



REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2018/2019

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A Word from the Director

Dear Friends and Supporters of Dalit Solidarity Network UK,

Some may think that the Government's decision in July 2018 to repeal the duty, which will effectively remove caste from the Equality Act 2010, has ended our campaign to outlaw caste in the UK. It has not – we will continue to work to ensure that there is protection against caste discrimination, whether this be through Government Guidance for employees, employers and providers of goods and services or by specific legislative protection. This struggle is not over

And, despite the government's decision, the work of the Dalit Solidarity Network continues at all levels. We continue to work with the All-Party Parliamentary Group to draft Parliamentary Questions, provide briefings and ensure relevant submissions to formal enquiries. Alongside the International Dalit Solidarity Network, we have drafted a Guidance document for the Ethical Trading Initiative on 'Caste in Global Supply Chains' which is soon to be launched in the UK and Denmark, which we hope will be the 'go-to' document for all businesses with supply chains in key caste-affected sourcing countries.

My thanks, as always, to the trustees and patrons, who give so much of their time and energy. This year especially to John Cropper who has stepped down as Chair but who over the past few years provided me with such invaluable support and time. Of course, also to our funders and donors who help to ensure we have the means to do what we do – and are always so generous in their support.

A big thank you to Hannah Tausz, who has done an excellent job stepping in to cover for Danguole (Danni) Kleinaityte whilst she was on maternity leave – and a warm welcome back to Danni in a new role as UK Co-ordinator as of April this year.



Our network continues to grow and our links with other organisations, fighting against caste discrimination, are flourishing – and for that a special thanks to you as members and supporters. We couldn't do what we do without you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nana Vanus". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Summary

Dalit Solidarity Network (DSN-UK) began in 1998 and now brings together organisations and individuals in the UK, who are concerned with caste-based discrimination and aims to link grassroots priorities with international mechanisms and institutions to make an effective contribution to the liberation of those affected by caste discrimination.

DSN-UK registered as a charity in 2003 and since then has continued to grow as an effective campaigning and advocacy organization working on caste discrimination in the UK. Our membership includes concerned individuals, development agencies, trade unions, journalists and academics.

We are working towards equality and social justice for Dalits both in the UK and worldwide in other caste-affected countries. We are a small pioneering headquarters organisation in the UK, working jointly with other like-minded groups, building strategic alliances to maximise advocacy opportunities and build a stronger network of organisations. Our aims are to change values and practices through policy changes worldwide. We raise awareness and support Dalit demands for justice – through an effective advocacy programme.

Our five key objectives are as follows:

1. UK Parliamentarians actively and positively engage with the Dalit cause worldwide;
2. Businesses operating in caste-affected countries introduce measures to address caste-based discrimination throughout their supply chains;
3. Support international advocacy efforts to address caste-based discrimination at the UN, EU and other international institutions;
4. Increase media attention on all aspects of caste-based discrimination;
5. DSN-UK seen as an expert and respected voice on caste-based discrimination.

1. UK Parliamentarians actively and positively engage with the Dalit cause worldwide

Law is the medicine of the body politic and when the body politic gets sick, medicine must be administered.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, leader of Dalits and the chief architect of the Indian Constitution

1.1 All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dalits (APPG)

At the end of April 2018, Penny Mordaunt was appointed as Minister for Women and Equalities (under the International Development department). She is one of the five women to have held this role since 2016. The APPG decided that it was important to contact the new Minister as soon as possible, and the urgency was further compounded by Bob Blackman, the MP for Harrow East bringing up a question on the consultation. Consequently, a meeting was convened on 13 June, organised by Kate Green MP, involving Lord Harries of Pentregarth, Yasmin Qureshi MP, CasteWatch UK, the Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance and DSN-UK, to discuss the necessity of implementing the legislation and respond to some of the concerns of the anti-legislation body.



After almost nine months, the results of the Public Consultation on Caste Discrimination in the UK were finally released on 23 July 2018, with the government deciding to repeal the duty to include 'caste' in the Equality Act 2010. Naturally, the APPG was extremely disappointed with the government's findings. DSN-UK has worked hard to ensure that parliamentarians have been kept up to date and that all political parties are still engaged. A separate analysis of the Consultation results showed that the government included the responses of those who had failed to answer the questions, but instead gave opinions, skewing the results. We continue to question the methodology and results of the analysis.

