

Special Rapporteur on the right to development

IDSN input on the Nexus Between Gender Equality and the Right to Development

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally. IDSN is a network of international human rights groups, development agencies, national Dalit solidarity networks from Europe and national platforms in caste-affected countries.

1. *What laws, policies and other measures have States introduced since 2015 to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions in public life (including in the executive, legislature and judiciary) as well as in the private sector? Are there any good practices in this regard?*

Despite progress in some South Asian countries, Dalit women remain severely underrepresented in decision-making roles across public and private sectors.

The seventh periodic CEDAW report of Nepal ranks it as the highest among other South Asian countries in promoting women's participation in the government. It reports nearly 41 percent of women in local governments and 33 percent in the parliamentary elections in 2022¹. The constitution mandates 33 percent representation of women in elected bodies and the Local Level Election Act 2017 has made it mandatory for one in every five persons elected in each local Ward government to be a Dalit woman². Representation of the 6,567 elected Dalit women in these Wards is a far-reaching change³. However, a Ward is the lowest rung of government and Dalit women are scarcely represented in higher forms of government. Accordingly, the participation of Dalit women in the decision-making and implementation of policy is limited.

Many elected Dalit women in Nepal experience caste-based discrimination at work, discouraging their participation in governance. Barriers include verbal abuse, exclusion from key policy discussions and tokenised representation⁴.

¹ CEDAW/C/NPL/CO/7, *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Nepal*, United Nations, 2025. Accessible at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW%2FCO%2FNPL%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en.

² *Local Elections Act, 2073. Act to Amend - Local Elections (First Amendment) Act, 2074*. Accessible at: <https://election.gov.np/ecn/uploads/userfiles/sthaniyatahakonirwachanainpahilosansodhansahit.pdf>.

³ CEDAW/C/NPL/CO/7.

⁴ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

In Pakistan, Dalit women have no representation in the National Assembly. The seats reserved for minorities are filled by dominant-caste Hindus and Christians, preventing Dalit representation⁵. Dalit women who attempt to run for political office face severe social stigmatisation and threats from dominant caste groups.

In Bangladesh, there is a lack of official data on the participation of Dalits in decision-making, reflecting their exclusion from political and policy processes⁶. Additionally, there are no targeted policies encouraging Dalit women's leadership in local or national governance.

2. Are there any good practices concerning gender-responsive or gender mainstreaming policies adopted by States in relation to budgeting, financing, trade, investment and social security?

In Nepal, gender-responsive budgeting has been introduced, but it does not address the intersection of caste and gender. Special budget allocations for Dalit women remain absent. Socio-economic programmes intended to uplift women regarding economic development and combat and systemic discrimination rarely reach Dalit communities⁷.

The Bangladesh National Women's Development Policy (2011) recognises marginalised women, but implementation gaps persist, and the needs of Dalit women remain overlooked⁸. Dalit women are not actively consulted during policy formation, leading to policies that fail to address their specific socio-economic reality and barriers to access.

Reservation (affirmative action) policies in India have improved Dalit women's representation in elected offices, but patriarchal barriers and sometimes violent subjugation still limit their effectiveness. Gender budgeting initiatives also fail to disaggregate data by caste, making it difficult to track Dalit women's access to economic resources and calls into question accounts that cite significant progress⁹.

3. What additional law and policy reforms should be introduced to achieve substantive gender equality in both private and public spheres? How to bring effective changes to existing patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes?

Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/FEDO-IDSN-Summary-and-Key-Recommendations-CEDAW-NEPAL-2025.pdf>.

⁵ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan, 4th cycle*, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2023. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Universal-Periodic-Review-UPR-Pakistan-2023-Joint-submission.pdf>.

⁶ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 4th cycle*, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement et al, 2023. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/joint-ngo-submission-related-to-the-review-of-bangladesh-for-the-fourth-cycle-of-the-universal-periodic-review-2023-the-situation-of-dalits-in-bangladesh/>.

⁷ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

⁸ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 4th cycle*, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement et al, 2023.

