been reviewed to work, with an increasing focus on thematic work and collective action and expansion of the range of actors promoting an end to caste-based discrimination. This approach is intended to diminish the barriers and resistance to addressing caste-based discrimination existing at national and international levels.

IDSN as a network facilitates dialogue, documentation and submissions on caste-related human rights violations to UN Human rights bodies and EU institutions. We will contribute to enhancing demands for accountability of caste-affected states and other duty-bearers to meet their obligations, and support Dalits to make their voices heard and claim their rights.

This approach views caste-based discrimination as a human rights violation and a structural and systematic hierarchy that must be addressed locally, nationally, regionally and globally. The approach addresses deeply rooted gender inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination, and further institutionalises Dalit women's space in IDSN activities and leadership.

IDSN programme areas, interventions and other activities are closely interlinked; results in one area support or influence interventions in another. Such interconnectivity has proven to be instrumental in producing results, and it will remain a core approach applied by IDSN. IDSN strives to ensure the inclusion of representatives from Dalit communities in its advocacy work and interventions in international fora, and works in collaboration with its network members including Dalit Solidarity Networks and International Associates.

Milestones will be set by the Board and the Executive in relation to achievements within priority areas.



The change we want to see

Achieving the aims set out in this strategy are assumed to enhance state compliance with international law and obligations, promote or enable policy change and specific measures, and to further raise visibility on caste-based discrimination among UN and EU stakeholders, the public and media. On the one hand enhancing pressure on Governments and institutions; and on the other creating opportunities for cooperation between multiple stakeholders for the elimination of caste-based discrimination. It is also expected to contribute to ensuring a continued support to civil society's work for Dalit rights, justice and equity in development, and increasing leverage of Dalit rights groups at the national and international level. This strategic approach ultimately aims to cause change at the local level through collaboration with and pressure from international actors.

Change objectives

IDSN's overarching change objective is to achieve policy change and action by multiple stakeholders through consistent advocacy, information sharing and engagement with stakeholders to make caste-based discrimination a recognised global issue backed by global engagement and action.

We have identified key change objectives within each programme area and organisational development objectives that will contribute to creating the change we want to see.

United Nations

Caste status is recognised as a ground of discrimination by UN bodies to be tackled on a par with other forms of discrimination and addressed as part of relevant UN human rights themes. UN agencies and bodies have continuously addressed the topic and issued recommendations to governments and other stakeholders.

European Union

The European Parliament continuously addresses caste-based discrimination and EU institutions take policy action and address the topic in strategic frameworks including at country level in some caste-affected states.

Communication, networking and campaigning

Increased global awareness of caste-based discrimination resulting from the use of documentation and information from IDSN, enhanced network engagement and collaboration with other partners; and increased public engagement with IDSN.

Organisational development objectives

Include expansion of network base and reach, strengthening of IDSN governing structures, securing long term sustainable funding and enhancement of cross cutting thematic work.

Cross cutting thematic work is prioritised and strengthened with a focus on intersectionality of gender and caste-based discrimination and violence against Dalit women, and that of caste, forced and bonded labour. IDSN will seek to integrate business and human rights aspects in this work and continue to provide information on the responsibility of businesses, trading initiatives and ILO to address caste-based discrimination.

Young Dalit boy working in bonded labour in India carries a heavy load. Photo: Jakob Carlsen

Dalit women in Bangladesh come together to fight intersectional caste and gender discrimination. Photo: Jakob Carlsen

Priorities

While caste-based discrimination is a global phenomenon, addressed by UN human rights mechanisms in 22 countries, IDS will in the strategy 2015-2018 focus its collaborative efforts on cooperation with members and partners in South Asia and some diaspora countries, while continuing to monitor and promote information including from the UN system on caste issues in other countries. IDS's international level activities are complementary to national and regional efforts by civil society.

IDS's overarching priorities within each programme area are set out below, as well as priorities within the cross-cutting thematic work. As a result of additional aims and priorities taken on board by IDS in this strategy process, the range and frequency of certain actions or interventions may be more limited within the UN and EU programme areas, and result in decreasing work with some UN Human Rights mechanisms. IDS will also endeavour to explore opportunities for creating an enabling environment for capacity building of members of caste-affected communities in relation to IDS programme activities.

