

# **2022 HLPF Full position paper by Stakeholder Group of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (SG-CDWD): “Leave No One Behind” and building back better while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

## ***1. Introduction***

The Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are of utmost relevance to the more than 260 million individuals who belong to a Community Discriminated on Work and Descent despite the lack of indicators and targets and mentioning CDWD and descent-based discrimination specifically. This position paper highlights perspectives and inputs following the principle to “Leave No One Behind” and provides reflections and new data as well all recommendations for the SDGs under review and provide a broader context that contributes to achieving the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) is a global phenomenon affecting more than 260 million people worldwide, including South Asia and East Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Europe. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) continue to face extreme forms of isolation and discrimination, which acts as an obstacle in their attainment of civil, political, economic and social rights. This form of stigma has led to their segregation and enforced endogamy, as well as socio-economic and political discrimination.

The *UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent*<sup>1</sup> firmly establishes that DWD is a form prohibited by international human-rights law. It is also prohibited by many domestic laws. However, it needs a comprehensive UN framework, based on which all states, as signees to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, would not only acknowledge the existence of DWD but also take all necessary constitutional, legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and educational measures to eliminate and prevent discrimination based on work and descent in their territories and to respect protect, promote, implement and monitor the human rights of those facing discrimination based on work and descent.

The issue requires a global articulation, where efforts of rightsholders, supporters, networks and individuals need to be transformed into a global framework to address Discrimination on Work and Descent, including caste based discrimination. There is a necessity for a specific international convention to eliminate discrimination based on work and descent including caste.

As a Stakeholder Group of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (SG CDWD), we present this position paper to the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to establish the situation of millions who suffer from descent-based discrimination and to demand the full inclusion of CDWD issues in the Agenda 2030, the SDGs and end the systematic exclusionary practices that characterise affected communities.

## ***2. Context – Understanding Discrimination based on work and descent***

Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) is the UN terminology used to denote the discrimination based on caste, caste-like, work, descent and birth. The inclusion of “caste” and “analogous” (caste-like) systems, based on “inherited status” (descent) in international human rights

---

<sup>1</sup>A/HRC/11/CRP.3, [Final report of Yozo Yokota and Chin-Sung Chung, Special Rapporteurs on the Topic of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent](#), 2009

law<sup>2</sup>, as well as ‘work’ or ‘occupation’ being central to caste and caste-like systems, forms the understanding of ‘discrimination based on work and descent’.

Based on one’s occupation and descent, Discrimination based on work and descent can be defined as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on inherited status such as caste, including present or ancestral occupation, family, community or social origin, name, birthplace, place of residence, dialect and accent that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life”<sup>3</sup>.

Discrimination based on work and descent is a global phenomenon affecting over 260 million people worldwide, including South Asia and East Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Europe. It emerged in the African, Latin American and Middle East societies mostly through slavery, while in South Asian societies it emerged through the caste system.

There are commonalities as well as differences between descent-based and caste-based discrimination. The principle of purity vs pollution or the concept of clean and unclean (dirty), is present in both forms, perpetuating the idea of untouchability. Both forms are hereditary and the communities are mandated to do occupations that are (i) connected with the dead - either requiring disposing the dead (undertakers), or working with the remains of the dead (cobblers, tanners), or taking life for a living (fishers, butchers, hunters, executioners and so on) and (ii) activities that bring them in contact with bodily waste such as faeces, urine, sweat, spittle (occupational groups of sweepers, laundry workers and so on).

The primary difference between the descent-based and caste-based discrimination is that the latter is ascribed through religion. Backed by religious scriptures, caste is determined by birth and remains same till death, and there is no scope of mobility in caste. According to scholars and many Dalit advocates, the terminology ‘Discrimination on work and descent’ dilutes the potent role of religion in dividing people based on their occupations and the tremendous scale of its impact (considering that 80 per cent of total 260 million DWD<sup>4</sup> community are South Asians and diaspora<sup>4</sup>).

CDWD across the world are the among the most marginalised and excluded in terms of political, social, cultural and economic development. Today, a disproportionately large proportion of them landless, or small and marginal landholders, earning their livelihoods in the informal/unorganised sector. They are agricultural labourers, sanitation workers, plantation workers, factory workers, domestic help, sweepers, waste collectors, street vendors, etc. Many lost their jobs during the Pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns.