At a parliamentary event on 5 November the APPG discussed how to move forward in light of the government's proposed repeal, attended by many of the key Dalit groups, a number of academics and several Peers. David Mosse (SOAS) presented an analysis of the Government's consultation report; Meena Dhanda (Wolverhampton University) and Annapurna Waughray (Manchester Metropolitan University) outlined the key requirements of the guidelines document to be produced by the Government Equalities Office (GEO). The APPG also took responsibility for finding out how it could influence and provide input for this Guidance. Since the parliamentary event, the Director has had several meetings with Lord Harries and key meetings with Kate Green MP, Lord Deben and members of the Labour Leader's team.

1.2 Caste legislation in the UK

DSN-UK is delighted that the UK stakeholders' pro-legislation group is continuing to work together to ensure that the issue of caste remains on the political and legislative agenda. We are proud to be working with CasteWatch UK, the National Secularist Society, the Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance, Voice of Dalit International, Christian Aid, Village Services Trust and the Catholic Association for Racial Justice, as well as a number of academics.



In January 2019 another meeting of the UK campaign stakeholders was convened by the Director, following up on the APPG meeting, to discuss what steps had already been taken and the future of the campaign. It was agreed that a clear and concise brief on the Guidance document would be undertaken by the academics and campaigners, as until this is produced, the duty to include caste cannot be repealed; it would also include how to deal with on-line harassment, twitter trolling etc. Furthermore, an effort would be made to log cases with the EHRC.

As the repeal will need to be done through an Affirmative Order, it will give stakeholders the opportunity to lobby and communities to demonstrate.

2. Businesses operating in caste-affected countries introduce measures to address caste-based discrimination throughout their supply chains

Am I not human? Do I not deserve to be treated with dignity and respect? Are my rights not human rights?

Vincent Manoharan, Patron, Dalit Solidarity Network UK

2.1 The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)

Our involvement with the ETI has continued to grow, with the Director asked to advise on an Innovation Fund project submitted by Homeworkers Worldwide to the ETI, to ensure that the



For workers' rights.
For better business.
For 20 years.

methodologies and questionnaires reflect the importance of both gender and caste in the ‘leather/shoe’ supply chain. Following on from several steering committee meetings, the Director attended an end of project stakeholder meeting in Chennai during its final stages. While largely co-operative (with companies pledging to dig deeper into their supply chain), there was also an open discussion that caste was already covered under their zero-discrimination guidelines and therefore did not need to be specified. Fortunately, it was conceded that caste has a ‘special’ role in the Indian context, and thus may need particular measures to address it.

DSN-UK along with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) has provided the expertise into producing the ETI’s *Caste in Global Supply Chains* Guidance. As soon as it is launched, we foresee that it could be of significant use in our corporate work.

The hot topic at the ETI NGO Caucus was a strategic rethink about more meaningful engagement and mutual benefits. NGO members and the ETI Secretariat met in both June and July, chaired by our Director, to finalise the plans for future working. ETI has met criticism in Tamil Nadu, where the work on mills has been slow to progress, despite supplying all the high-street retailers. Although these companies are loath to suffer bad publicity, the lack of progress is not forestalling criticism aimed at them. There are a large number of NGOs in this area, and at present more co-ordination is needed in order to make better progress. It is essential that companies recognise that forced labour of young women workers is predominantly a caste issue, as up to 80 per cent of the labour force faced with this abuse are Dalits.

2.2 BOND Caste and Development Group



DSN-UK has continued to engage with this BOND group, including the discussion over whether we should talk in more global terms of ‘discrimination based on work and descent’ rather than caste discrimination. The report *Caste and Development: Tackling work and descent-based discrimination to achieve the SDGs for all* was launched in March 2019 at the BOND conference. The recommendations for governments, NGOs and donors draws from our own experiences, and lessons learned from a range of helpful interventions. It has also given us the opportunity to work with Christian Aid, the Karuna Trust, Village Services Trust, VODI; and in India, Change Alliance, National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights and the Asian Dalit Rights Forum.

2.3 Other Corporate Work

We continue to try and expand our work in the corporate sector and have had meaningful meetings with two significant companies in the UK. Both are subject to confidentiality agreements at this stage, but it indicates that consultancy is becoming an increasingly attractive proposition to businesses in order to harness genuine expertise from NGOs.

