

ANNIHILATE CASTE AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA

22-27 September 2015, New York City



Introduction

UN adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (25-27 September 2015) has ushered a new era of development goals with focusing on the inclusiveness and participation of each and every person. The inclusive developmental model however had failed to recognize and include exclusionary variables such as discrimination based on work and descent (caste) within the comprehensive adopted document.

Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) in collaboration with Asian Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC) and Regions Refocus 2015 hosted a delegation of 40 South Asian parliamentarians and civil society members in New York for a week of policy advocacy, strategy, and solidarity-building with policy makers and social movements from across the sub-continent and beyond. Echoing advocacy by activists and policy-makers from South Asia throughout the process of defining the international development framework, this delegation calls for national and international recognition of caste as a fundamental determinant for social exclusion. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 10, “Reduce inequalities within and among countries,” governments in South Asia and throughout the world must facilitate the elimination of caste-based exclusion and the triple burden of caste, gender, and class carried by Dalit women.

ADRF with Regions Refocus 2015 and APDFC co convened Annihilate Caste and Structural Inequalities in Implementing the SDGs, from 22 through 27 September, 2015, in New York towards addressing the issue of caste based exclusion. The year being significant as 125th birth anniversary of the visionary Dalit leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an honorary celebration was conducted as the culmination of the week long events in Columbia University, New York.

Asia Dalit Rights Forum

Regional solidarity among Dalits has its genesis in the upsurge created by the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001, which challenged the conscience of humankind against racism and other forms of inequality. The powerful voice of the strong contingent of civil society organizations led by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) reverberated around the globe and generated the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN). Dalit communities across South Asia began to advocate for public visibility, global official recognition, and access to rights and entitlements. At the World Social Forum 2004 in Mumbai, the Asian Dalit Rights Forum was formed, in recognition of the contiguity of the South Asian Region countries and the commonality of the systemic nature of discrimination and violence suffered by the Dalit people of this region.

Asian Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC)

The Asian Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC) was created in 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal, to address the issue of Dalit rights to entitlement and livelihood through a forum of elected representatives working against caste-based exclusion. Thirty-three Members of Parliament from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan joined with Dalit human rights organizations and other human rights representatives, pledging to address the issue of caste based discrimination with their respective governments. Members of the APFDC advocate for holistic development inclusive of marginalized and socially excluded communities, especially Dalits. In the context of the post-2015 slogan “Leave No One Behind,” APFDC has committed to address caste-based discrimination and exclusion through the implementation of the SDGs.

Regions Refocus 2015

An initiative housed at Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Regions Refocus 2015 fosters regional and feminist solidarities for justice through policy dialogue between civil society, governments, sub-regional alliances, and the UN. Through our innovative perspective on transformational regional to global policies, Regions Refocus presents a unique intervention into the post-2015 and Financing for Development intergovernmental spaces. We refocus the conversation of the new development agenda and change the terms of the debate, challenging the hegemonic privileging of the global over the discourse and policies of the regions.

Programmes

1. 22-23 September Parliamentarian-Civil Society Regional Exchange
2. 23 September Challenging Systems of Casteism and Racism

3. 24-25 September Policy Dialogues with Parliamentarians & Permanent Missions to the UN
4. 25 September Global Youth Exchange
5. 26 September Educate, Agitate, Organize for Dalit Rights in the 2030 Agenda!
6. 26 September Celebrating 125 Years of Ambedkar's Legacy
7. 25-27 September UN Sustainable Development Summit
8. 27 September Debrief and Next Steps

Parliamentarians-Civil Society Regional Exchange

The Parliamentarians-Civil Society Regional Exchange was conducted on 22nd and 23rd of September 2015 in New York City. This exchange proved crucial in understanding the existing conditions of Dalit population and communities in the Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The exchange helped in detailed look into the current or the potential policies and their adequate or inadequate implementation at the national to regional levels. It focused on the understanding of the 2030 SDG Agenda and develops a roadmap, with concrete actions by parliamentarians and civil society to shape its implementation in each country. Further the exchange focused on strengthening ADRF and APFDC to address exclusion, inequalities, and violence against Dalit communities at the national, regional, and global (UN) level.