In South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), the traditional agricultural bonded labour systems, manual scavenging, ritualistic sexual slavery are almost exclusively *Dalits*.<sup>5</sup> In Far East Asia, in Japan, the *Burakumin* form a minority group with approximately 3 million people. They are considered to be the untouchable group, mainly engaged in unclean occupations, including leather making. In the Middle East, in Yemen, the Muhamasheen, also known as *Al-Akhdam*, form a minority group subjected to descent-based discrimination. As per data from unofficial sources, their population varies between 500,000 and 3.5 million; there is no official data available for the same. They are mainly engaged in ‘unclean’ occupations, namely garbage collection, sweeping and cleaning toilets and drains. Caste-like divisions are central to several ethnic groups in West African countries. Countries in West Africa that have societies with hierarchical caste-like structures include Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Nigeria and Chad. One of the most hierarchical communities is

---

<sup>2</sup> With the passing of General Recommendation XXIX in 2002, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), recognises and includes “descent-based discrimination”, as a form of “racial discrimination”, and a violation of human rights law. 2- Sixty-first session (2002), General Recommendation XXIX on article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention (Descent), [UN Treaty Body Database](#)

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/31/56 January 2016 Human Rights Council – Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues Rita Izsak

<sup>4</sup> Asia Dalit Rights Forum, [Towards a Unifying Global Identity: A Framework on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, Including Caste](#), <https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2021, [Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in South Asia — Status of Modern Slavery](#)

the Wolof of Senegal. The *Neeno*, who fall at the bottom of the caste-like ladder, make up 10-20 percent of the Wolof society. In the South Asian diaspora, a caste system can be seen in other regions, including Africa (Mauritius, South Africa), Europe (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), the Americas (United States of America, Canada and Suriname), the Middle East (Bahrain, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates), Malaysia, Australia and the Pacific (Fiji).<sup>6</sup>

*Noting the overlaps between the terminologies, the occupation-wise DWD across societies, while keeping in mind the intersectionalities, may be categorised as -*

### **Descent-based discrimination rooted in the WORK of the community**

Engaged in occupations deemed unclean or dirty/filthy, associated with unclean/ polluting bodily fluid (manual scavengers, cleaning, barbers, circumcisors among others). Such communities include - *Harijans, Domer, Valmiki/Bhangi, Mahar, Nai, Dhobi, Rodi* (South Asia), *Maza Yanah* (Yemen), among others.

Engaged in occupations that are associated with the dead, with taking lives (executioners, undertakers, butchers, fishers, cobblers, hunters, among others). Such communities includes- – *Dom, Chamar, Matang* (South Asia), *Burakumin* (Japan), *Baekjeongs* (South Korea), *Neeno* (Senegal), *Osu* (Nigeria), *Sab* (Somalia), *Fuga, Mano, Manjo* (Ethiopia), *Maza Yanah* (Yemen), among others.

Engaged in artisan work (blacksmiths, weavers, potters, among others). Some of the communities include – *Jolaha, Kami, Damai/Dholi, Matang, Madiga* (South Asia), *Shamano, K'ejeche, Mano, Ke'mo* (Ethiopia), among others.

Engaged in occupations in service of the so-called upper class and caste (servants, child-servants, guards, courtesans, entertainers among others). Such communities included – *Jeetam, Bitti-chakri, Badi, Vahumpura* (South Asia), *Burakumin* (Japan), *Noole* (Senegal), *Vidomegon* (Benin), *Al-Akhdam* (Yemen), among others.

**Descent based discrimination rooted in SLAVERY**– In many societies, mostly Africa, the caste-like category of 'slave-status' is passed down the maternal line. While in some societies, the descendants continue in slavery (descent-based slavery), while in others they are known as former slaves. Descent-based slavery, where the descendants continue to provide unpaid servitude to the "slave-owning families", can be found across the Sahel belt of Africa, including Mauritania (*Haratine*), Niger (*Djerma-Songhai*), Mali and Burkina Faso (*Bellah*), Chad, Sudan, Senegal (*Jaam*), among others. Former slaves with the slave-status can be found in Somalia (*Sab-Midgan*), Yemen ('*abid*'), among others.

**Descent based discrimination rooted in PAST SLAVERY** – The *Quilombolas* in Brazil, *Creoles* in Nicaragua, and *Garifuna* in Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala are some Afro-descendant groups, whose ancestors ("maroon communities") were slaves brought to the region during colonisation. The group (ancestors) who managed to escape slavery and establish communities outside the colonies, have historically struggled for collective rights, in particular, in defence of communal lands or territory.