United Nations Programme Priorities

- Work to support caste-related mainstreaming, standard setting and guidelines within the UN
- Submissions to Universal Periodic Reviews and selected Treaty Body reviews of key caste-affected countries in South Asia
- Input to relevant UN Special Procedures and UN Human Rights Council sessions and interventions based on assessment of maximum impact within the given resources
- Cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Facilitating the use of recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms at country-level

European Union Programme Priorities

- Facilitating dialogue and documentation to influence the policies, strategic frameworks, funding instruments and programmes of the European Union
- Mainstreaming caste-based discrimination into key EU policies through a thematic approach
- Furthering debate and text in resolutions on caste-based discrimination by the European Parliament and committees on development (DEVE) and human rights (DROI) and delegations on South Asian countries.
- Increase focus on EU delegations and the EU Human Rights working groups in some of the caste-affected countries

Communication, networking and campaigning

- External communication, media work and the production and promotion of resources and awareness raising material
- Facilitate the exposure of information from network members and associates to an international level audience
- Use social media channels to facilitate dialogue and information exchange between network actors, communities and the global level
- IDS will endeavour to create international level exposure for relevant local or national level campaigns, especially within the thematic focus areas of Dalit women and caste, forced and bonded labour.
- Sustain and enhance internal communication and networking between members, associates and the secretariat

Cross-cutting issues

- Work on themes and inter-sectionality with priority to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence against Dalit women, and forced and bonded labour and caste-based forms of slavery, forging alliances with existing and new collaborative partners and members. IDS will seek to integrate business and human rights aspects in this work and continue to provide information on the responsibility of businesses, trading initiatives and the ILO to address caste-based discrimination.



Young Dalit women and a representative from the Women in Governance Network, join the IDSN team at the UN in Geneva. Photo: IDSN

Organisational development

- Expand network base and increase network reach, and engagement of network members
- Strengthening of IDSN governing structures
- Securing sustainable funding and working to increase funding

Key long-term organisational change objectives and priorities to work towards

Future strategic aims identified through the strategy process that the current limitations on staffing and network engagement do not allow for have been set out below as key future strategic aims to work towards. In order to further the realisation of these aims and priorities IDSN will prioritise:

Increasing network engagement

IDSN will continue to gradually expand the network and widen the group of stakeholders. IDSN will also work towards strengthening internal network engagement to encourage network members to contribute additional resources to achieve the change objectives, take sustained action on current and future strategic aims and respond to opportunities that arise.

Increasing funding

IDSN will work towards long-term financial sustainability and increasing its funding to allow for the recruitment of additional human resources. This includes the current approach of seeking Government and organisational funding as well as expanding to collect private individual donations.

If IDSN is successful in increasing human resources and network engagement, the network will prioritise:

- Strengthening cross-cutting thematic work further
- Strengthening focus on expanding network capacity to engage in IDSN's work, and follow up action at national level, and enhanced synergy between national and international level engagement. Engaging high-level champions for the cause
- Strengthening work on caste, labour, business and human rights
- Mobilising broader public awareness raising initiatives and campaigns
- Linking with research institutions to produce studies

Background

Since its inception as an informal network in 2000, IDSN has developed from a network of committed individuals, who brought their organisations along, to a professional organisation, which maintains a network structure, gradually enlarged with new members and additional countries. IDSN has also gradually expanded its scope of work and institutional outreach. Collectively IDSN has effectively built awareness, political influence and support for the cause of securing Dalit human rights with a considerable impact.

The core functions of IDSN are to promote policy change and action by multiple stakeholders through consistent advocacy, information sharing and engagement with stakeholders; its achievements are by all comparisons high. The organisation has also faced naturally emerging challenges, including to cope with expectations and responsibilities in a membership structure, and to enhance synergy between local, national and international levels. As time went by, the need for a review of IDSN's structure and governance also became apparent.