Furthermore, we are increasing our global presence by communicating with other organisations from around the world. The Director had a conference call with a US-based organisation, which focused on investigative reporting highlighting supply chain labour rights and environmental abuses. Similarly, we met with the Advocacy and Research in South Asia (ARISA), the rebranded name for the India Committee of the Netherlands, who will be an ally in our corporate sector work for both DSN-UK and IDSN.



3. Support international advocacy efforts to address caste-based discrimination at the UN, EU and other international institutions

We now undertake that we cannot rest whilst millions of our people suffer the pain and indignity of poverty in all its forms.

Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid revolutionary and first Black President of South Africa

Ahead of IDSN's General Assembly, the Board finalised a new five-year strategy, focusing on three thematic objectives: Dalit women and gender justice; equality and participation; and business and human rights. All will incorporate the theme of access to justice. The expectation is to engage further with Dalit women and girls who are positioned at the bottom of the caste, class and gender hierarchies, and bear the brunt of labour and physical exploitation and attacks.



The General Assembly was extremely successful with all, but one member from South Asia, able to attend, and excellent representation from IDSN's International Associates based in Geneva. Most significant was the

launch of a brand new IDSN Ambassadors Group, made up of several highly distinguished human rights advocates (including DSN-UK's patron Aidan McQuade). This group will use their skills and knowledge to ensure that caste discrimination never falls off the global human rights agenda.

3.1 At the United Nations

In her role as the Executive Director of IDSN, Meena also attended the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) – Review of Nepal in May 2018, where IDSN members from Nepal were able to make statements at the formal NGO session for the Committee members. The focus was on Dalit and Adivasi rights. Meena also chaired an 'informal' session with the Committee and NGO delegates, where others were able to raise their issues and concerns, including the lack of adequate implementation of the laws prohibiting caste-based discrimination, caste-based slavery, sexual violence and the abuse of Dalit women. The Concluding Observations by CERD included dozens of remarks relating to caste-based discrimination and several strongly worded recommendations on addressing issues.



On 21 June in Geneva, at the UN Human Rights Council and annual day addressing Violence Against Women, IDSN supported the side-event #DalitWomenFight against Caste-Based Violence. This event explored and discussed aggravated caste-based violence faced by women and girls in India, often with little recourse to justice.

IDSN continues to make documents available to the public, including the Roadmap to the UN OHCHR Guidance tool on descent-based discrimination, which can be found on their website.



Following on from the CERD review of Nepal, the UN Committee on Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – Review of Nepal took place at the end of October. The Feminist Dalit Organisation of Nepal and IDSN presented a joint civil society report, denouncing a number of instances of discrimination against women, including very low representation levels in government; the lack of specific legislation on multiple forms of discrimination, and cultural prejudices against Dalit women. The CEDAW committee took note of a number of concerns regarding Dalit women and made more than 17 relevant recommendations.

IDSN actively participated in the 11th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues in November, under the theme ‘Statelessness: A Minority Issue’. IDSN members from Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan outlined how Dalits in reality often suffer de facto statelessness due to extreme marginalisation and lack of access to rights.

3.2 At the EU

At the 20th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in Brussels in November, an IDSN delegation participated. The Forum, organised by the EEAS and the European Commission, together with the European Parliament for the first time, gathered more than 200 civil society representatives from all over the globe.



4. Increase media attention on all aspects of caste-based discrimination

DSN-UK has maintained a close relationship with the media. This year we have been approached by two different television companies looking to make documentaries on caste-based discrimination for the BBC, and the Director participated in BBC Radio 4’s *Sunday* programme in August to discuss the Public Consultation.

By March 2019 the DSN-UK Facebook page reached over 2,535 followers and @DSNUK Twitter followers numbered over 16,000.

5. DSN-UK seen as an expert and respected voice on caste-based discrimination

I like the religion that teaches liberty, equality and fraternity.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Despite the news that the duty to include ‘caste’ will be repealed, DSN-UK has continued to convene meetings with stakeholders and academics to ensure that the Guidance, due to be published prior to the repeal, will be fit for purpose and we have worked hard to produce a document that includes all members’ comments.

The Director remains involved with the Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) as Vice Chair of their International Council. Part of her responsibility was to host the reception to say farewell to Mark Lattimer, the Executive Director, who had stepped down after some 18 years. She was also part of the committee

that led the search for a new Director and who were delighted to appoint Professor Joshua Castellino to the role.

