



**DALIT SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK UK**  
A world without caste discrimination



c. Jakob Carlsen/IDSN

## REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2019/2020

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## A Word from the Director

### Dear Friends and Supporters of Dalit Solidarity Network UK,

It is with much sadness that I write this, my 'last word' as the Director of the Dalit Solidarity Network UK.

I have had led DSN-UK since 2007 and the organisation is in an excellent position vis a vis all due diligence requirements and financial position. It is also highly respected and holds a significant position in the INGO world here in the UK. It is seen as the expert on all caste matters – both in the UK and internationally. We are often the first port of call for journalists and researchers on the issue of caste.

We have, with a good deal of success, lobbied political leaders nationally and internationally, as well as putting multinationals working in the Indian subcontinent under pressure to acknowledge their responsibility to help tackle caste discrimination in their supply chains. DSN-UK's role in the UK campaign to outlaw caste discrimination has been crucial – bringing together a wide range and diverse set of UK stakeholders.

The dual roles of DSN and IDSN have become increasingly challenging and I have taken the difficult decision to focus my efforts, moving forward, on IDSN. The global crisis precipitated by COVID-19 has shown more than ever how the most marginalised and excluded communities across the globe have suffered disproportionately and the need to address and highlight incidences of oppression, violence and abuse at the international level is key. The global language of '*social distancing*' has normalised the practice of untouchability and exacerbated notions of purity and pollution. There is still so much to be done.

I will remain deeply committed to DSN-UK and hope to continue to engage in key areas, such as business and human rights, as well as advocacy at the international level and planning and preparing for bilateral dialogues with key affected countries.

I have way too many people to thank – so let me just thank all of you for the support and commitment to me personally during my tenure and seeing DSN-UK through the good times (and also the many that were more challenging!)

My work on ending caste discrimination will continue and I very much look forward to working alongside the new Director for some years to come.

DSN-UK will always have a special place and I remain at its service if or whenever required.

Should the current restrictions be eased or lifted enough to enable a fonder and more physical farewell, then I hope you will join the Board alongside myself and the team somewhere in 2021.

Warm wishes as ever



## Executive 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 activities are as follows:

1. Providing technical advice and analysis to the UK Parliament, Government departments and others on discrimination on the grounds of caste;
2. Providing technical advice and analysis to the corporate sector in the UK and internationally on addressing caste-based discrimination and other labour rights abuses;
3. Promoting international advocacy with the International Dalit Solidarity Network;
4. Raising Awareness of all aspects of discrimination, exclusion and abuse of human rights on the grounds of caste-based discrimination;
5. Strengthening the Network.

### 1. Providing technical advice and analysis to the UK Parliament, Government departments and others on discrimination on the grounds of caste

**In 1916 Ambedkar described caste as 'a local problem but one capable of much wider mischief', observing that 'if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem'.**

#### 1.1 All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dalits (APPG)

The APPG have been busy this year, keeping up the momentum to encourage legislative change, despite the decision to repeal the duty to include 'caste' in the Equality Act 2010. Consequently, the APPG, with the help of DSN-UK, have created an updated briefing document to explain the situation, an analysis of the Consultation carried out in 2018 and a Timeline of the push for legal protection from 2007 to 2019. This will be sent to around 40 key APPG supporters, and eventually to all MPs and Peers,



when the right moment arrives. This has been prompted in part by the continued call from Bob Blackman MP to repeal the legislation immediately, both in October 2019, where he described it as a

‘bizarre and divisive situation’, and January 2020, where once again he claimed that the inclusion of caste was ‘unnecessary, divisive and ill-informed’.

The APPG for Dalits has also been busy networking with like-minded organisations. As a result, in May 2019 they hosted a reception for Minority Rights Group’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary during its International Council meeting and their Global Team Week. They also reached out to the APPG for Pakistani Minorities, and with DSN-UK, submitted a report to the International Development Committee enquiry on UK Aid to Pakistan, covering issues of minorities, caste, forced conversion and early marriage. A joint meeting was also arranged to discuss ways to promote pro-Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) policy, following the publication of a report on Religious Minorities of Pakistan: Report of a Parliamentary Visit, which took place in Autumn 2018.

Aside from two APPG meetings held in July, one for Parliamentarians and an open meeting for stakeholders, the inaugural AGM took place in March 2020, with Chair Yasmin Qureshi and Co-Chair Lord Harries of Pentregarth at the helm.

## 1.2 Caste legislation in the UK

DSN-UK continues to convene meetings of the UK Pro-Legislation group. In April 2019 the group met to discuss the next steps to be taken regarding legislation, prompted in part by understanding the Government Equalities Office would shortly issue their draft Guidance document. Before the duty to include ‘caste’ is repealed, it is necessary for the government to provide a Guidance document. The draft document received significant input from the group in April, but it has yet to be published.