**Descent based discrimination rooted in the CASTE SYSTEM** – Caste-based discrimination is based in the caste system<sup>7</sup> of India. The caste system, more than 2000 years old and described in the Hindu scriptures, divided society and people into four *varnas* or social groups. The fifth category, '*Panchmas*' were considered to be so impure, polluted and 'Untouchable' that they were not even

---

<sup>6</sup> Asia Dalit Rights Forum, *Towards a Unifying Global Identity: A Framework on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, Including Caste*, <https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

<sup>7</sup> The occupational hierarchy assigned Brahmins (priests) in the top most rung, followed by Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and traders) and then Shudras (labourers, artisans and servants). The fifth category, '*Panchmas*' were considered to be so impure, polluted and 'Untouchable' that they were not even included in the *varna* system.

included in the *varna* system. This group constitutes the Scheduled Castes<sup>8</sup> or ‘Dalits’ of India and other South Asian countries.

The *Hari* system in Pakistan too engages bonded labour from both, Dalit and non-Dalit backgrounds. Sanitation work in all the countries almost exclusively engages Dalits/ DWD communities. The Indian origin Tamils (or Plantation workers) are predominantly Indian Dalit immigrant descendants of Dalit Indian indentured slaves brought to Sri Lanka during British colonisation. They include *Pallan*, *Parayan* and *Chakkiliar* caste. The textile mills in South India almost exclusively engage Dalit women and girls through the Sumangali scheme system. Over 80 per cent of brick kiln bonded labourers in India are Dalits, while over 60 per cent of brick kiln bonded labourers in Pakistan are Dalit Christians. Over 85 per cent of Devadasi in India, a form of ritualistic sexual slavery engages Dalits.

**Descent-based discrimination rooted in FORCED and UNPAID LABOUR:** Though this segregation has overlaps with caste, slavery, descent and work factors of DWD as discussed above, it is nevertheless mentioned separately since the unpaid labour by some communities is a function of ‘customary obligation’ rendered by the DWD community to the dominant community. This is also a form of ‘passive slavery’. The *jeetam*, *bitti-chakri systems* of India, *Djerma-Songhai* of Niger are some such types.

**Descent-based discrimination rooted in SEXUAL SLAVERY:** The ritualistic sexual slavery practices in some communities legitimizes the sexual and physical violence and discrimination against women and girls from DWD communities, in the guise of religion, rituals, tradition and culture. Some practices include – *Devadasi* system (India- prohibited), *Deuki* system (Nepal, not prohibited), *Trokosi* system (Ghana, prohibited), among others. Very young girls of slave descent are sold off by Tuaregs as fifth-wives, in a practice called *Wahaya*. Most *Wahayu* come of Toubou region and are sold off mainly to wealthy Hausa individuals, including some from Nigeria.

**Other distinctive descent based discrimination:** The *Osu* of Nigeria, within the Igbo community, were considered to be “owned” by deities, and were dedicated and sacrificed to these Gods. Passed down generations by inheritance and descent, and/or marriage, this unique status and alternate occupation (blacksmiths, potters, leatherwork, weaving, arranging funerals, midwifery, castration and drumming), deem the *Osu* unclean and polluting. Newforms of contemporary slavery that exploits DWD communities include - *Talibes* in Benin, *Gabibou* in Burkina Faso are child beggars in Quranic schools and a form of contemporary slavery; *Kayayee* of Ghana who are girls or young women from ethnic *Mamprusi* group and Muslim communities. They work as head porter in city market places and experience physical, sexual exploitation and trafficking. The *Romani or Roma-Sinti* people across Europe have historically been one of the most vulnerable and poorest people who have faced centuries of discrimination in Europe. Assumed to have been brought to Europe from North-west India as slaves, the Romani people are called Gypsies by the Europeans because of the initial belief that these people came from Egypt. Specific anti-Roma racism is termed ‘anti-gypsyism’ or ‘antiziganism’. In several European states, Roma people are victims of “ghettoisation”, a system wherein the people from this community are made to live in specific parts of towns, away from rest of the population.

### **Manifestations of Discrimination based on work and descent experienced by the affected communities**

Discrimination across societies, is experienced through prohibitions, restrictions, distinctions, forced labour, discrimination and exclusion from common resources and opportunities and a subjection to violence. Some of the ways in which, communities face **prohibitions, distinctions and restrictions** are - from eating together with members of other castes, inter- caste marriages, accessing common resources like temples, roads, water; from wearing footwear, particular type of garment; holding

---

<sup>8</sup> Scheduled Caste: Official term for those castes characterised as socially, educationally and economically backward due to the traditional practice of ‘untouchability’, and listed by the Government of India to access special development, protection and affirmative action schemes.

umbrellas in front of dominant caste members, from riding a horse as bride-grooms, from riding cycles or motor-cycles, from contesting elections and exercising their right to vote.

