

IDSN comments on the Draft Report on the Global Thematic Consultation on Inequalities (submitted 31 January 2013)

This comment is prepared on behalf of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN); an international network working for the elimination of caste-based discrimination globally (www.idsn.org)

The draft report captures many of the challenges to address inequalities in the post-2015 development framework, which is a great step forward in the debate. Hopefully, these important observations – e.g. on structural inequalities – will be fully recognized and included when the future framework is formulated and implemented, including with regards to proposed measures, targets and assessments.

Inequalities caused by caste-based discrimination are mainstreamed into various sections of the draft report with country examples from India; a country with at least 167 million Dalits according to official statistics. While the majority of people affected by caste discrimination live in South Asian countries, similar forms of discrimination are found in Japan, Yemen, some African communities, and the South Asian Diaspora, as confirmed in a comprehensive UN study on the topic. It is estimated to affected 260 million persons globally.

In the section on ‘Social inequalities’, the following patterns of horizontal inequalities are mentioned: ethnicity, caste, gender, sexuality, religion or place of residence. Persons affected by caste discrimination are also included in the list of disadvantaged groups, who are understood to be inferior or “other” to the mainstream on the basis of their identity, and therefore face particular challenges in accessing resources. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to drinking water and sanitation, Dalits in South Asia belong to the category of particularly stigmatized groups, who may suffer from pervasive negative stereotyping, social exclusion and denial of fundamental human rights. In her last thematic report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/21/42, para. 32), she finds that “caste systems across the world are deeply rooted in social segregation, based on ideas of purity and pollution and lending traditional ‘legitimacy’ to discrimination.”

As argued in [IDSN’s preliminary input on inclusion of caste discrimination in the post-2015 framework \(Nov 2012\)](#), caste discrimination is a major obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). **IDSN therefore recommends that caste discrimination is explicitly addressed as a major structural factor underlying poverty, and as a root cause of structural inequalities in the post-2015 development framework.** Victims of caste discrimination – estimated to affect at least 260 million persons globally – are routinely denied access to water, schools, health services, land, markets and employment. The social exclusion of Dalits and similarly affected communities lead to high levels of poverty among affected population groups and exclusion, or reduced benefits, from development processes. It furthermore precludes their involvement in decision making and governance, and their meaningful participation in public and civil life.

In effect, it is necessary that inequalities caused by caste-based discrimination come at the forefront of the debate – including in the draft report. When addressing the “structural inequalities’ in the draft report, specific groups are highlighted on page 7. **In this context, IDSN recommends that persons affected by caste discrimination are included on the list of particularly excluded groups.**

Regarding the draft report's discussion on the choice of approach when analyzing inequalities, it is necessary to look at the nature and extent of the root cause to inequalities, such as caste discrimination. Analyses based on economic facts alone will not present an adequate picture of the challenges that exist, and the measures that must be taken to ensure equal distribution of resources in accordance with the overall human rights principles of non-discrimination, equality, and inclusion. This is particularly relevant

when looking at means and ways to address inequalities in some of the world's most caste-affected countries such as India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. One example is gender-based violence, which takes a unique form when gender and caste intersect, as explained in [IDSN input to the online discussion on "Gender-based violence"](#) concerning the situation of Dalit women and girls.

Unless there is an understanding of the underlying causes to such caste-based forms of violence and exclusion, measures and targets taken to address the situation of affected persons risk neglecting – and in the worst case exacerbating – their rights and needs. [As documented by various studies](#), this has also been the case in some relief responses to humanitarian disasters, where efforts taken by governments and donors to address and rehabilitate the situation of excluded groups like Dalits have failed. Experience has shown that failure to overcome the particular development challenges stemming from caste discrimination are linked to a lack of recognition of the problem, lack of relevant strategies, policy analyses and tools, as well as a lack of involvement of Dalits in development processes and as staff. **On this basis, IDSN recommends that special measures must be applied in development and relief programmes, as well as in other forms of cooperation, to avoid a repetition of the engrained patterns of discrimination against Dalits and their exclusion from development and relief benefits.**

Draft Report on the Global Thematic Consultation on Inequalities – Extracts of references to caste discrimination

Link to draft report: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/file/299198/download/324584>

National, international & inter-country inequalities

Inequalities are often discussed in terms of the distribution of opportunities and outcomes within the boundaries of a country. [Distinct inequalities characteristic of particular countries are well known – discrimination based on the caste system in India](#), multiple disadvantages that attach to indigenous people in Australia and a number of Latin American countries, racial inequalities in the USA, and inequalities in income or gender status in various African countries. In practice, however, a range of mutually reinforcing inequalities are found in any given country.

