

Position paper by *Stakeholder Group of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (SG-CDWD)* to the **High-Level Political Forum 2023 under the theme: “*Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels*”**

1. Introduction

Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) are dangerously undocumented or under-documented. The caste system in Asia is the most commonly known example of descent and work-based discrimination globally. However, in Africa, Latin America and Europe the phenomenon is also common, founded on complex beliefs and behavioural systems and enforced systematically.

The mapping and documentation are hindered by the historic invisibilization of those who experience this unique and socially cemented social stratification. Socially “dominant” castes/classes reject its existence and continue to profit from this belief system.

Communities who experience Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD), as defined by the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent by Prof. Yakota and Prof. Chung is “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”¹. They continue to be systematically excluded in various areas of life, including access to water & sanitation and housing and many others.

The contemporary discourse on Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) suggest that policies are made without considering their voices and are blind to their concerns, further exacerbating injustices and inequalities. Colonial and caste induced power structures are not confined to operating within social institutions alone but also influence the political-economy and inform all aspects of socio-cultural, economic and political life. Therefore, inequality perpetrated on CDWD is structural, historic, and political. In order to make meaningful recommendations to the HLPF 2023, the unique position specific marginalization they face must be highlighted before recommendations can be made.

¹ <http://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Principles-and-Guidelines-for-effective-elimination-of-DWD.pdf>

2. WHO ARE COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT?

We, as Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWDs) do not share a common history or origin, but a common struggle against a social structure that ascribes to us a permanent status of devalued personhood and requires of us the performance of stigmatized and exploitative forms of labor. Despite the fact that this mode of oppression diminishes the life chances of well over two hundred and seventy million people around the world, which would make up the 5th largest country



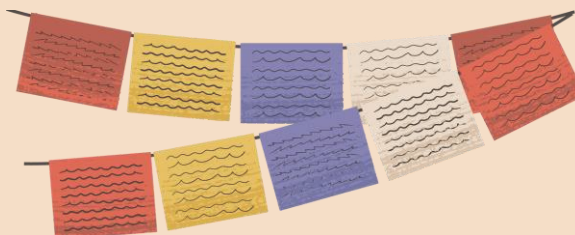
in the world, our condition has yet to be fully recognized by the global community, including the United Nations and its institutions.

The [caste-system in Asia](#) is the most commonly known example of descent and work-based discrimination globally. [Dalits](#) (formerly known as untouchables) are the largest [community discriminated on work and descent \(CDWD\)](#).

The [Haratins](#) in [Africa](#), the [Roma/Romani](#) people in [Europe](#), the [Burakumin](#) in [Japan](#), and the [Quilombolas](#) in [Brazil](#) are a small selection of various groups who experience oppression through discrimination on work and descent.

The oppressor or “dominant” group often shares the same race, ethnic background and language as the oppressed group, pre-dating colonial enslavement.

In addition, [sexual violence](#), [gender-based violence](#), the enslavement of women and girls and control of their reproductive rights is a common enforcement mechanism of the imposed “social order” for all CDWD.



The experience of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent can be described by three major categories of oppression and stigmatization:

1. Stigma of “impurity, pollution or uncleanness” by birth, often reinforced by menial manual professions.

- Burakumin in Japan have historically worked as butchers and undertakers, and [this association with death is often presented as the justification](#) for discriminating against them.
- Roma communities in Europe are [banished to the outskirts of cities or other human settlements](#) and are forced to live near or on waste sites and landfills, [reinforcing the stigma of “impurity and pollution.”](#)
- Settlements in Brazil known as Quilombos and their inhabitants, the Quilombolas, often [do not have access to most basic public services such as water and sanitation](#) or garbage disposal, thus the stigma is reinforced through said lack of public provisions.

2. Endogamy – the inability to marry outside of one’s “low status/caste” community.

It is important to note, however, that **this notion of purity/pollution is deeply ingrained** within the cultural beliefs of a population and expands far beyond the actual labour performed by an individual. **One is considered impure merely for being born Dalit or Burakumin, no matter what occupation they have.**

Endogamy – the practice of ensuring that marriage *between* castes or social groups does not occur – is another **common characteristic of discrimination based on work and descent**, and one that is key to maintain the social systems in question.



