Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and its role in addressing Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) and Caste

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1. Ensuring No one is left behind in the developmental planning and implementation has captured the world attention and gravitated towards the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets. The focus on the people centric approach and principles of accountability, transparency and participation ensures SDGs as a near perfect model of holistic development. With all the positive signs through this paradigm shifting global developmental agenda, there are concerns its reach and impact on the traditionally marginalised and socially excluded communities.

2. Traditionally marginalized and socially excluded populations and their progress need to be mainstreamed in the SDGs so that there are consistent debates on the stages of development and economic progress in the global scenario, with a special focus on their inclusion. With 260 million (approx) people worldwide, such structurally excluded communities if hypothetically reside at one state, it would be 6th largest populous country in the world. These communities are the victims of exclusion based on their caste, work, descent and identity are considered as lower (status) or impure and polluting the society thus isolated physically, socially and politically from other castes/communities of the society. Thus they are victims of colossal amount of violence and other forms of atrocities, perpetuated by other (higher status) communities and state. Apart from the gross violence, these communities are also excluded from various public and private resources and services for development and welfare.

3. Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) is terminology used to address various forms of discrimination including caste, work and birth based discrimination. While DWD is often identified with caste based discrimination and limited to Indian sub continent, it is a global phenomenon with various communities around the world has faced with similar kind of discrimination and exclusion. Some of the major communities who are identified as victims of DWD are Burakumin (Japan), Roma (Europe), Osu (Nigeria and Cameroon), Quilumbo (Brazil), Al Akhdam (Yemen) and Dalits (Whole of south Asia specially India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan).

4. The draft United Nations Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent (DWD), 2009 clearly states that "discrimination based on work and descent exacerbates poverty and constraints progress." It is essential that SDG should favour primal emphasis on the descent (caste) based discrimination, if the visions is for any systematic and sizable change (development).

5. United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye states "This is a global problem affecting communities in Asia, Africa, Middle East, the Pacific region and in various diaspora communities," the expert said while stressing that "caste-based discrimination and violence goes against the basic principles of universal human dignity and equality, as it differentiates between 'inferior' and 'superior' categories of individuals which is unacceptable."

6. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. ZeidRa'ad Al Hussein noted that ten years after the end of the internal armed conflict in Nepal, there has been little progress in addressing its root causes, including entrenched ethnic and caste discrimination, unequal access to economic resources, extreme poverty and pervasive impunity.

7. Significance of DWD and caste in social exclusion was initially recognized by Post 2015 development agenda (working committee), with various negotiations and other interventions was raised for the inclusion of traditionally marginalized and socially excluded communities to ensure the SDG is accessible by these communities. SDG implementation talks about inclusion and participation of the very last person for successful implementation of this global development programme. It could be very difficult to guarantee the development measures reaching these communities. The discrimination based on work and descent however failed to make the cut in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Targets.

8. The SDG indirectly influences the various concerns of the excluded communities, while it fails to recognize the DWD or caste as an important determinant of the poverty and under-development. The absence of DWD from the SDG main document, goals and targets as well as the global indicators are clear evidence that there is less to no recognition of DWD in the global agenda of development. While on one hand the SDGs stands for transparency, accountability and participation with inclusion of all populations, on the other hand, it structurally excludes the traditionally marginalized and socially excluded populations.

9. Similar to DWD communities, the African descent population living outside Africa faces exclusion based on racial terms. While SDG and its targets has identified race as a variable for data disaggregation, their concerns have not addressed significantly for enrich change.

10. SDGs have redefined the development programmes towards more sustainable and eco friendly model of development for preservation of planet, people and prosperity for the next 15 years. This also moulds the developmental attributes in a more inclusive and participatory methodology which could enrich the most vulnerable population. This in paper is the optimum solution to the lack of attention and implementations of the developmental policies. However with the state in pole position to call for the modus operandi of the national implementation, in ground this might reflect its predecessors and end up ignoring the most vulnerable population.

11. SDG implementation even though is primarily responsibility of the State, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility needs to be the crux; thus state nexus with CSOs, business, academia and citizens is paramount for any successful implementation of these goals.