DSN-UK has since garnered more support from leading UK Human Rights organisations, and we have written a letter endorsed by Amnesty International UK, Human Rights Consortium at the University of London, Liberty, Race on the Agenda (ROTA), Runnymede Trust, Stonewall, and Stop Hate UK. We and our members are ready for action as soon as an announcement on the repeal is made.

It is clear that our stakeholders have also been busy - in February 2020, a meeting was held in Parliament organised by the South Asia Solidarity Group with CasteWatch UK on India and the current state of UK law. The event received coverage by several media outlets in India and several MPs pledged their support.



## 2. Providing technical advice and analysis to the corporate sector in the UK and internationally on addressing caste-based discrimination and other labour rights abuses

*Caste is not just a division of labour; it is a division of labourers.*

**Dr B R Ambedkar**

### 2.1 The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)



DSN-UK's work as a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative enables us to continue our focus on the business and human rights agenda and to work with business to address caste in their supply chains.

The ETI Caste in Global Supply Chains Guidance was finalised and launched in Copenhagen in November 2019 with an excellent turnout for the event, which focused on Vulnerable Workers. Speakers included the ETI Directors of the UK, Norway and Denmark, international business and trade union representatives. Our Director led the session on caste, along with Maria Brink Schleimann from IDSN. This will be a key advocacy tool for both DSN-UK and IDSN in their business and human rights work.

The Co-ordinator, having finished her ETI training, will now represent DSN-UK at NGO Caucus meetings and undertake specific company report reviews, while the Director will continue to represent DSN-UK at the Tamil Nadu Stakeholder Advisory Group and other programmatic groups that require high level and strategic input. Having met with the ETI category Leader for Apparels and Textiles, it was agreed that Dalit workers, especially women and girls, should be at the front and centre.

### 2.2 BOND Caste and Development Group



The report 'Caste and Development: Tackling Discrimination based on Work and Descent' has been published. It is our intention to use this in our Business and Human Rights work. The report covers the Sustainable Development Goals that need to be considered for true equality, and it is obvious that much work still needs to be done, but examples of success in combatting discrimination are also mentioned, demonstrating the heightened awareness of a situation that has long been hidden.

### 2.3 Other Corporate Work

The Director attended a reception hosted by Body Shop as one of their 'influencers'. The world's first fair trade-certified plastics recycler, Plastics for Change, and the Body Shop have created a supply change that supports the crucial work done by informal waste pickers in Bangalore, Karnataka. It is hoped that this will help empower waste pickers that they support with access to more sanitary working conditions, a fair price and the respect and recognition they deserve.



### 3. Promoting international advocacy with the International Dalit Solidarity Network

*Let us stand in solidarity. Not to a specific country, race or religion – but rather to HUMANITY*  
**David Vox**

Following on from IDSN's new strategy, an operational plan has now been designed, and there is a great deal of synergy between DSN-UK and IDSN.

The Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues is focusing on hate speech and planning regional forums this year, which will hopefully provide a platform to raise Dalit issues and connect the UK problems to a global campaign.



#### 3.1 At the United Nations



There were several key interventions at the UN Human Rights Council on Dalit Women, and Freedom of Association in March 2019.

The Caste and Gender Justice event held in Geneva in June was a highly successful event, with over 80 people attending, including the Second Secretary from the Nepal Embassy.

The event also saw the launch of the Caste and Gender Justice report. It contains some fascinating background – did you know that over 40% of Dalits in Nepal live in poverty, or that 90% of Dalit girls in Pakistan are not in school or that a Dalit woman lives 14.5 years less than the average woman in India? The document covers caste and gender equality; the fight for justice; demand for decent work; inclusive education; poverty, hunger, health, water and sanitation; and most importantly action for change.

November was a particularly busy month, as IDSN participated in the Business and Human Rights Forum, with a very popular stand that highlighted the links between caste and human rights violations in global supply chains, and all copies of the new ETI Guidance on *Caste in Global Supply Chains* had already been picked up by the end of the first day.

During the Forum, the Director gave a snapshot presentation on what Governments can do to address caste-based human rights abuses in business operations in their countries and took part in the Minority Mandate consultation hosted by the OHCHR and Minority Rights Group International.

#### 3.2 At the EU

Over two days in June, the European Development Days took place, with a delegation from India, Nepal and Bangladesh. One of IDSN's members was part of the plenary panel which launched the new EU Guidelines on Non-discrimination, where the issues of Manual Scavenging, water and sanitation were highlighted.

IDSN was also fortunate enough to be the first INGO to meet with the new Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, and we hope that this will be the start of an excellent relationship.