CDWD are engaged in various forms of **Forced and Menial Labour**, including traditional forms of bonded labour, unpaid bonded labour, attached labour, manual scavenging (cleaning human excreta with bare hands). Various emerging forms of modern slavery that engage DWD communities include bonded labour in non-agricultural sector, child labour, trafficking and commercial sex work, among others. Some ways in which DWD communities face **exclusion from accessing civic amenities** include, segregation in seating in hotels, schools; separate utensils; segregated housing, burial ground; discrimination in accessing health and other governmental services; social boycott by dominant groups for various reasons and ways; denial to access land ownership, among other exclusions. The CDWD are also at the receiving end of different forms of **violence, atrocities and humiliation**, often for following/ doing the restricted and prohibited actions, or as punishment for assertion, or retaliation, or subjugation, among other reasons. Rape, gang rape is often used as a tool for punishment or subjugation. Extreme forms of atrocity also include forcing individuals to eat excreta, forced to parade naked as punishment, etc. Killings over inter-caste marriages ('Dishonour killings') are also prevalent. Emerging forms also include online violence, hate speech and incitement to violence. Discriminatory hiring and promotion practices are also commonplace adding to the systematic targeted exclusion of CDWD.

### 3. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) and the SDGs

The COVID-19 pandemic, while impacting the lives, education, health and livelihoods of all people worldwide, exacerbated the pre-existing vulnerabilities and exclusion of the marginalised communities, including Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent worldwide. Instances of restrictions or denial of government relief programmes, access to public water and sanitation facilities, emerged from Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America. CDWD faced extreme financial distress, food shortage, access to government relief. Absence of health insurance for the informal sanitation and health workers alongside other front line workers created conditions of great risk of transmission. Additionally, the inadequate or lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for sanitation workers and other front-line workers put them at great risk of exposure to the virus. Evidence suggests that the mortality rates of CDWD population was disproportionately high compared to other communities. The *Roma* in Europe continued to be excluded from access to basic public services such as water, electricity and organised garbage collection. Their extreme poverty-led living conditions in informal settlements, heightened their risk to contracting the virus.



A look at the status of CDWD in context of the relevant SDGs under review in HLPF 2022, shows a dismal picture.

#### SDG 4- Quality Education:

Due to hierarchical and generational discrimination Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) have been and continue to be subject to forced labour, bonded labour and other contemporary forms of slavery. However, the nexus and ways of escape from conditions of bonded and modern as well as traditional slavery through education have been documented but lacks the recognition to be a transformative force to liberate individuals from bonded labour and other forms of modern and traditional slavery. This is especially holds true for for woman and girls with over 71

percent of victims being female and one in four victims of contemporary forms of slavery thought to be a child according to a study published in 2016.

The SDG4-Education 2030 commitment promotes inclusive, quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education from early childhood to adulthood and including quality early childhood care and education, technical and vocational education and training and higher education and research. Recognizing that a large number of CDWD children and adolescents remain out of school despite recent progress, efforts are focused on the most disadvantaged to ensure that no one is left behind. Just before the pandemic struck, 53% of young people were completing secondary school globally, but only 29% in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>9</sup>, likely excluding children from CDWD particularly severe.

The commitment to inclusive quality education and improved learning outcomes also implies the urgent need to focus on teachers – their empowerment, professional development and ensure inclusive learning is possible, free of descent-based hierarchies. In 2019, 81% of primary school teachers were trained but the proportion was lower in sub-Saharan Africa (65%) and Southern Asia (74%) which coincides with the presence of CDWD communities. With the unprecedented lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to total or partial school closures in most countries, the teaching workforce was severely affected.<sup>10</sup>

SDG 4 has links across the 2030 Agenda as an enabler of achieving other goals and harnessing human ingenuity to address challenges like climate change (SDG 13) and the potential labour market disruptions of digitalization (SDG 8). SDG 4 encompasses the acquisition of foundational skills in literacy and numeracy; analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills; and skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges like biodiversity loss (SDG 15) and ocean protection (SDG 14) through education for sustainable development (ESD). Global citizenship education (GCED) can also help to build solidarity around the 2030 Agenda and advance partnerships (SDG 17).

