



# Dalits and the Post 2015 Development Agenda

*Addressing the hidden apartheid of millions will be key to the success of the SDGs*

## Background:

The world over it has been clearly demonstrated that economic progress and stages of development have little impact on the continuum of inequalities. Consequently, Dalits, constituting 260 million people worldwide with the majority residing in South Asia, have fallen off the wagon of progress. We welcome the recognition in discussions and key outcome documents that impediments of caste would set back the process of development for all. However, it is regrettable that the draft Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fail to mention or specifically address discrimination based on work and descent (caste).

Caste based exclusion is a dominant cause for poverty in South Asian countries, which hold 25 per cent of the world's population and yet 40 per cent of the global poor. In India alone, Dalits comprise 17 per cent of population. National and international responses to the condition of Dalits in South Asia would determine the success of a sustainable development trajectory that seeks to reduce inequalities.

## A brief profile of Dalits in South Asia

Over 210 million Dalits live across South Asia today:

- 201 million in India (16.6% of the total Indian population)
- 3.5 million in Nepal (13.2% of its total population of 26.5 million)
- 3.5 to 6.5 million in Bangladesh (3-4% of total population)
- 330,000 in Pakistan (13.6% of its 2.44 million Hindu minority population)
- 4 to 5 million in Sri Lanka (20-30% of total population)

## Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals from a Dalit perspective

The Open Working Group (OWG), conceptualized at the Rio+20 conference in June 2012 and appointed by the UN General Assembly, has scripted the SDGs which will replace the MDGs set to expire in September, 2015. The 17 goals with 169 targets cover a broad range of issues including ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, peace and security, social inclusion and climate change.

Accelerated delivery of social justice, income equality and overall well being of the poorest and most excluded social groups is a pre-condition for a credible development agenda. The Rio+20 outcome document (*The Future We Want*, 2012) reaffirmed the need to be guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, with full respect for international law and its principles. It reaffirmed the importance of freedom, peace and security, respect for all human rights, including the rights to development and to an adequate standard of living, upheld the rule of law, good governance, gender equality, women's empowerment and the overall commitment to just and democratic societies for development. It also reaffirmed the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as other international instruments relating to human rights and international law.

Given the strong intent and political will to protect the rights of the most vulnerable and the principles on which stand the new framework, the Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) finds it opportune to engage in the post 2015 SDG process and amplify the voices and concerns of the socially excluded communities.

## Importance of the SAARC platform

South Asian Association of Regional Cooperative (SAARC) countries have achieved considerable progress in socio-economic indicators like poverty reduction, education and health. The progress, however, is not uniform across the countries. There are disparities based on caste, ethnicity, religion and gender within the region and communities. Due to lack of access to information and availability of disaggregated data, demanding accountability has been a challenge for the civil society organisations (CSO) of South Asia.

<sup>1</sup>In this document Dalits will be used interchangeably with the more official Scheduled Caste, Harijans, Untouchables, Outcastes and all other ways in which caste based exclusion is denoted.

<sup>2</sup>Kushum Shakya: *Achievements of MDGs in SAARC countries*, *Journal of pro poor growth*, 2013

The South Asian Sub-region (SAS) holds a population of around 1.5 billion, which is increasing at the annual rate of 1.8 percent. This has led to an increasing demand for goods and services resulting in unsustainable consumption of natural resources and resource inefficiency. Rapid population growth is aggravating poverty in the region besides increasing income and development gaps within and between countries.

Four years after the inception of the MDGs, regional heads of state from South Asia came together for the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad and adopted the SAARC Development Goals on livelihood, health, education and environment. However CSOs of the region have not been engaged much on the SAARC Development Goals and post 2015 SDGs to have their concerns, especially of the socially excluded groups of the South Asia region, reflected and captured in the new framework.

### **Dalit Agenda from SAARC countries**

The upcoming 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit to be hosted by the Government of Nepal from 22-27 November 2014 becomes a strategic opportunity to pull together an agenda from the civil society of South Asia on inclusion of caste based discrimination (CBD) as a central focus in the SDGs.

The SDGs will be adopted in September 2015 and become a framework for national policies and socio-legal measures. Between now and September 2015 lies a crucial opportunity. It is important to have a regional strategy based on cooperation that will ensure monitoring, accountability and resourcing of the implementation of this global commitment. SAARC provides an appropriate platform to forge those regional linkages and agree on a regional strategy to strengthen the collective Southern voice on equity and social inclusion in the SDGs. The regional agenda of advocacy on Post 2015 and SAARC needs to be collectively evolved between parliamentarians and members of civil society. It is also critical to establish a dialogue with the parliamentarians of the region. In order for parliamentarians to effectively engage with the development agenda, they must have access to the latest information on developments and trends not only in their own countries, but also across the region.

### **Regionalization of the SDGs according to SAARC priorities**

- Develop a regional framework for the post 2015 SDGs with a focus on SAARC priorities and deriving from the SAARC social charter
- Amend SDGs on inclusion, poverty, health and other relevant goals to include and prioritise CBD
- Commit to strong implementation through national action plans and interim targets
- Set up a mechanism for regional collaboration and accountability on sustainable development, poverty alleviation and social inclusion, elevating cooperation on these to equal status with those on trade and security
- Roadmap for funding of the post 2015 SDGs through the SAARC development funds and other means

### **A response to the Open Working Group's draft SDGs from the Dalit perspective**

The zero draft of SDGs prepared by the OWG is a historic document which sets the agenda for the replacement of the MDGs in 2015. Given the urgency of the need to end inequalities of all forms, this document must have transformative potential and set new principles. We have attempted an analysis of the proposed SDGs from the point of view of caste based exclusion and discrimination.