In 2012, a strategy process was initiated by the IDSN Executive Group. After almost 10 years since the establishment of IDSN, it was time for a review of IDSN as an organisation and a network, for discussions on strategies and pathways ahead; and to position IDSN for future challenges and opportunities.

In 2014, IDSN embarked on the final leg of a strategy development process. This was informed by the findings and outcomes of an external review conducted in January 2014 and an analysis of responses from IDSN members and associates to a comprehensive questionnaire in June, accompanied by an internal strategy development process inspired by U-theory and Theories of Change. The review and strategy processes have provided unique opportunities to reflect on and review experiences and achievements, and to further enable alignment of vision, strategies and expectations.

Review and questionnaire findings

These processes have confirmed the relevance of IDSN's mandate, mission and aims, and the effectiveness of IDSN's current programmes indicated by a high degree of consistency and coherence in respondents' replies on programmes and strategies, and a majority recommendation for maintaining current strategic programme focus. The strategic direction and priorities set by IDSN therefore continue to fall within the three programme areas; UN, EU and communication and networking, and the work will continue to be carried out from a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA).

One of the strengths highlighted in the review and questionnaires was the unique role of IDSN as the only international human rights NGO that systematically targets the EU and UN on caste-based discrimination in solidarity with and cooperation with NGOs from caste-affected countries, solidarity networks and international human rights NGOs.

"The focused and shared objectives, members with a high degree of ownership, NGOs with the same or similar goals and focus as IDSN, strong partnership networks, and EU and UN stakeholders that have a high degree of respect for IDSN, make up the glue and ensure coherence and strong loyalty to IDSN." – 2014 Review of IDSN by Danida

IDSN works with a standardized, firm, well-established and recognized methodology, which includes a range of products and approaches used for servicing the various stakeholders. Methods include systematic documentation based on input from partners and other sources in caste affected countries and international bodies, monitoring, lobbying, face-to-face interaction with stakeholders as well as meetings and workshops, with participation of representatives of Dalits and other NGOs from caste affected countries. 2014 Review of IDSN by Danida

The UN and EU were found to be of key importance in putting international pressure on caste-affected countries to address caste-based discrimination with new measures, a higher level of political commitment, and effective implementation of laws, policies and additional measures, which currently is grossly lacking in most caste-affected countries.

IDSN is capable of bridging the national level with international policy and decision-makers in EU and UN as well as between EU and UN, and is recognised internationally for its systematised and persistent documentation process, lobby work, mapping of stakeholders as well as monitoring and follow-up on specific issues. 2014 Review of IDSN by Danida

A theory of change approach as applied in the process involves outlining preconditions for achieving change objectives. It entails a process of analysis and ongoing reflection on strategies, and possible adjustments, and in the case of IDSN a continuous assessment of both political opportunities and barriers.

The rationale behind is to review how we as IDSN best can influence policies and institutions as well as the public, how we articulate our philosophy of change, and what the preconditions are, that are necessary to achieve the change objectives. We have certain assumptions about causality; what sequence of events or outcomes will be necessary to reach a new benchmark, enable a new political opening or outcome, or a social change action.

With the application of the theory of change approach in IDSN's work progress markers and outcome mapping become integrated in evaluation, re-strategizing and planning processes. It informs our long-term change objectives, results setting and priorities as well as the methodologies chosen. Furthermore it underpins the importance of inter-linkages in the work of IDSN – between stakeholders, and programmatically.

This organizational strategy addresses medium and long-term objectives, and strives to develop IDSN's infrastructure and its organizational base towards sustainable financial and human resourcing. Implementation of medium to longer-term strategies is subject to availability of additional financial resources, commitment of members to action plans and expansion of network capacity. If the assumptions above cannot be met, IDSN may have to further prioritize its input.

Countering political barriers

At the international political arena, the political barriers identified and encountered through more than a decade of work with the UN relate to opposition by some affected states to addressing the issue internationally. The political reality, the power relations at the UN and the limited leverage by states or interregional groupings – real or perceived – are currently factors contributing to the absence of member state initiatives to address caste-based discrimination at an adequate level and in an effective manner at the UN.