DSN-UK met with a student at a University of London Medical School to give some advice on the issue of bullying and abuse he has suffered from fellow students. He believed the perpetrators, all so-called 'higher caste' Hindus, had targeted him because of his outspoken views on caste and Ambedkar. As a result, he wrote to the Dean of the School and pointed out the oft hidden issues of caste-based discrimination and suggested that they added it to their charter. This situation has highlighted the problem in Higher Education Institutes, and as a result we have reached out to the Equality Challenge Unit to work with them to include caste in their Charter.

During the last year we have continued to inform our members of events from both ourselves and other NGOs. Our newsletters cover both UK and international news to keep interested parties up to date. We remain committed to strengthening our relationship with organisations who support the end of caste-based discrimination, both in the UK and abroad, particularly other Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe. Our participation in the ETI, BOND and MRG has given us access to like-minded organisations and individuals and we are keen to retain the special working relationships that we have built.

The Director has represented DSN-UK at a number of events and meetings:

- Presentation at Christian Network against Caste Discrimination in Southall to give them some ideas about how to take up the issue more widely with their own constituents in the Catholic churches.
- Presentation on caste-based discrimination and the work of DSN and IDSN at the Tom Lantos Institute in Budapest for the Global Minority Rights Summer School.
- Meetings with two separate Japanese Academics visiting at SOAS to explain the work to address Caste discrimination in the UK.
- Meetings with both the Voice of Dalit International (VODI) and Christian Network Against Caste Discrimination (CNACD)
- Meeting with Maina Kiai, former UN special rapporteur and human rights lawyer.

Highlights and Challenges of the Year

This has been a year of ups and downs, with our attempts to get caste included in the Equality Act 2010 frustrated by the government's publication on the Caste in the UK consultation and the announcement of its decision to repeal the cast amendment – and the government's almost single-minded focus on Brexit.

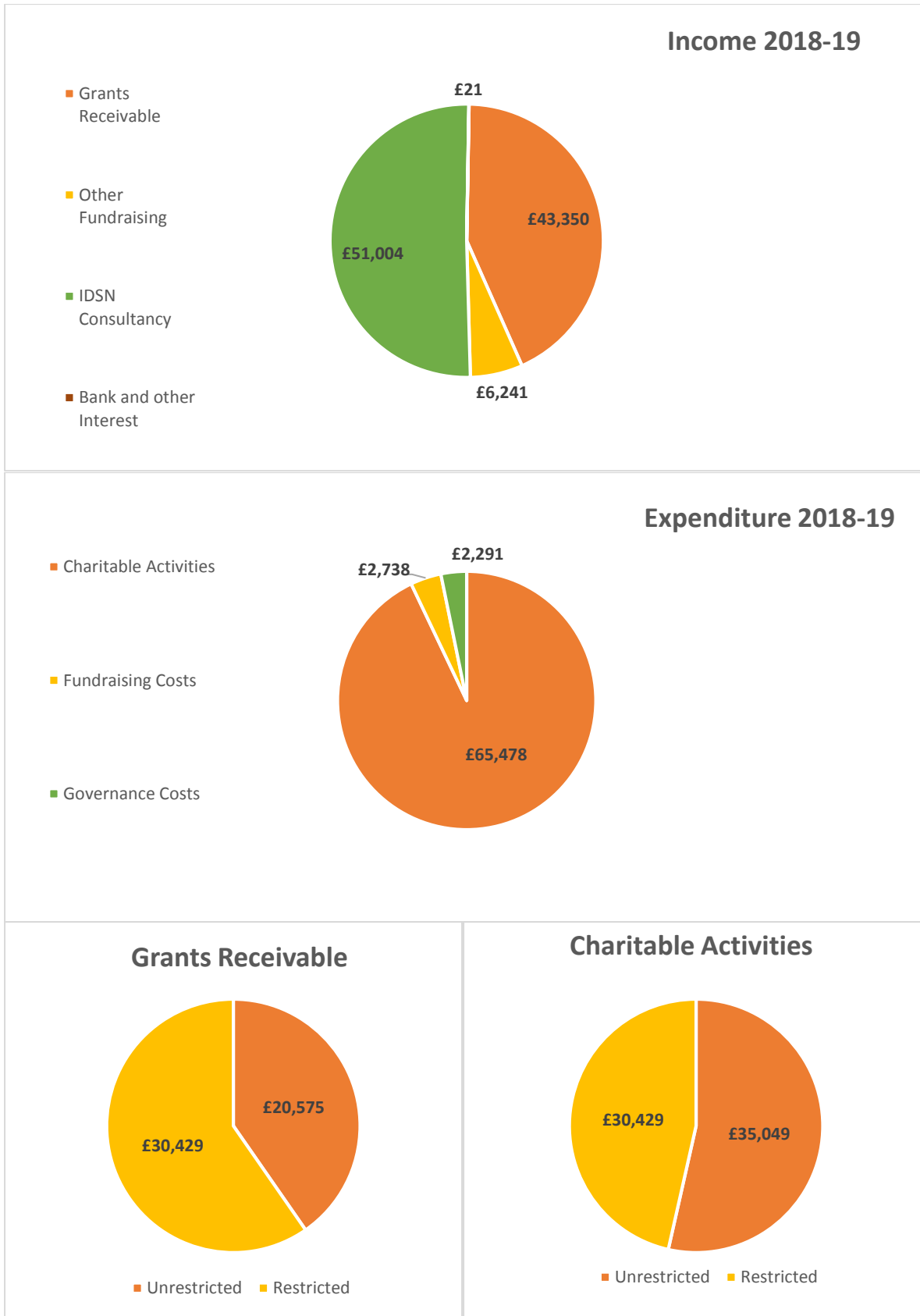
On a positive note, DSN-UK has made progress in the corporate sector through the Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), especially due to our expertise on supply chains in India. DSN-UK focused on changing the lives of over 300,000 young girls and women in the textile mills of Tamil Nadu, through our recent 'bonded labour' programme. DSN-UK Director Meena Varma was shortlisted for the 2018 Secularist of the Year Award, and she gave a presentation at the ceremony. Meena has featured in articles and broadcasts numerous times this year, and DSN-UK continue to brief journalists and other organisations studying South Asia on caste and human rights issues.