4. Raising awareness of all aspects of discrimination, exclusion and abuse of human rights on the grounds of caste-based discrimination &
5. Strengthening the network

*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*

**Nelson Mandela**

Berlin was the site of a meeting of all the Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe (UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Finland). The key focus was to see where each DSN could work on the areas of the IDSN strategy and where there were commonalities and successes in how each group operates.

We have met with Amnesty International's newly appointed person to deal specifically with discrimination based on work and descent and are pleased that the organisation will be supporting efforts to globalise the issue of caste to Africa and beyond.

A presentation at the University of London Federal Inclusion Network on tackling Caste-based discrimination in the Higher Education Institutions was as a result of raising the issue of unconscious bias when it comes to caste. We hope that all the institutions will include caste as a discriminatory factor in their Equality and Diversity policies.

As usual, we continue to provide both background information and quotes for journalists and broadcast media on the issue of caste-based discrimination.

The DSN-UK Co-ordinator had an article published in Lithuania on caste, and hopefully this will be translated at some point. Furthermore, our newsletter is being produced three times a year and new articles regularly appear on our website.

During the last year we have continued to inform our members of relevant events from ourselves and other NGOs. 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 and the BOND Caste and Development group has given us access to like-minded organisations and individuals and we are keen to retain the special working relationships that we have built.

We have had a great deal of support from several human rights organisations in the UK, that have lent their names to our campaign to stop the repeal of inclusion of 'caste' in the Equality Act 2010. It is our hope that we can continue to support each other in the aim to end all forms of caste-based discrimination.

## Highlights and Challenges of the Year

It has been a year of ups and downs. A single-minded focus on Brexit (up until the COVID-19 crisis) has meant that other issues have been put on the back burner by government. On the plus side, despite a number of calls to repeal the duty to include caste in the Equality Act 2010, the government has yet to act, giving us the opportunity to rally opposition to this decision. The global situation is also changing – while India has continued its crackdown on NGOs and human rights activists, in Nigeria the Osu caste system has at last been strongly condemned by both the monarchy and religious leaders. Let us hope that words lead to actions.