Education is an integral means to empowering women and girls and advancing gender equality (SDG 5). Yet gender disparities persist in education. For example, in 2019 there were only 92 literate women aged 15 years or older for every 100 literate men of the same age. Almost half of countries with recent data did not meet gender parity in primary completion, and only a handful of countries demonstrate parity in tertiary enrolment ratios.<sup>11</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to unravel past progress toward gender parity.

High levels of illiteracy among the CDWD worldwide are a result of lack of access to quality education. While in many countries, children access education at primary levels, the difference in education attainment rate emerges at secondary and higher education levels. School dropouts at this level is common owing to engagement of children in livelihood opportunities, security issue of girl children, unfavourable infrastructure, continued discrimination at schools and so on. Child labourers and children exploited in harmful practices are further excluded from attaining education. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviour include segregation in seating of DWD school children, casteist ragging and humiliation in higher education in many countries. Discriminatory policies include – cuts in scholarship budget and delay in reimbursement for higher education Dalit students in

---

<sup>9</sup> United Nations. 2021. Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

India, and placement of Roma children in ‘special’ schools meant for disabled students<sup>12</sup>, among others.

### **SDG 5- Gender Equality**

The intersectionality of caste/ caste-like features, class and gender makes DWD women victims of triple fold violence, including economic deprivation, gender bias and bias because of their DWD identity, thus making them a highly vulnerable section of society. As discussed earlier, the ritualistic sexual slavery of DWD women completely excludes them from their basic human rights. With over 60 per cent of world’ employed population in informal sector work, and the fact that the sector comprises a large section of DWD population, the situation places a large population of DWD women in the exploitative work space. For instance, in India, among the women in the working population, Dalit women are engaged in agricultural labour and casual labour more than women from other social groups.<sup>13</sup> DWD communities and especially women and girls suffer from malnutrition due to feminization of poverty. And the pandemic has made them face nutritional crisis. This crisis will hamper pregnant women and health of children under 5. Many countries saw a sharp increase in violence against women and girls, including domestic violence during the pandemic. The pre-existing vulnerability to violence against women and girls from DWD communities, further exacerbated.

Girls and women who face further discrimination and lack access to safe sanitation and water. They experience period poverty and cannot afford menstrual products, to clean themselves safely, or access separate bathrooms. In Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, more than a quarter of the population spends more than half an hour per trip to collect water. The task of fetching water tends to fall on women, and this burden can also prevent girls from attending school.

### **SDG 15 – Life on Land**

In several case studies were produced in 2022<sup>14</sup>. Case studies by Dalits, Quilombols, and members of the Haratin community all identified that they to primarily agricultural and engage in subsistence agriculture, meaning their well-being is directly tied to the land that they land that they occupy. However, the Dalits and Haratins have been denied ownership of the land that they work, and the Quilombola, despite having a constitutionally guaranteed right to their land, have been forced off of it to make way for large infrastructure projects, with many moving to the margins of cities where they live in intense poverty.

These conditions have made these groups uniquely vulnerable to the effects of desertification, lang erosion, loss of biodiversity and climate change. In the cases of the Haratin and Maharashtra Dalits, drought has made growing crops difficult, and has exacerbated these groups’ already tenuous access to vital resources. Many Dalits in Maharashtra have responded by moving to urban areas, where they face the same marginalization as Quilombolas and Roma. The Haratins have displayed remarkable adaptability in the techniques they have used to mitigate the effects of climate change, but without ownership of land and more concerted efforts from the international community, they are still immensely vulnerable.

In the cases the of CDWD community in Chagossians, the Roma of Pata Rat, and the Dalits of Bangladesh flooding has presented a major threat to peoples’ wellbeing, destroying homes and causing death. In Mauritius and Pata Rat they often live in ramshackle homes that cannot protect them from the elements. In Bangladesh cyclone shelters have been built far away from Dalits homes, and the salinification of the soil that has resulted from the flooding has threatened their crops.