⁹ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of India, 4th cycle*, International Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2022. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/UPR-India-2022.pdf>.

IDSN recommends the following law and policy reforms that would bring effective changes to existing patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes and caste-based discrimination across South Asia.

- I. Governments must strengthen legal frameworks, ensuring that national anti-discrimination laws explicitly criminalise caste- and gender-based discrimination, with strict enforcement mechanisms. For example, The Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act (2011) in Nepal and The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989) in India remain poorly enforced, leading to the continued exclusion of Dalit women¹⁰.
- II. Dalit women face systemic discrimination in accessing justice and legal remedies. Governments must ensure institutional accountability, legal aid and adequate reparation for Dalit women¹¹. Legal aid must be free for Dalit women and girls, include the option for free legal aid in sign language, and be accompanied by legal awareness education, psychosocial counselling (in the case of victims of discrimination) and mobile free-legal aid services¹². Moreover, the adoption of legal aid policies, such as Nepal's Integrated Legal Aid Policy (2019), must be followed up by mechanisms to monitor implementation; Nepalese Dalit women and girls and their organisations have not witnessed any development towards the entitlement of free legal aid¹³.
- III. It is paramount that Governments increase the accountability of the police, law enforcement authorities and justice mechanisms to ensure the victims of caste-based discrimination are free from fear and social and political pressure.
- IV. Many Dalit women are trapped in hereditary caste-based labour, including manual scavenging, leather work and sanitation work. Governments must ensure alternative livelihood programmes and strict implementation of laws banning that dangerous practice of manual scavenging¹⁴.
- V. A large proportion of Dalit women work in informal, unregulated sectors where they are subjected to exploitation, wage theft, bonded labour and a lack of legal protection. Governments must implement labour laws that protect Dalit women workers, ensuring equal pay and safe working conditions¹⁵.
- VI. Multinational corporations must adopt caste-sensitive due diligence policies to ensure Dalit women workers are protected from bonded labour, sexual harassment and pay disparities. The ETI Base Code Guidance on Caste in Global Supply Chains recommends legally binding agreements between corporations and labour unions to uphold Dalit women's rights¹⁶.

¹⁰ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

¹¹ *"No-one Cares" Descent-based discrimination against Dalits in Nepal*, Amnesty International, 2022. Accessible at: https://www.amnesty.at/media/11812/amnesty-report_no-one-cares_descent-based-discrimination-against-dalits_nepal.pdf.

¹² *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *IDSN input to report on contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2022.

¹⁵ *Base Code Guidance: Caste in Global Supply Chains*, Ethical Trading Initiative, 2022. Accessible at: https://www.ethicaltrade.org/sites/default/files/shared_resources/ETI%20Base%20Code%20guidance%2C%20caste%20in%20global%20supply%20chains.pdf

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

- VII. Dalit women's lack of land ownership perpetuates economic vulnerability and forced dependency on dominant caste employers. Governments must implement land redistribution policies prioritising Dalit women's ownership and access to agricultural resources¹⁷.
- VIII. Governments, NGOs and media/ social media organisations must actively challenge deep-rooted patriarchal norms that restrict Dalit women's rights. Awareness campaigns should focus on dismantling caste and gender biases, emphasising the economic and social contributions of Dalit women¹⁸. For more information on actions that should be taken to address the disproportionate impact of technology on Dalit women and girls, see Question 8, 'Technology'.
- IX. Targeted scholarships and support programmes should be introduced for Dalit girls, ensuring they complete secondary and higher education without financial barriers¹⁹.
- X. The empowerment of Dalit women leaders and professionals serves as a vital catalyst for inspiring younger generations and reshaping societal perceptions. The Blue Club in India exemplifies this approach by mentoring marginalised women, particularly from Dalit backgrounds, in digital media and filmmaking. Founded by an independent filmmaker, the organisation conducts workshops and provides platforms for women to narrate their stories, thus challenging prevailing stereotypes and encouraging broader participation in media²⁰. Similarly, Pakistan's Centre for Law & Justice (CLJ) focuses on protecting the rights of disadvantaged religious minorities, many from Dalit backgrounds. Through initiatives such as the Prosperity Fellowship Program, CLJ engages in advocacy, research and capacity-building efforts aimed at empowering marginalised communities, including Dalit women²². These initiatives highlight the significance of community outreach programmes in transforming societal attitudes and promoting the active involvement of Dalit women across various sectors.