However, the analysis of inequalities beyond national boundaries usually falls into one of two possible approaches. One is to look at common manifestations of inequalities as they affect particular and identifiable groups – people with disabilities, migrants, or religious and ethnic minorities, for example. There is a significant literature on these and other groups, often focusing on the nature and extent of inequalities as compared with the general population, together with actions necessary to address their common needs (see section 3).

Economic inequalities

Asset ownership:

Factors that limit access to land are a critical element in asset inequalities. Disparities in access to land have long-standing historical roots in many countries, with women and members of minority ethnic or linguistic groups, [castes](#) or clans often lacking equal entitlements compared to advantaged members of the same communities.

Social inequalities

Patterns of inequalities are often contrasted as being 'horizontal' or 'vertical'. *Horizontal* inequalities most obviously refer to social inequalities between groups, where the characteristics of those groups are primarily hereditary or largely beyond the control of those affected. These include ethnicity, **caste**, gender, sexuality, religion or place of residence. Certain livelihoods are also stigmatised, including rag-pickers, night-soil cleaners and others. Discussion of these differences may lean more heavily on social and historical analysis, identifying patterns of discrimination and exclusion. (...)

Even where legal provisions exist to ban or reverse discrimination based on social status, powerful social norms may reduce progress. **In India, for example, laws to protect and advance the status of scheduled castes and tribes have not eliminated harassment and exclusion.**

Minorities and disadvantaged groups

People experiencing disadvantage and inequalities are often defined in terms of their membership of a specific group, understood to be inferior or "other" to the mainstream, on the basis of identity. Members of disadvantaged groups, defined by ethnicity, religion, indigenous or migrant groups, or **caste**, are routinely amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged in any given state, whether rich or poor. The hierarchies that define which groups predominate, and which are excluded from full participation in society, can become very entrenched. This can be underpinned by a combination of legal and economic measures, reinforced by widespread social, cultural and even religious devaluation, and perpetuated by impoverished access to education, health and social protection.

Whilst the identity of disadvantaged groups varies, there are commonalities in patterns of exclusion that are reproduced globally. Discrimination against ethnic minorities and racial discrimination is a predominant concern in this respect. (...)The Hindu caste system in India and Nepal imposes explicit restrictions on families deemed "untouchable". Seventeen and 12 percent of the population respectively are largely exiled from mainstream society through complex restrictions on work, housing, education, social interaction and movement. (Kabeer 2010. *op cit.*)

Affirmative action

Positive legislation and policies seeking to address entrenched inequalities through affirmative action, have been established in a number of countries.

Affirmative action is most successful when it is driven by efforts for broader social and political change, and where it encompasses the education, work and political domains. The most comprehensive affirmative action programmes are established through constitutional and legal provisions. **India** and **South Africa**, both with significant histories of entrenched discrimination, have both instituted broad based actions aimed at counteracting the effects that built up by many generations of overt and statutory discrimination. **In India, dalits and scheduled tribes have for many years had reserved quotas in education and employment, as well as guaranteed political representation. More recently, other backwards castes have been included in an expanded quota, now totalling 49 percent of government jobs and educational places.^{cxiv} Although discriminatory social attitudes still exist, the extent of disparities and exclusion is reducing.**

Tackling economic inequalities

Social protection

In India, the National Employment Guarantee Scheme shows high levels of participation amongst women, dalits and scheduled tribes, and provides an opportunity for engagement with these otherwise hard-to-reach groups. In common with **Columbia**, the participation of disadvantaged people has helped improve social cohesion, building participation and engagement in support of economic and social development at community level.