This workshop model exchange focused on structural categorization of the different thematic issues into three broader sections: (i) Analysing the Policy Landscape- Accountability and Peace; (ii) Analysing the Policy Landscape- Gender and Social justice; (iii) Analysing the Policy Landscape- Economic and Ecological Justice. The next



session further focused on the strategies towards implementation of the discussed agendas based on 2030 Sustainable development goals, in a thematic group meeting.

The Second day focused on the analysis of the discussions on the existing landscape and strategic planned interventions for implementation of 2030 agenda, with special focus on the recommendations for the indicator setting for the SDG. The focus of the events was shifted towards influencing the indicators for the implementation of the goals, in which strong reference to discrimination based on work and descent (caste) is needed.

Challenging Systems of Casteism and Racism

Following the Parliamentarian-civil society regional exchange, Dalit parliamentarian and civil society leaders engaged in a strategic exchange with African American movements, Latina and other discriminated movements on 23rd September 2015, in Barnard College, Columbia University. The contemporary historical movement in the US of protest and organizing around racial justice provided an important opportunity for the two movements to share experiences of oppression, particularly due to inefficiency of the state mechanisms, across the world and build collective strategies in activism, and advancing policy. Co-sponsored by the Barnard Center for Research on Women, this discussion provided space to establish synergies towards collective action to address casteism and racism together in a global context, to highlight and build a new internationalism of collective struggles for social and structural justice.



Policy Dialogues with European Union Permanent Missions to United Nations

A delegation of the South Asian Parliamentarians and Civil Society Representatives meet with the European Union Permanent Mission to UN on 24th September 2015, towards building solidarity and support for raising the issue of discrimination based on work and descent (caste) in the UN and inclusion in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The representatives from each countries present the case of Dalits in their respective countries to building up the conscious effort towards addressing the issue in a regional context.



The representatives of the missions and the South Asian delegates exchanged information and concerns over the non representation of such a huge chunk of population (or community), which could be calculated as more 3 per cent of the global population. The delegates appealed for raising the issue in structuring the indicators for the SDG implementations.

Policy Dialogues with UK Parliamentarians Department for International Development

A delegation of South Asian Parliamentarians and Civil Society Representatives met with the International Development Committee on 25th September, 2015. The committee monitors the policy, administration and spending of the [Department for International Development](#) (DFID) and its associated public bodies and takes an interest in the policies and procedures of the

multilateral agencies and non-government organisations to which DFID contributes. The Committee consists of eleven backbench Members of Parliament

The committee promised to take the issue of caste based discrimination in their discussions while reassuring the importance of the progressive slogan propounded by the Sustainable development goals (SDG) of “leaving no one behind”. The roundtable exchange resulted in UK parliamentarians ensuring to raise the issue of inclusion of caste and descent based discrimination in SDG (indicators) with UN and the member states. They also supported the issue of elimination of caste based discrimination with constant efforts towards addressing the issue in various international platforms.

Global Youth Exchange: Eliminating Discrimination based on Work and Descent (Caste)

The Global Youth Exchange workshop was conducted by Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) in association with World Federation of United Nations Association (WFUNA) and South Asia Equity Forum. About 50 young women and men from communities that are discriminated on the basis of work and descent (caste)



from over 10 countries gathered together on 25th September in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York. Welcoming the Summit to chart out a path on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership - leaving no one behind; they pose the question – are we included in this new global framework? These youth activists are determined not to be left behind. They came together at this historic time across countries and communities to share strategies, to network among themselves, and to build solidarity with others in this process.