---

<sup>12</sup> Asia Dalit Rights Forum, *Towards a Unifying Global Identity: A Framework on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, Including Caste*, <https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

<sup>13</sup> All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM)- National Dalit Campaign for Human Rights (NCDHR) *Dalit Women Rise For Justice – Status Report 2021*

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

## **SDG 16: Partnerships for the Goals**

The growing inequality between countries and regions is interlinked with factors of hunger, poverty, unsustainable food systems, lack of investment in rural development and agriculture, inadequate social safety nets and poor governance. Adding to these, the factors of the unnatural and natural disasters, religious fundamentalism, nationalist fanaticism, economic crisis, the COVID-19 impact and climate-related shocks are slowly but surely widening the inequality gap. While the effects of such unrest impact all people and nations– it is the people who are marginalized by social-economic inequalities, who are affected more than others. Today more than ever, it is extremely important for states to situate domestic and international policies from the lenses of the global south. States need to ensure that issues around SDG synergies are not implemented at the cost of social, environmental and health trade-offs. States must balance short and long-term needs across the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and other private initiatives cannot solve the profound inequalities and states should assume their regulatory and re-distributive roles to achieve the universally recognised ambition to leave no one behind.

## **SDG 14: Life below Water**

Looking at the intersection and interlinkage of SDG 14, focusing specific impacts that relate to human rights and developmental implications for children and youth and members of the CDWD community.

Children and youth, especially those originating from Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent, CDWD, and other marginalized groups are a group who are at particular risk from the effects of environmental degradation due to their reliance on ecosystems for access to food, water and the enjoyment of their culture. In the marine context, coastal youth, children and other marginalised groups are extremely vulnerable to pollutants such as plastics and methylmercury due to their high seafood diet.

Human rights are relevant when one considers the relationship between marine biodiversity and human rights. Biodiversity refers to the variability among living organisms from marine, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Biodiversity for food and agriculture is the subset of biodiversity that contributes in one way or another to agriculture including fisheries and aquaculture and food production.

Biodiversity and biodiversity for food and agriculture are essential in supporting the contributions which ecosystem services make to the realisation of human rights to health, adequate food and water. Any harm to biodiversity, therefore, prevents the full of realisation of these rights.

Children and youth are some of the leading actors in environmental and climate justice movements and in defending human rights. Young people and c are un a position can be at risk from threats, harassment and be the subject of legal actions for expressing their concerns about the activities of businesses contributing causing pollution. It should be recognised by states that those who act to defend biodiversity are also human rights defenders. This could help to provide protection to children who are defending marine biodiversity.

## **SDG interlinkages (SDG 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16)**

The COVID-19 virus may not discriminate, but people do. Communities that have traditionally borne the brunt of xenophobic hatred, caste bigotry and modern-day slavery suffer higher COVID-19 infection and death rates, due to inadequate, inferior access to health care and lower vaccination rates.



Nearly 90 percent of the municipalities where Quilombolas live in Brazil, for example, do not have a single Intensive Care Unit, where a critically-ill pandemic patient could be treated<sup>15</sup>.

Across South Asia, individuals from marginalised communities have also been pushed into dangerous, frontline jobs – clearing carcasses from the roads, cleaning dead bodies prior to cremation – without being provided personal protective equipment like masks or gloves. For those who fall ill, there is no social safety net to support them.

Since the start of the pandemic, communities that suffer discrimination based on work and descent have been subjected to increased social isolation. In India, Dalits are falsely accused of carrying the coronavirus; shopkeepers have refused to sell them essential food supplies, for fear of falling ill and dying, while access to public water and sanitation facilities is blocked on the premise that Dalits will ‘pollute’ the water by touching it. Students from DWD communities have been forced to drop out of school and return to bonded labour, after COVID-related slowdowns prevented government bureaucracies from renewing scholarships on time.

The pandemic has exposed the anti-DWD attitude in many countries in terms of policy, administrative and social response to the pandemic. Many DWD communities who were already living in the margins owing to intergenerational poverty, were further excluded from access to water and sanitation, housing and food. The Romani people in Europe for instance, faced a higher transmission and mortality risk due to lack of access to water, sanitation, housing insurance coverage and COVID-19 testing vaccination, among other reasons.

**Decent Work (SDG 8):** Modern slavery and slavery like practices, if not urgently addressed, will have far-reaching consequences in the lives of a significant population of the world in the coming years. According to Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Urmila Bhoola<sup>16</sup>, trends in the future of work and in social protection schemes are thus highly relevant to any understanding of how slavery may change in the future. Today, more than 60 per cent of the world’s employed population are in informal employment. If technological and social changes in the world of work are not human-centred and trends towards decent work deficits are not tackled, precariousness in the labour markets could increase, along with rise in slavery risks. The emerging trends of market economy and labour put DWD women and children at further risk. High probability of risks include - children’s online sexual exploitation; for-profit orphanages; a resurgence of enslavement of women and children in armed conflict areas; or the disproportionate gender ratios resulting in demand for women and girls for servile and forced marriage – all put women and children at increased risk of sexual slavery. Conflict induced displacement and use of schools for military purposes put children and their families at further risk of various forms of slavery.<sup>17</sup>