Ensuring that each caste or social group is clearly delineated from one another – that individuals “stick to their own kind” – is one of the primary methods which dominant social groups use to maintain the social hierarchy. This is **particularly important since often no physical difference between the oppressor and the oppressed exists.**

The notion and logic of purity/pollution is used to justify endogamy. Crucially, the practice of endogamy is deeply intertwined with the **sexual violence and the enslavement of women and girls and control of their reproductive systems.** News of “honour killings,” in which women who choose to marry outside their caste are murdered, have attracted increasing media coverage in recent years but is in fact not a new phenomenon

In the case of the Haratin people in Africa, the enslaved status is inherited through the mother, and thus control of women, girls, and their reproductive system is vital to upholding the this oppressive structure.

3. Segregation of public and private spaces that mark CDWD as “less than human.”

Segregation is portrayed as the “normal” desired social order to maintain and ensure stability for all. This mechanism is used by the dominant groups to separate themselves physically and geographically from **communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD) who often live in settlements where the land is less fertile, with no or limited access to natural resources and no or limited access to education, healthcare and other basic public services.** In addition, these lands have fewer protections from the growing effects of climate change, such as floods, fires, and droughts.

Linked to beliefs of purity/pollution, CDWD are kept from accessing community spaces such as water wells, schools, or religious centres so as to **“not pollute” those public places and spread their “pollution”** thereby ensuring the continuation of this social order.

Reinforcing said mechanism, CDWD settlements often do not have access to adequate sanitation services or garbage disposal systems, augmenting the stigma of **“pollution and impurity.”**

This practice of segregation was worsened the continuing human rights crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, as Roma refugees have been kept separate from other refugees and have been denied services available to other refugees, such as adequate housing and sanitation.



2. SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation

In the last two decades investment in drinking water services has led to considerable increases in access. Two billion people globally **gained** access to safely managed drinking water services. **But 40 per cent of the world's population are affected by water scarcity** and some 2 billion people around the world still lack access to safe drinking water today². While this positive trend must be acknowledged, **not all communities have benefitted from this positive trend.**

Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent are systematically excluded from accessing water and sanitation due to the notion and stigma they face, most notable in this context the notion of “purity” and “pollution” they experience. Fears of water sources becoming polluted lead to a systematic denial of accessing public sources of fresh water and sanitation.

Being subjected to preconditioned stigmas, **CDWD in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America are often segregated to remote areas in villages and cities.** In many cases they are **denied access to common water sources** and forced to use **alternative sources, which are often dirty or polluted.**

Control over access to water and sanitation is a common mechanism used to maintain and enforce the imposed “social order” which oppresses Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD). This often intersects with the other main enforcement mechanism of this social order, namely, sexual and gender-based violence. Women are frequently subjected to violence and harassment while attempting to access community water sources, and poor sanitary conditions are most dangerous for menstruating and pregnant women. For Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) control over **access to water and sanitation is a common mechanism to maintain and enforce the imposed “social order,”** alongside the other main enforcement mechanism expressed through **sexual and gender-based violence.**

A CDWD profile from Bangladesh, which illustrates the hereditary nature of water, housing, and sanitation access. First published in December 2022:

Hemonti Rani is a sanitation worker from Narayanganj. She has been working with the city corporation for 20 years. She was born and raised in the colony designated for sanitation work. Both her parents worked for the city corporation. Hemonti has three sons. Two of them work with her in the city corporation. One works as a sanitation help in the garments industry nearby.

The salary that Hemonti takes home monthly is 4,000 taka (40USD). Of which around 2,000 goes to all the necessary bills that she has to pay, namely for gas and electricity. The housing is provided by the city corporations. It barely has any facilities. There are altogether 75 families, who live with only 11 toilets. These are simultaneously used by both male and females. There are other housing concerns as well, during rain water entering their homes. Hemonti has a daughter who goes to school. She wishes that her children and grandchildren complete their education, and do not have to work as a sanitation worker.

² https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/wash-documents/water-safety-and-quality/state-of-drinking-water-report_ex-summary_english.pdf?sfvrsn=9cb7ca6d_4&download=true

In many countries, **Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD)** are involved in operating and maintaining **sanitation systems such as pit latrines, septic tanks, sewers and treatment facilities**, making the access to water and sanitation facilities even more vital. They often work in abject and inhumane conditions that expose them to infections, injuries, social stigma and even death, jeopardizing their human rights to decent work and health.

3. SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities

Cities are on the front line of coping with the pandemic and its lasting impacts. Across the globe, COVID-19 is threatening cities and communities, endangering not only public health, but also the economy and the fabric of society. Growing populations put increased pressure on the housing market and a 1 per cent increase in urban population growth will increase the incidence of slums by 2.3 per cent and 5.3 per cent in Africa and Asia, respectively.

For the Dalits of India, the **most documented group of CDWD**, the loss of income due to the pandemic was significant. Unable to pay rent and far from their ancestral homes, these workers were forced onto the street. **As marginalised communities with little or no access to judicial remedy** and political participation and a lack of State support, these communities have been impacted disproportionately by development-based displacement and evictions. Studies have shown that **over 20% of those displaced by development projects** in India have been Dalits or Scheduled Caste communities.³

Forced physical segregation of settlements, known in some countries as *colonies*, are the consequence of the systematic and hierarchical enforcement of the system oppression. It is one mechanism to maintain and **enforce the imposed “social order.”** The other main form of social control exerted on CDWD is **through sexual and gender-based violence** as a way to directly control reproductive rights of woman and girls.

The forced **physical segregation in housing** is also due to the stigma and perceived notion of denial of access due to the notion of “purity” and “pollution” and the unreasonable fears of housing sectors to become “polluted” by members of the “lower” cast. For example, Dalit communities in South Asia often face discrimination in the rental system by landlords unwilling to house them. Despite fulfilling all legal requirements, they face significant hurdles in access to housing.

Infrastructure Vs Access: Even with necessary infrastructure, social hierarchical oppression and discrimination often prevents the “lowest” casts from having access to housing or water and sanitation facilities⁴. Therefore, the importance of universality and indivisibility of all SDGs and human rights in general becomes increasingly important in achieving the SDGs and those furthest left behind.

³ Forced Evictions in India 2020, Housing and Land Rights Network, September 2021, available at: https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Forced_Evictions_2020.pdf .

⁴ <https://www.dhrdnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/No-Lockdown-on-Caste-Atrocities-Stories-of-Caste-Crimes-during-the-Covid-19-pandemic-DHRDNet.pdf>

4. Recommendations:

The systemic discrimination on work and descent (including caste) violates people's right to education, housing, water, land, employment and equal treatment, resulting in further exclusion and marginalisation. Some countries have taken affirmative action with regards to Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), but to date said measures fall short of achieving the elimination of the centuries-old discrimination practices engrained into society. To achieve the Agenda 2030 and the vision to "Leave no one behind" we make the following recommendations:

- **We seek recognition as Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD)** and of the hierarchical systems of oppression surrounding us. This recognition is essential in order to not only establish protection mechanisms for specific groups, countries or regions, but also to create global awareness and solidarity.
- **We call for specific indicators in the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to fill the significant gaps** that leave CDWD out of the United Nations' vision for a sustainable and equitable future.
- We stress the urgent need for institutions at the national, regional and global levels **to ensure intersectional and disaggregated data on CDWD.**
- **We demand the active participation of and dialogue with CDWDs in the design of public policies** especially concerning education, healthcare, housing, food & nutrition, water and sanitation, justice administration, public finance, climate finance and biodiversity, development and urban planning and other areas that affect the lives of CDWDs.
- **Establishing mechanisms to achieve the SDGs for CDWD** through a recognition of the interconnectedness of all SDGs and special measures which may be required to achieve them. **For example, despite the** existence and availability of water or housing, CDWD are often denied access to maintain the violently imposed "social order".
- **In order to achieve the SDGs** a **multi-dimensional approach** must be taken. Ensuring **the rights to housing, water, sanitation, health, and education is essential**, as the hereditary nature of of labor for many CDWD groups results in employers controlling the housing of workers and thus their access to sanitation, water, education, etc.
- **To focus the HLPF 2024 on marginalized communities** and incentivize a focused discussion during the 2024 Summit of the Future on CDWD so that we can ensure to "Leave No One Behind."