The environment for pursuing rights agendas through institutional means is in principle conducive with human rights obligations as accepted standards and global commitments to human rights based approaches. The push back factor relates to ingrained resistance to dealing effectively with caste inequalities, power relations and the social dimensions of caste systems, and at times, lack of priority by states but also of resources to engage in the topic. This has lead IDSN to shift some of its focus to applying a mainstreaming approach and decreasing engagement with States and the UN Human Rights Council. In work with UN human rights mechanisms IDSN prioritises its resources to mainly cover South Asian caste-affected countries and a few diaspora countries.

The political scenario at the UN is compounded by a trend of a shrinking democratic and civil space globally, including in some of the countries most affected by caste discrimination, impairing and affecting civil society working for Dalit rights. These factors have only reaffirmed IDSN's commitment to continued advocacy for the rights of Dalits at the international level.

Opportunities found in the strategy process for routing around these barriers have led IDSN to change the emphasis in the political advocacy work towards working more on a thematic basis, in a targeted fashion on specific issues, with a priority focus on multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and violence against Dalit women and caste related forced and bonded labour. Pursuing joint actions with members and collaborative partners, including international women's organisations, in various international settings, is also featured more prominently in the IDSN strategy.

Revised statutes and governing structure enhances cooperation and the thematic approach

With the adoption of revised statutes and an adjusted structure in December 2014, IDSN has created the possibility for expansion of membership and affiliation and simultaneously simplified IDSN governance with a Board and General Assembly to create a more efficient mode of working together.

The adjusted structure opens up for increased engagement with a broader base of collaborative partners enabling IDSN to pursue collective action by IDSN stakeholders more strategically based for example on action research, thematic calls or presentation of cases of gross human rights violations, that are particularly appropriate for reaching out to the public and the political establishment.

Planning for future opportunities

While the outcomes of the external review, and internal questionnaires process strongly recommends a continuation of IDSN core programmes and strategic approach, the process also identified new opportunities and ideas to pursue IDSN's mission and vision. Some of the suggestions have been inserted into the current strategy priorities by decreasing certain programme activities over time while many of them require additional resources and enhanced network engagement to become realistic aims and activities. IDSN has therefore within this strategy included a list of priorities that the network wish to pursue in the longer-term if increased funding or network engagement to lift the work load has been secured.



A Dalit man in Nepal is trapped in bonded labour and a young Dalit girl in Pakistan works in child labour weaving. Photos: Jakob Carlsen.
Dalit women from India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan join the IDSN team at the UN in Geneva for a side-event on Dalit women. Photo: IDSN

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www.facebook.com/dalitnetwork

You can register to receive the monthly IDSN newsletter on
www.idsn.org/newsletter

Stay updated with IDSN's twitter feed on
www.twitter.com/idsnupdates

View a selection of videos on caste discrimination on
www.youtube.com/idsnvideo



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Caste-based discrimination

There are an estimated 260 million Dalits worldwide, often born into an 'untouchable' status in highly stratified caste systems. Caste systems are found in South Asia, in communities migrated from South Asia across the globe and in other caste stratified countries in Africa and Asia.

Caste-based discrimination involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Caste systems divide people into unequal and hierarchical social groups. Those at the bottom are considered 'lesser human beings', 'impure' and 'polluting' to other caste groups.

Those in the lowest of castes, are known to be 'untouchable' and often subjected to so-called 'untouchability practices' in both public and private spheres. 'Untouchables' – known in South Asia as Dalits – are often forcibly assigned the most dirty, menial and hazardous jobs, and many are subjected to forced and bonded labour. Due to exclusion practiced by both state and non-state actors, they have limited access to resources, services and development, keeping most Dalits in severe poverty.

Dalits are often de facto excluded from decision-making and meaningful participation in public and civil life. Lack of special legislation banning caste-based discrimination or lack of implementation of legislation, due to dysfunctional systems of justice, lack of state responsibility and caste-bias, have largely left Dalits without protection. Despite policy development and new legislation in some countries, fundamental challenges still remain in all caste-affected countries.