**Reduce inequalities (SDG 10):** This is a highly interconnected goal to urges us to take a closer look at healthcare, education, employment & decent work, often highlighting that inequalities are a result of political priorities, structural and systemic discrimination. The caste and caste-like systems are a major cause in perpetuating poverty among the DWD communities. Land and asset ownership of DWD communities worldwide is very minimal. Landowning coincides with belonging to dominant social groups (caste and caste-like), as is landlessness with DWD and other oppressed communities. Their landlessness is further perpetuated through forced evictions. For instance, the Sab Somalis are denied the right to own land and livestock.

**Climate Action (SDG 13):** DWD communities are often located in the outskirts of rural and urban areas and are the first to be impacted by developmental projects, private housing and city expansions. Owing to livelihood patterns, they often live in areas that are first affected by natural disasters (such

---

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2956&menu=3170>

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Council Forty-second session 9–27 September 2019, A/HRC/42/44, 25 July 2019, Current and emerging forms of slavery, Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences [accessed 9 October 2021]

<sup>17</sup> Asia Dalit Rights Forum, 2021, [Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in South Asia — Status of Modern Slavery](#)

as fishing communities in coastal regions). They also experience discrimination in accessing relief and rehabilitative benefits owing to displacement. Violence against DWD communities is often led by dominant caste/ caste-like persons as intolerance of DWD resistance, or mobility is often followed by forced eviction and displacement of DWD communities.

## *4. Recommendations:*

**SDG 4 & SDG 5 – Quality Education and Gender Equality:** The SDG4-Education 2030 commitment promotes inclusive, quality lifelong learning opportunities for all. Recognizing and designing mediation mechanisms to reverse the trend that a large number of CDWD children and adolescents remain out of school. Just before the pandemic struck, 53% of young people were completing secondary school globally, but only 29% in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>18</sup>, excluding children, woman and girls from CDWD particularly severe.

Teacher training, their empowerment, professional development and ensure inclusive learning is possible, free of descent-based hierarchies is essential to continue the positive trend observed in less other communities with regards to return to education and attendance.

Eradication notions of purity and pollution which are stigmas particularly devastating for woman and girls. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than a quarter of the population spends more than half an hour per trip to collect water. The task of fetching water tends to fall on women, and this burden can also prevent girls from attending school.

**SDG 15 & SDG 14 - Life on Land and Live Below Water:** Creating conditions of certainty related to land, ownership or communal use, would allow the sustainable protection from ongoing required from protection from desertification and erosion that only local communities can perform including most Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent who rely on land for their livelihoods.

The rudimentary techniques and individual responsibilities preserve and are the central mechanism to ensure local participation in the preservation of ecosystems which has been shown in the Sahel in Africa, in Asia and in similar circumstanced in Brazil.

The right to use, preserve and occupy, at times temporarily, land and the resources found such as fresh water sources, for habitation or agricultural purposes, relates directly to Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent is key to achieve SDG 15 as it relates to the sustainable use and prevent further of land to desertification, land erosion and degradation.

An approach which considers the relationship between marine biodiversity and human rights must be strengthened. A clean environment and healthy and sustainable use of the oceans from a rights-based perspective is essential to ensure the rights and livelihoods of coastal and other Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent which reply on oceans.

**SDG 3 - Good Health and well-being:** We need a COVID-19 vaccine for all, available for all, everywhere and free of charge. This can be achieved through the elimination of patents, making the technology become a public good that is not for profit but for people, especially the most vulnerable. CDWD and other marginalized communities must be prioritized when rolling out a vaccine since those communities are often on the front lines as healthcare workers, manual scavenger or other menial forms of labour with a higher risk to contract virus and feel the direct and indirect consequences most drastically.