4. *How could States, UN agencies, companies and civil society integrate better an intersectional approach to gender equality for girls and women?*

Gender equality initiatives must explicitly address caste discrimination. Existing gender policies, such as India's National Policy for Women or Nepal's Gender Equality Act, fail to incorporate caste as a key dimension of inequality²³. Governments must revise gender policies to recognise caste-based barriers and ensure specific protections for Dalit women.

¹⁷ Joint Stakeholder Submission, *Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan, 4th cycle*, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2023.

¹⁸ *Study on Dalit Women Specific Recommendations Received from the UPR, CEDAW and CERD, and their Implementation Status*, Feminist Dalit Organisation, 2078. Accessible at: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/English_UPR-CEDAW-latest_CERD-V5-12022.pdf.

¹⁹ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

²⁰ *Meet Priyadharsini: Filmmaker And Founder Of The Blue Club*, Hamsadhwani Alagarsamy, *Feminism in India*, 2018. Accessible at: <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/11/19/priyadharsini-interview-blue-club/>.

²¹ *Dalit women are wrongly represented in media: 'The Blue Club' filmmaker, Priyadharsini, Sowmya Rajendran*, *The News Minute*, 2018. Accessible at: <https://www.thenewsminute.com/flix/dalit-women-are-wrongly-represented-media-blue-club-filmmaker-priyadharsini-90348>.

²² *Prosperity Fellowship Program*, Pakistan Centre for Law and Justice. Accessible at: <https://clj.org.pk/prosperity-fellowship-program/>.

²³ *Study on Dalit Women Specific Recommendations Received from the UPR, CEDAW and*

Dalit women face a "triple burden" of caste, gender and economic oppression, which must be reflected in gender rights frameworks. Governments should enact comprehensive anti-discrimination laws that recognise the intersectionality of caste and gender, ensuring that Dalit women have equal protection under the law and access to justice for caste-based gender violence²⁴.

Governments and international organisations must facilitate the active involvement of Dalit women's organisations whilst shaping gender policies and economic development strategies. Existing forums rarely include Dalit women as key stakeholders, further marginalising their voices. Policies should require mandatory consultations with Dalit women's groups before implementing national gender equality plans²⁵.

Multinational corporations sourcing from South Asia must integrate caste-sensitive labour protections into their operations. Brands sourcing from garment, textile and leather industries must ensure fair wages and protections for Dalit women workers, provide social security coverage and monitor for caste-based exploitation²⁶.

Governments should prioritise scholarships and vocational training for Dalit women to enable their access to higher education and non-caste-based employment opportunities. This should include technical training programmes in IT, healthcare and skilled labour sectors, moving beyond traditional caste-restricted jobs²⁷.

Existing social protection programmes often fail to address Dalit women's specific vulnerabilities. Governments must create caste-sensitive welfare programmes, with a consultation phase that involves Dalit women, ensuring that Dalit women have access to food security, maternity benefits and housing schemes²⁸.

Governments must mandate disaggregated data collection on caste and gender to assess Dalit women's participation in education, employment and leadership²⁹.

5. What should be done to ensure active, free and meaningful participation of girls and women in development-related policies, programmes and projects at all governance levels? What role could women's organizations play in this regard?

CERD, and their Implementation Status, Feminist Dalit Organisation, 2078.

²⁴ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

²⁵ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of India, 4th cycle*, International Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2022.

²⁶ *Base Code Guidance: Caste in Global Supply Chains*, Ethical Trading Initiative, 2022.

²⁷ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

²⁸ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 4th cycle*, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement et al, 2023.

²⁹ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of India, 4th cycle*, International Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2022.

