



Strategy

2019-2023



International Dalit Solidarity Network

WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION



Dalit women march in India. Photo by Jan Sahas

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Who we are

We are a unique global human rights network that has been mobilizing international solidarity for the elimination of caste-based discrimination for over fifteen years. Our network includes civil society members from countries affected by caste discrimination, national Dalit Solidarity Networks and international human rights and development NGOs.

We create change by

- Raising global awareness of the realities faced by Dalits to foster international solidarity and support for ending caste-based discrimination
- Facilitating that Dalit voices and concerns are amplified and heard at the international level
- Documenting patterns of caste-based human rights violations and bringing these to the attention of international institutions, networks, organisations, businesses, activists and researchers

Vision

Our vision is a world free of caste-based discrimination and untouchability.

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.

Values

Human Rights

We apply a human rights based approach and strategy to all aspects of our work with a firm basis in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international instruments.

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

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

Collaboration

We seek to collaborate with network members and associates and with other relevant organisations and institutions to ensure the maximum impact of our work.

Integrity

We are known for delivering accurate, relevant and reliable input to global mechanisms and processes and strive to maintain this level at all times, and ensure the integrity, accountability, transparency and respect for the network.

Dalit boy leaps for change in Nepal. Photo: Jakob Carlsen

Dalit girls in Pakistan dance in a camp for freed bonded labourers. Photo: Jakob Carlsen

Key thematic areas for 2019-2023

Following a wide consultation in our network and an extensive organizational development process carried out in 2017-2018, we have chosen to focus our efforts on three key thematic areas over the next five years. This has been done to maximize our impact and work on areas where we have key strengths and the capacity to effect meaningful change. The thematic areas chosen are:

- **Dalit women and gender justice**
- **Business and human rights**
- **Equality and participation**

These thematic areas all incorporate the cross-cutting theme - access to justice.

Strategic Objectives and targets

Our overarching change objective is to instigate action by multiple stakeholders at the global level through consistent advocacy, information sharing and engagement with stakeholders to make caste-based discrimination a recognized global issue backed by global engagement and commitment. This engagement will provide solidarity and an international platform to Dalits fighting for their rights in their local and national settings.

It is also a long-term ambition of IDSN to work towards a UN Convention on Work and Descent-based Discrimination. Within the three key thematic areas that form the focus of the 2019-2023 strategy, we have identified three overall long-term strategic objectives and subsequently related targets to be achieved by 2023.

Long-term objective 1: **Dalit women and children are free from caste and gender-based discrimination**

Especially relevant to SDG Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

IDSN's 2023 Targets:

- The fight to end violence and discrimination against Dalit women, youth and children and the promotion of justice has received international attention
- Intersectionality of multiple forms of discrimination faced by Dalit women has been raised at the UN, EU and through global awareness raising efforts
- We have brought attention to forced conversion and marriage of Dalit girls and women and honour killings, and have ensured that this has been addressed at the UN and EU level
- We have ensured meaningful and dignified

participation with equal opportunities for Dalit women in key international fora, including promoting Dalit women leadership

- We have strengthened the capacity for Dalit women and youth to take part in global level processes
- We have strengthened the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the voices of Dalit women
- International networks of Dalit women are strengthened and visible in key global human rights and development fora
- Dalit women are actively engaging with mainstream global networks for the achievement of SDG 5 on Gender Equality
- Right to life and livelihoods for Dalit women, including food, water, decent work, education, health and housing has been reflected in IDSN's submissions and dialogue with UN and EU mechanisms
- All IDSN's work is mainstreamed to include Dalit women and youth as key actors

Long-term objective 2: **Caste-related labour, land and resource exploitation is eliminated, including forced and bonded labour**

Especially relevant to SDG Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

IDSN's 2023 Targets:

- The labour, land and resource challenges faced by Dalits are reflected in the international business and human rights agenda
- Caste-related labour, land and resource exploitation is highlighted in global reports on business and human rights, labour and/or slavery
- Caste-related forced and bonded labour has been explicitly addressed at the UN and EU level
- International solidarity from trade unions, trade initiatives, and International NGOs has been fostered to address exploitation of Dalits
- Key international businesses and trade-related networks have been sensitized to the existence of caste-related exploitation in their supply chains and informed of ways to tackle it
- Developments in international labour standards have been communicated widely disseminated to the IDSN network

Long-term objective 3:

Inequality based on caste is eliminated and Dalits participate actively and equally in decision making processes

Especially relevant to SDG Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

IDSN's 2023 Targets:

- Elimination of caste-based discrimination is included in SDG implementation in key countries affected by caste discrimination
- Caste is reflected in disaggregated data monitoring progress in relation to the SDGs
- We have made ensured the inclusion of Dalit voices in wider global campaigns and initiatives
- We have an expanded and actively engaged network
- We have promoted the active inclusion of Dalits in policy and decision making processes directly affecting their lives

Approach

Our work is based on a human rights-based approach, and adheres to the values and mission set out above. Our 2019-2023 strategy is strongly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals – 2030 Agenda.

In order to impact change at the national and local level we work with advocacy and awareness raising with global institutions concerned with human rights, including the UN and EU, as well as with international NGOs, transnational businesses, trade unions, rights bodies, research institutions and activists across the world.

Our human rights-based approach is further grounded on the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights, without any discrimination.

The international secretariat functions as a resource hub and coordinates advocacy and awareness raising activities in close cooperation with members, associates, affiliates and alliance partners. Members from countries affected by caste discrimination are primarily Dalit-led organisations and are driving forces at the national level as well as leaders in or key contributors to interventions internationally.

We facilitate dialogue, documentation and advocacy and submissions on caste-related human rights violations to UN bodies and the EU and its 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 strategic approach ultimately aims to cause change at the local level through collaboration with and pressure from international actors.

We strive to ensure the inclusion of representatives from Dalit communities in all our advocacy work and interventions in international fora, and work in collaboration with our network members including Dalit Solidarity Networks and International Associates to maximize our impact. IDSN furthermore aims to ensure that Dalit women leaders participate actively in key IDSN activities.

We will ensure that our strategic objectives are monitored and evaluated in a systematic way so that IDSN is clear on organisational effectiveness, outcomes, successes and equally, any areas for improvement.

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 “countries affected by caste discrimination” 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.



A Dalit child is trapped in bonded labour and a Dalit woman is scarred after an attack by a dominant caste man. Photos: Jakob Carlsen.

Dalit women join the IDSN team at the UN in Geneva, to speak out about the violations faced by their community. Photo: IDSN



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Caste-based discrimination

There are an estimated 260 million people affected by being born into a historically 'untouchable' status, in caste systems across the world.

A caste-system functions as a 'hidden apartheid' that divides people from birth into unequal social groups where those at the bottom of the system, known as Dalits in South Asia, are historically considered inferior, impure and polluting to other caste-groups. While caste-based discrimination has been banned in many countries affected by caste discrimination, the realities on the ground are not reflecting this as often the legislation is either not implemented or implementation is inadequate or inhibited by deeply rooted caste bias in law enforcement or the systems of justice.

Caste-based discrimination therefore continues to involve massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Those at the bottom of the system may be forced to do the most dirty and hazardous jobs, and may be subjected to modern slavery. Due to exclusion practiced by both state and non-state actors, they also have limited access to resources, education, services, political participation and development, keeping many in severe poverty. Dalit women are particularly at risk of severe rights violations, including violence and sexual abuse, as they suffer the compounded effects of gender and caste-based discrimination.



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