---

<sup>18</sup> United Nations. 2021. Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf)

## SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals:

1. **Official Recognition:** Members states to give official recognition to those DWD-affected communities in countries where they have not been identified as such, so as to enable them to enjoy the benefits that are due to them.
2. **Promoting exogamy among all cultures and communities:** Individuals from Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) are often forced to follow a strict endogamy system. Promotion of exogamy, ie, marrying outside the social group must be normalised.
3. **Caste and caste-like and not Class is the driver of discrimination:** Discrimination on Work and Descent (DWD) is not an economic issue but a social and cultural one of maintaining the societal balance or status quo. The psychological and unethical subjugation of fellow humans drives the economics of free or subsidised labour. Unless we treat caste / DWD as a structural problem, no social change is possible. As such, it is imperative for nations to recognise, acknowledge the role of caste/ caste-like features in perpetuating Discrimination based on Work and Descent. We call upon the UN bodies to first recognise and acknowledge this link, and to accordingly hold member nations accountable in their policy-making to address the structural problem of caste and caste-like features of DWD.
4. **Concept of purity and pollution:** Sanitation work which almost exclusively engages DWD communities, is deemed as ‘unclean’ and ‘filthy’, based on the principle of purity vs pollution. States need to immediately and absolutely invest in redesigning sanitation related technologies and infrastructure which would eliminate the use of manual scavenging. To invest and ensure through policy and regulations, re-designing of urban-rural sanitation infrastructure that will absolutely not allow municipalities and extended outsourced services to use any form of manual scavenging. To invest and ensure through policy and regulations that easy and affordable technologies are available and used by housing societies and townships for decentralised waste management. To open the jobs to all communities and also proactively provide for alternate livelihood opportunities for DWD communities presently engaged in sanitation work.

### (A) Legal, Policy and Programmes

5. **Anti-discrimination laws and abolition of slavery, as applicable for member nations:** To review / amend / enact anti-discrimination legislations in accordance with CERD Article 1.1 and the General Recommendation XXIX, amend Constitutions, as applicable to include prohibition of all forms of discrimination. Ensure effective implementation of legislations for an increased reporting, investigation and prosecution. Ensure speedy trials, victim compensation, victim-witness protection and good quality free legal aid.
6. **Special Measures and Affirmative Action for socio-economic-cultural advancement of the DWD communities:** Affirmative action for the advancement of DWD communities serve the purpose of rectifying historical wrongs perpetrated by the potent caste and caste-like systems. States are encouraged to adopt/ strengthen/ not revoke special Measures for promoting and boosting education through reservation in higher education and scholarships, and promoting work through reservation in public jobs, ensuring political representation through reserved constituencies, among other measures.
7. **On Plans, Policies and Programmes:** To recommend member nations to design, update and revise national plans, policies and programmes for eliminating DWD and all forms of modern slavery, for advancing the inclusion and rights of DWD communities and for protection from discrimination during disasters. To ensure that such plans, policies and programmes are backed by sufficient personnel, funds and implementing infrastructures. To ensure effective monitoring and create/ strengthen checks and balances for curtailing official complicity. To ensure adequate trainings and sensitisation to relevant personnel.

8. **Disaggregated data and Policymaking:** Ensure that all data capturing the demography, socio-economic-cultural-political, all labour related, crime related, victim identification related, among a few, should be disaggregated by caste/ relevant social group among other relevant factors.
9. **On rural infrastructure:** Invest more in services for rural infrastructure, including education, health, locally-relevant and sustainable livelihood generation plans, mobility, easy access to higher education, among others.
10. **Protection against customary harmful practices and its prevention:** State parties to take necessary steps to put an end to harmful customary practices that prevent women and girls from fully enjoying their rights, in particular the right to own and inherit land. To strengthen or initiate the rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors.
11. **Corporate Social Responsibility and Accountability:** State parties to ensure through effective policy making and monitoring that corporate business policies and business practices do not perpetuate caste-based discrimination and other intersectional factors that result in modern slavery and slavery-like practices.
12. **Public Awareness and Support:** Continuous and concerted mass communication and messaging for awareness raising of all citizens on the debilitating impact of DWD on communities affected by it; on consumption of modern slavery at-risk goods and services in daily lives, and also for sensitising on minimum wage payments.
13. **Budgetary Resources and Utilisation:** State parties to back policies with adequate resources and systems to check effective utilisation. To refrain from adopting Austerity move, which would cut social spending.

Discrimination based on work and descent cannot be justified any longer under the principles of human rights and SDGs. While DWD itself is staring at our faces in our everyday lives, there is a need to recognise and acknowledge it. The DWD communities have found little visibility and very little legal recognition in most of the countries where these practices prevail. The evidence worldwide point to the commonalities between the various DWD communities, as well as the uniqueness and differences. Therefore, there is an urgent need to evolve a unifying global identity and an international UN convention to eliminate Discrimination based on Work and Descent.