Dalit women must be consulted at all levels of policy development, including budgeting, disaster response and social protection planning³⁰. Programmes addressing poverty and employment must actively seek input from Dalit women leaders. For example, Nepal's Local Governance Framework should enhance the decision-making role of elected Dalit women beyond symbolic representation³¹. Without enforcing mechanisms that ensure their active participation, these elected positions remain ineffective.

6. *How is gender-based discrimination and violence undermining the right to development of girls and women? What more should be done to end all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and women?*

Gender-based discrimination and violence, particularly when intersecting with caste, critically undermine the right to development for Dalit girls and women across South Asia. The discrimination against Dalit women results in structural exclusion from education, employment, healthcare and justice systems³².

Across the region, Dalit women are frequently subjected to harmful practices such as Chhaupadi (a menstrual taboo, most common in Nepal), child marriage, dowry-related violence and the Devadasi system³³, a form of sexual exploitation disguised as a religious tradition where 93% of victims are Dalits³⁴. These practices, alongside systemic exclusion, reduce participation in economic life, politics and public services, violating the right to development under Article 1 of the Declaration on the Right to Development. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, Dalit women and girls are routinely restricted to stigmatised, hazardous occupations such as sanitation work, with limited legal protection and widespread social ostracisation³⁵³⁶.

Gender-based violence is also weaponised to suppress resistance. In Nepal, only 21.5% of Dalit women who experienced physical or sexual violence sought help and only 7.2% went to the police, largely due to mistrust and systemic barriers³⁷. Furthermore, caste- and gender-based violence often goes unpunished, reinforcing a culture of impunity that obstructs development and justice.

³⁰ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 4th cycle*, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement et al, 2023.

³¹ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

³² *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *IDSN input to report on contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2022. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Input-Report-SR-Slavery-and-Minorities-IDSN.pdf>

³⁵ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of India, 4th cycle*, International Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2022.

³⁶ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 4th cycle*, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement et al, 2023.

³⁷ *"No-one Cares" Descent-based discrimination against Dalits in Nepal*, Amnesty International, 2022.

In addition to the law and policy reforms mentioned in response to question number 3, to combat this entrenched discrimination, States should:

1. Fully implement anti-discrimination legislation and remove caste- and gender-based barriers in access to justice;
 2. Integrate caste as an intersecting factor in gender-based violence laws;
 3. Ensure meaningful representation of Dalit women in policymaking and participation in development planning;
 4. Promote education and awareness programmes addressing harmful social norms.
7. *What steps should be taken by States and companies to support women's economic independence and equal rights to land ownership? How to deal with the double/triple burden faced by women?*

Dalit women often lack access to bank loans and credit due to systemic discrimination. Governments should implement targeted microfinance programmes and interest-free loans to help Dalit women start businesses and gain financial independence³⁸.

In Nepal, India and Pakistan, land inheritance laws often exclude Dalit women, preventing them from owning property. Governments should amend property and inheritance laws to explicitly include Dalit women and ensure legal support for enforcement³⁹.

Dalit women are disproportionately affected by bonded labour in agriculture and domestic work, where they work in exploitative conditions. Governments should enforce anti-bonded labour laws and provide alternative livelihood training programmes to help Dalit women transition to sustainable employment⁴⁰.

Dalit women work in informal sectors such as home-based garment production, often without contracts, social security or adequate wages. The ETI Base Code Guidance on Caste in Global Supply Chains recommends that multinational companies conduct due diligence to ensure fair wages, workplace protections and trade union rights for Dalit women workers⁴¹.

Many Dalit women are confined to low-paying, caste-based labour due to limited access to formal education and vocational training. Governments should fund scholarships for Dalit girls, create vocational training centres in Dalit-majority areas and provide direct employment support programmes⁴².

³⁸ *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

³⁹ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan, 4th cycle*, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2023.

⁴⁰ *IDSN input to report on contemporary forms of slavery as affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2022.

⁴¹ *Base Code Guidance: Caste in Global Supply Chains*, Ethical Trading Initiative, 2022.