The Youth Exchange workshop gave new dimensions of the youth taking up the issue of development, with demanding their share of developmental share. The youth from the excluded and discriminated communities demands for inclusion through participation and proper implementation of the goals and targets of the 2030 global developmental agenda.

Public Meeting: Educate, Agitate, Organize for Dalit Rights in the 2030 Agenda

South Asian Parliamentarians, Civil society representatives, solidarity organisations and diaspora gathered in Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, opposite to UNGA, for public demonstration and rally during UN Sustainable Development Summit to address the inclusion of discrimination based on gender, work and descent in implementing the SDGs. More than 150



people joined in the public meeting and protest in front of UN General Assembly, demanding the promise of leaving no one behind and inclusion of caste as variable of exclusion in the SDG.

Parliamentarians and Civil Society representatives with youth activists participated in the programmes including a public performance by the youth and slogans demanding the policies and programs to address these interlinked sites of oppression, through the lens of implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda. Various parliamentarians and key Civil Society leaders have raised their concern of inclusiveness and participatory nature of the SDG agenda in their speeches. Many calling this to be initial step towards elimination of exclusion and discrimination based on work and descent, and inclusion in the SDG implementation process nationally, regionally and globally.

Celebrating 125 Years of Ambedkar's Legacy

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the pioneer and trailblazer of Dalit Rights and equality in South Asia. The Father of Indian Constitution, throughout his life, worked towards gathering equal rights and status to the Dalits and dalit community. Honouring his legacy on his 125th Birth Anniversary by garlanding his statue in Lehman's Library, Columbia University, followed by a seminar on the impact of Ambedkar's ideology and legacy in structured elimination of caste based exclusion.



South Asian Parliamentarians, Civil Society representatives, members from Diaspora and Solidarity organizations expressed their perspectives on the influences of Ambedkar's Legacy in formulating the Dalit identity and Dalit rights. Towards addressing inclusiveness of the farthest behind, according to SDGs, there is a need to adopt Ambedkar's ideology of eliminating the bias through targeted policies and budgets for inclusion and participation in the developmental process. There should be a conscious effort towards ensuring accountability, transparency, participation and inclusion in national, regional and global (UN) level for true and successful implementation of the 2030 developmental goals.



UN Sustainable Development Summit

Various Representatives of South Asian Parliamentarians and Civil Society representatives participated in the sessions of the SDG adoption Summit from 25th -27th September 2015. With

restricted entry, delegates were limited to monitoring of the negotiations and discussions during the summit, with attending various side events associated with this.

Debrief and Follow up

Parliamentarians and civil society came together for a final dinner to share feedback and perspectives on the “Annihilate Caste and Structural Inequalities” programme as well as their participation in the UN Sustainable Development Summit on 27th September 2015. An informal, semi-structured debrief was conducted through written and verbal feedback and discussion on potential ways forward building from new alliances and discussions emerging from connections with Permanent Missions to the UN as well as with US-based activists working on racial justice. These new and strengthened solidarities will help guide the way forward for follow-up to this programme in national and regional arenas of implementation for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Advocacy Meetings in Washington DC

Meeting with UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Mr Juan Mendez

Each country representative shared the status of the situation of Dalits in each of the country. The Special Rapporteur and his team took on board the suggestions and the situation and assured the delegation that they would look into these aspects in their reports.

Meeting with US Foreign Policy Department; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

A delegation met with the US Foreign policy group and gave an update on the current situation of Dalits in South Asia. The main areas of discussion were on ensuring inclusion in the aspect of bi-lateral funding, inclusive policies in Disaster Risk Reduction. One of the aspects that interested them was to look into developing a policy to ensure that corporations adhere to the policy of non-discrimination in their operations in other countries.

Materials

(Books)

1. Annihilate Caste and Structural Inequalities: In Implementing the 2030 Agenda, 2015, ADRF
2. UN Mechanism and Caste: Discrimination based on Work and Descent, 2015, ADRF