In her role as the Executive Director of IDSN, the Director of DSN-UK has led delegations to the UN in Geneva and the EU in Brussels, which enabled her to influence several South Asian countries to address caste issues.

The most challenging news we have had this year is HM Government's disappointing response to the public consultation on caste in the UK. The Government concluded in its consultation analysis report that there was not sufficient evidence of caste discrimination in the UK to include caste explicitly in the Equality Act 2010, and that legislating against caste discrimination had the potential to cause more harm than good. Her Majesty's Government therefore recommends in the report that victims of caste discrimination should seek protection through emerging case law, rather than through explicit legislation. The problem with this, of course, is that there is not enough consistent case law to reliably protect victims of caste discrimination. Furthermore, if caste discrimination is not explicitly outlawed, then no precedent is set to warn people against discriminating against people due to their caste. In other words, failing to explicitly outlaw caste discrimination sends the message that caste discrimination is acceptable, and slows or prevents the process of positive social change.

- Following on from pressure by DSN-UK and other stakeholders, the government finally published the Analysis and Response on the Public Consultation on Caste Discrimination in the UK.
- Although the outcome of the Consultation did not go in our favour, DSN-UK convened a number of stakeholder meetings to discuss our options.
- The Government Equalities Office provided a draft Guidance that the APPG and Stakeholders felt was insufficient. As a result, DSN-UK collated comments from the various groups to produce a more appropriate document. We still await the publication of this document.
- DSN-UK Director continues to coordinate the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dalits, convening meetings and disseminating information.
- In her role as the Executive Director of IDSN, DSN-UK Director has led delegations to the UN in Geneva and the EU in Brussels; the work of IDSN has influenced reports produced by CERD and CEDAW and other UN Committees reviewing caste-affected countries in Asia.
- DSN-UK has made significant contributions to BOND's *Caste and Development: Tackling work and descent-based discrimination* report and ETI's *Caste in Global Supply Chains* Guidance document.
- The DSN-UK Director has contributed to several BBC and Channel 4 programmes and has been asked to consult on a number of potential documentaries.
- DSN-UK Facebook page reached over 2,535 followers.
- @DSNUK Twitter followers reached over 16,900, up 39% from last year (as of end September 2019).

Accounts at a Glance



Thank you

Anti-Slavery International

Bond

CasteWatch UK

Ethical Trading Initiative

Farthing Trust

International Dalit Solidarity Network

Karuna Trust

Methodist Church in Britain

School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS)

St Clare and St Francis Trust

Three Oaks Trust

Village Services Trust

Wyndham Trust

University of London

University of Manchester

University of Wolverhampton

Village Services Trust

And again, special thanks to the staff, trustees and patrons, members and supporters of the Network, who give up their time to attend meetings, rallies and other events.