⁴² *Joint Shadow Report on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regarding Dalit women and girls in Nepal*, Feminist Dalit Organisation and International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2025.

Dalit women experience significant wage disparities compared to dominant-caste women and men in both formal and informal sectors. Governments must mandate equal pay legislation and establish independent labour oversight bodies to ensure wage transparency⁴³.

8. *What should be done to deal with differentiated and disproportionate impacts of climate change, conflicts and new technologies on girls and women?*

Climate change

Dalit girls and women are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change due to intersecting caste and gender discrimination, compounded by economic exclusion. To address these disproportionate impacts, it is essential to:

1. Develop climate adaptation strategies that specifically incorporate the needs and voices of Dalit women and girls, recognising their unique challenges⁴⁴;
2. Facilitate equitable access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities for Dalit females to build resilience against climate-induced adversities⁴⁵;
3. Empower Dalit women's organisations that are actively combating systemic oppression through activism and awareness campaigns⁴⁶;
4. Systematically gather data on how climate change affects Dalit communities to inform targeted interventions⁴⁷.

Conflict

In armed conflict and post-conflict situations, structural violence and systemic discrimination against Dalit girls and women is exacerbated, leaving them disproportionately exposed to direct violence, sexual exploitation and loss of livelihoods⁴⁸. To address these impacts, IDSN recommends:

⁴³ *Joint Stakeholder Submission, Universal Periodic Review of India, 4th cycle*, International Dalit Solidarity Network et al, 2022.

⁴⁴ *Recommendations for the 53rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2023. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/IDSN-Recommendations-for-HRC53.pdf>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ *UN HRC 53 SIDE-EVENT: Addressing the Intersections between Caste and Gender-Based Violence in South Asia*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2023. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/un-hrc-53-side-event-addressing-the-intersections-between-caste-and-gender-based-violence-in-south-asia/>.

⁴⁷ *Recommendations for the 53rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council*, International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2023. Accessible at: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/IDSN-Recommendations-for-HRC53.pdf>.

⁴⁸ *Report on Dalit Women and Critical Areas of Concern as outlined by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) for Women*, Feminist Dalit Organisation, 2010. Accessible at: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Key_Issues/Dalit_Women/FEDO_report_on_Dalit_Women_as_outlined_by_Beijing_Platform.pdf#:~:text=community%20is%20ultimately%20borne%20by,other%20family%20members%20or%20the.

1. Inclusive legal protections explicitly covering caste-based violence⁴⁹;
2. Targeted relief measures ensuring Dalit women's equal access to aid and basic services⁵⁰;
3. Improved access to justice with accountability for caste-based atrocities⁵¹;
4. Full inclusion in decision-making for Dalit women in post-conflict recovery and development programmes, addressing their intersectional vulnerabilities⁵².

Technology

The digital divide disproportionately affects Dalit women, who lack access to education and online work opportunities⁵³. To address this, IDSN recommends that States:

1. Recognise and regulate caste and gender-based hate speech online by incorporating it into international and national digital governance frameworks;
2. Ensure equitable access to digital tools by expanding internet infrastructure, providing affordable devices and offering digital literacy programmes tailored to marginalised women;
3. Strengthen online safety protections by enhancing laws against cyber harassment, improving reporting mechanisms and allowing anonymity for at-risk women;
4. Increase Dalit and marginalised women's representation in tech by recruiting them into AI, content moderation and policymaking roles while auditing algorithmic biases in search engines and social media;
5. Hold tech corporations accountable by mandating transparency in content moderation, establishing independent oversight bodies and enforcing fair implementation of hate speech policies.

⁴⁹ *Study on Dalit Women Specific Recommendations Received from the UPR, CEDAW and CERD, and their Implementation Status, Feminist Dalit Organisation, 2078.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Toolkit: Finding hidden homeworkers in apparel & footwear supply chains, Homeworkers Worldwide & Cividep India, 2021. Accessible at:*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60a24248d1bdf007a7d6d14f/t/615ab9bc73282d56ef286d08/1633335742687/Hidden+Homeworkers+Toolkit.pdf>.