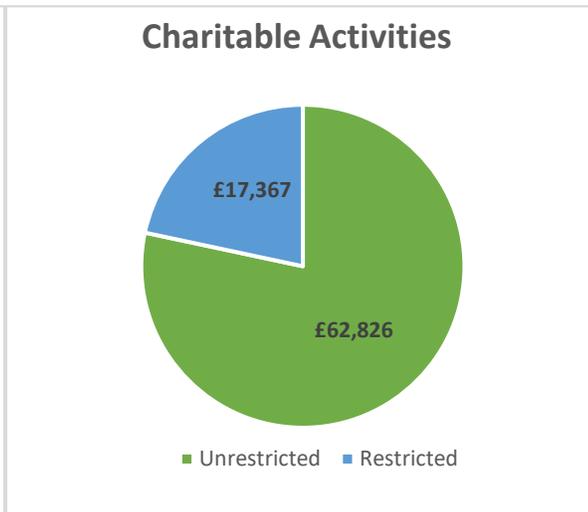
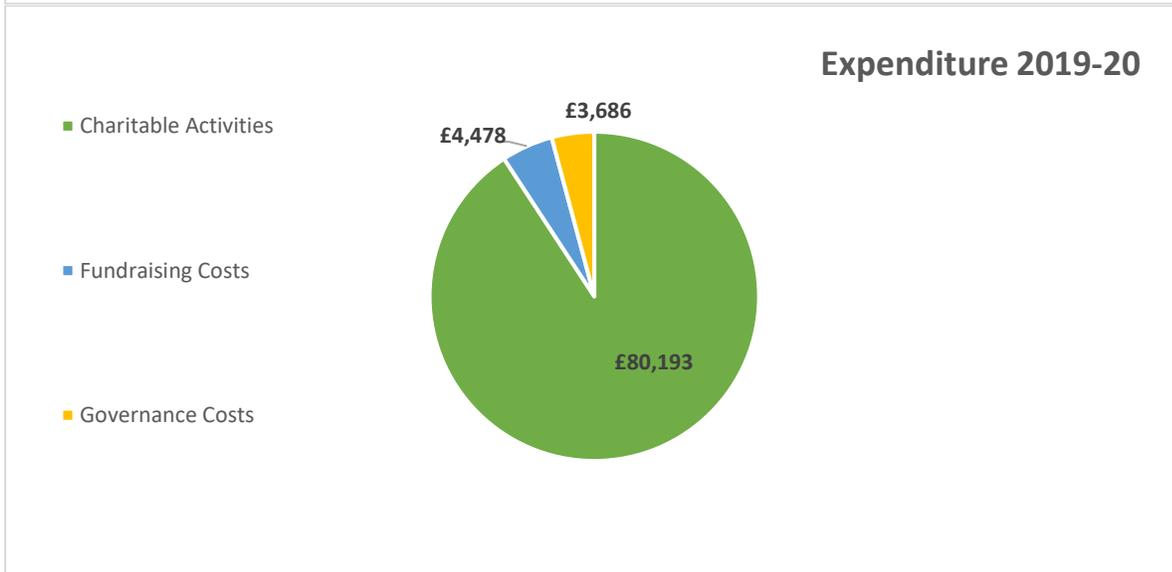
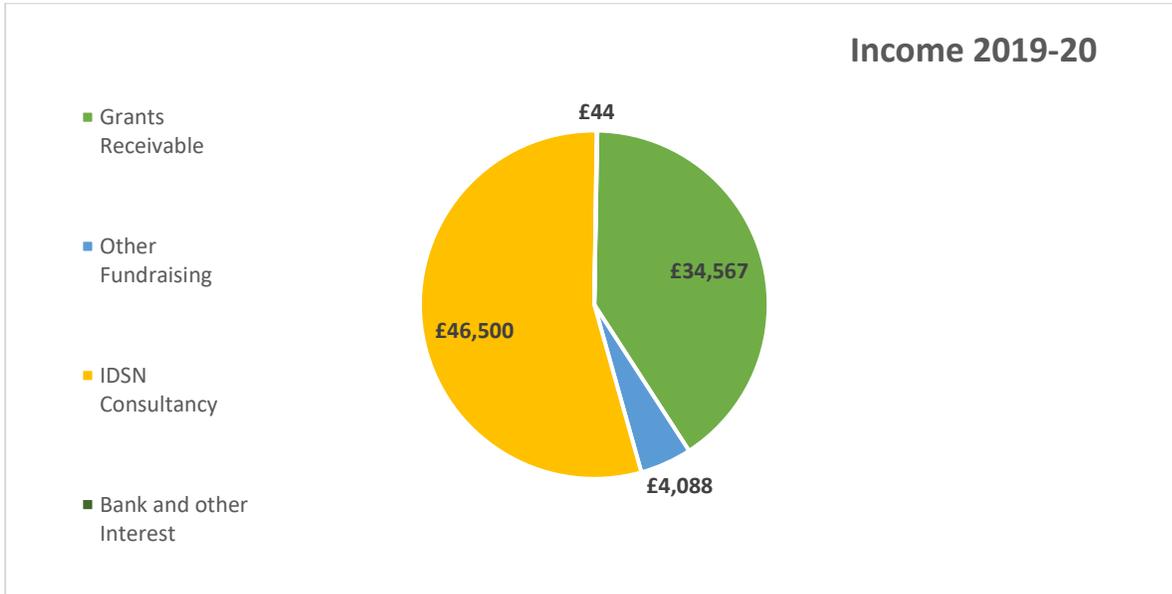
A great deal of work has been put into modernising our website, and we are already seeing the fruits of our labour – our subscription numbers have increased, and we are getting some really positive feedback. This year also saw the launch of our new leaflet, which aims to explain what caste-based discrimination is to those who are unaware of the problem, with a particular emphasis on the UK and the effort to change the law. This leaflet will be sent out to MPs and Peers when we launch our opposition to the repeal that is due to take place. Our thanks go out to the Methodist Church in Britain, who provided funding.

We are particularly proud of the work carried out in conjunction with BOND to produce the report ‘Caste and Development: Tackling Discrimination based on Work and Descent’ which was launched during the year. The close working relationship we have created with BOND, ETI and MRG have continued to serve us well, and recently we have been reaching out to a number of high-profile human rights organisations to combine our efforts to end discrimination.

- DSN-UK launched its new-look website, which has already led to an increase in membership and views.
- We have produced a new leaflet to distribute on Caste-based Discrimination specifically in the UK. This will be used to lobby MPs and peers, and to raise awareness with the public.
- Following on from a complaint by a student at a university in London, DSN-UK has started to campaign for caste to be included as a protected characteristic in equality policies in higher education institutions.
- DSN-UK Director continues to co-ordinate the APPG for Dalits, convening meetings, disseminating information and connecting with other relevant APPGs on both a global and national level.
- The Ethical Trading Initiative launched its Caste in Global Supply Chains Guidance document, which DSN-UK contributed to significantly.
- The DSN-UK Director has contributed to a number of articles and media projects, whether it be background information or direct quotes, including several potential documentaries.
- @DSNUK Twitter followers reached over 18,000.

Whilst a lot of our work is done behind the scenes, what we have managed to achieve this year with only one full-time member and two part-time members of staff is quite exceptional. Yes, there is always more to do, and of course we would love to see all of our hard work to change legislation come to fruition, but in the meantime, we continue to aim for a ‘world without caste discrimination’.

## 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

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 ensure the wellbeing of the organisation and to attend meetings and other events.*