### **Making the SDGs truly inclusive: Recommendations for the way forward**

#### **A more ambitious and dynamic chapeau text**

- Establish an equitable approach to all goals and targets, placing foremost the needs of the poorest, most excluded and vulnerable.
- Pledge that targets under education, health, water rights and sanitation and other basic rights will be equitable and close the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged in a time bound manner.
- Recognise that extreme inequality is the key hindrance to economic growth as well as poverty eradication.
- Recognise caste based discrimination as a key concern.
- Commit that no one will be left behind; goals will be met only if the targets are achieved for all socio-economic sections of the society.

<sup>3</sup>Post - 2015 South Asia Development Agenda, [http://www.unep.org/civil-society/Portals/24105/documents/Civil%20Society%20prior%20to%20EoE/schedule\\_Overview/SADA%20ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.unep.org/civil-society/Portals/24105/documents/Civil%20Society%20prior%20to%20EoE/schedule_Overview/SADA%20ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

**Alternative Goal 1: End poverty and reduce inequality in all its forms everywhere.**

**Alternative 1.3:** by 2030, implement **universal** appropriate social protection measures including floors, with a focus on coverage of the poor, **women, children, persons with disabilities and those discriminated on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity and sexuality.**

**Alternative 1.4:** by 2030 secure equal access for all men and women, particularly those most in need **and discriminated on the basis of caste, ethnicity and religion**, to basic services, the right to own land and property, productive resources and financial services.

**New 1.8 End income inequality through aggressive tax reforms and just distribution of opportunities and wealth.**

**Alternative Goal 3. Attain universal public healthcare and healthy lives for all**

**Alternative 3.6:** achieve equitable access to **universal** health care, including financial risk protection, and access to safe, effective and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

**Alternative Goal 4. Provide equitable and inclusive quality public education and life-long learning opportunities for all**

**New 4.8: End discrimination against the children of those excluded on the basis of religion, caste, economic status in schools and institutions of higher education through stringent laws and by enforcing structural corrections.**

Proposed Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

**New 5.8: Protect women and girls of the marginalised groups as they are the most vulnerable by enforcing strict laws to end violence and impunity for violence against these women.**

**Alternative Goal 6. Ensure the right to water, its availability and sustainable use of water and sanitation for all**

**New 6.7: By 2030, abolish manual scavenging and provide complete rehabilitation to millions of those engaged in such degrading work.**

Proposed Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

**Alternative 8.1 (8.8 brought up and amended)**

Protect labour rights, promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, sex workers and those in precarious employment, **abolish livelihoods of extreme injustice such as manual scavenging and ensure the rehabilitation of those engaged in such occupations into decent work.**

Alternative 8.4: By 2030 achieve full, productive, decent employment and livelihood for all women and men, including for the **poorest and those excluded on the basis of religion, caste, etc., the most vulnerable such as those displaced due to natural disaster or conflicts**, young people and persons with disabilities with the guarantee of equal pay for work of equal value

**New 8.6: Guarantee access to employment opportunities by enacting equal opportunity laws that prohibit discrimination along the lines of gender, religion, ethnicity and caste in capital markets, hiring decisions and processes at the work place**

**Proposed goal 10. Reduce inequality within and between countries**

**Alternative 10.1: By 2030 sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average**

**Alternative 10.2:** By 2030 reduce **economic, social, and environmental** inequalities of opportunity and outcome among social groups **through reducing wealth inequality between richest 10% and poorest 40%**

**New 10.d: by 2030 ensure the availability of high-quality, timely and disaggregated data to ensure monitoring of progress for marginalized groups and people in vulnerable situations**

Proposed Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

**New 15.8 : Defend people's rights to land and forest, safeguard forest and other natural resources by promoting self rule, local planning and ownership, social audits.**

**New 15.9: Make land acquisition by the private sector subject to stronger scrutiny and ensure the rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced without interrupting their quality of lives, cultural practices, emotional well being and livelihood.**

Proposed Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

**Alternative 16.3:** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, **abolish all anti-people, anti-democratic laws, engage politically with conflict regions and initiate police and judicial reforms to uphold peace and human rights.**

**New 16.9/earlier 16.9:** by 20xx recognize the number of internally displaced persons and refugees and minorities, including linguistic, ethnic, caste, religious and sexual, in all countries as citizens with equal rights

**Proposed Goal 11 (moving current Goal 11 to Goal 12):**

End caste, work and descent based discrimination by 2030

#### **About the Asia Dalit Right Forum:**

The Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) was instituted in February 2014, by civil society leaders from Bangladesh, India, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to address the common challenges of socially excluded groups in South Asia. It is a platform that works to empower the socially excluded and safeguard their rights and entitlements. Formed in the aftermath of the historic World Conference against Racism at Durban, South Africa in 2001, over the last decade ADRF has become a global advocacy platform for descent and work based discrimination in the South Asia region and global diaspora.

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