

IDSN Input to the online discussion on the [Focus Areas Document](#) (that sets out 19 broad issues for consideration at the Next OWG where member states move into a process of identifying SDGs and accompanying targets) of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals. Posted on [The World We Want 2015 platform](#) (UN and Civil Society) on 14 March 2014.

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)

[Regarding the 'focus areas document' overall: What do you agree with and what is missing? \(400 word max\)](#)

The focus areas document lacks inclusion of those affected by caste-based discrimination. Discrimination based on caste status is a strong indicator for the high poverty levels that caste-affected people experience. Most 'untouchables' – known in South Asia as Dalits, live below the poverty line, earn less than the minimum wage, have no access to education, experience segregation in access to housing and suffer from numerous diseases, not least because of lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Pervasive discrimination keeps them poor, uneducated, in terrible living conditions and in menial jobs. See [IDSN webpage on the post-2015 agenda](#)

IDSN is concerned about the failure to recognise caste-affected groups and specifically identify these marginalized groups in the focus areas; Promoting equality, Poverty eradication, Food security and nutrition, Employment and decent work for all and Education. This, given it is a group that numbers more than a quarter of a billion people who are subjected to poverty, social exclusion and discrimination – factors to be addressed in the post 2015 agenda.

Almost all UN human rights bodies have raised concerns about caste-based discrimination in a multitude of states. See [IDSN Compilation of UN references to caste-based discrimination](#), [Draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the effective elimination of discrimination based on work and descent](#) and [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights statements on caste](#). In their [joint statement](#) from May 2013, seven UN experts expressed their hope that the post-2015 agenda would include specific goals for the advancement of Dalits, stressing that caste-based discrimination is a major structural factor underlying poverty. In 2013, the UN Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism [stated](#) that, “a disproportionate percentage of Dalits live in abject poverty and face discrimination and exclusion at social, economic and political levels.”

As victims of caste-based discrimination are routinely denied access to water, schools, health services, land, markets and employment, it has been a major obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. 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.

IDSN strongly recommends that caste-affected groups are addressed in the post-2015 agenda and are clearly identifiable in the document. Leaving out caste and similar forms of discrimination from this equation means that hundreds of millions of people will indeed be “left behind” preventing the agenda from being achieved.