12. The disaggregated data is crucial for SDGs, while two important aspects to ensure effective and inclusive as well as value added data needs firstly reflective accounted data based on all major stakeholders within the state periphery as well as the intersectionalities of these stakeholders; secondly establishment data in a regular basis rather than in extended interval periods. (For example National Sample Survey Office provides survey every year, but the specific survey topics are repeated only after 5 years, thus there is a gap in the data for the 4 years between the surveys)

13. The planning and implementation should focus on the intersectionalities of communities who faces multiple discriminatory practices in development debate. The under representation of these intersectional groups have been a structural concerns for the states. With data disaggregation is been seen as the important monitoring tool, the states needs to address the importance of the intersectionalitites within the SDG model.

14. In India, SDG implementation has followed a federal model; with the national/central government has decentralized the responsibilities of the SDG implementation to the State government. However the planning and programme mechanism like setting the indicators have been concentrated by the central government.

15. SDG has the slogan of Leave No One Behind; while India calls for "Sabka Saat, Sabka Vikas" translates to "All together, Inclusive growth" a very inclusive slogan, which has failed to translate throughout the SDG implementation process from initial planning, consultations and which could be evident in the latest set of pre final indicators were communities like Dalits, Adivasis, PWD etc. are conveniently ignored.

16. Like most of the countries, India has also adopted to integrate SDGs with National Development programmes. This is a concern as many of the national development programmes have failed to reach the most vulnerable populations like Dalits, Adivasis, PWD, sexual minorities, religious minorities and regional constituencies. Thus SDGs might also face similar threat to ultimately not reaching the targeted communities.

17. SDG in India has been raised on special focus of certain specific development initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) and Aadhar as well as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) and skill development programmes are mooted as important steps. However the inclusiveness of these programmes is to be questioned, as most of the Dalits have failed to acquire financial support under PMJDY, while Aadhar and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has not provided any improvement in the lives of Dalits or any other marginalized communities. Skill India, which has launched with much interest have failed to translate its awareness to the rural areas especially among the Dalits and Adivasis, who have neither heard nor understand the skill development programme.

18. Goal 1:- India is a clear example of 'lopsided development' with on one hand it is one of the fastest developing nation for more than 5 years, on the other hand it is 55 per cent of population living in poverty, according to the multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). But among Dalits it is 65.8%and among the Adivasi it is 81.4%.The poverty level among the rest of the population is 33.3%.

19. Gaol 2:- According to Findings of the Nutrition Report (2009) of the National Family and Health Survey 3 with respect to social groups SCs and STs have a high percentage of women with BMI less than 18.5 is acute among SC's with 42.1% SCs are diverging from the national average in terms of female malnutrition. On the Public Distribution System being the largest food security initiatives in the world, SC and ST are often discriminated against while accessing publicly provided entitlements such as subsidised food grain through the public distribution system (PDS), meal for children at schools (Mid-Day Meal Programme) and nutritional supplements at mother and child care centres[i].

20. Goal 3:- The state aims for the universal access of healthcare, while India continues to spend 1% of the total GDP on health in the budget. For Universal health care India needs to spend more than 7% of the GDP. 33% of public health workers refuse to go to Dalit homes.[ii] As compared to non-SC/ STs, persons not having access to public health services was higher by 7 percentage points for SCs, and 16.4 percentage points for the STs respectively.

21. Goal 4:- The literacy rate of India is 73%. However, for Dalits it is 66.1% and for Adivasi it is still lower at 59%. Literacy levels are lowest among SC girls at 24.4%, compared to the national average of 42.8% for the female population. In the Mushahar community,[iii] barely 9% of women are literate. The mean[iv] years of Dalits' schooling are just 3.2 yearsmainly because of increasing dropout rate of SC children.

22. Goal 5:- Dalit women's experience of violence across four Indian states shows that the majority of Dalit women report having faced one or more incidents of verbal abuse (62.4%), physical assault (54.8%), sexual harassment and assault (46.8%), domestic violence (43.0%) and rape (23.2%). In less than 1% of cases were the perpetrators convicted by the courts.

23. Goal 8:- The daily status employment rate for SC males is about 46% as compared with 52% for other workers. According to 2011 census, the unemployment rate for SCs between the age of 15 and 59 years of age was 18% & STs are 19%.[v] Of the 770,338 manual scavengers and their dependents across India,[vi] so far only 427,870 persons have been assisted under the National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (NSLRS) and the remaining 342,468 yet to be rehabilitated. International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that the incidence of bonded labour remains particularly severe among Dalits and indigenous peoples in Asia. According to Anti-Slavery International, the vast majority of bonded labourers (around 90%) are predominantly from Scheduled Castes and minority groups.

24. Goal 10:- According to the NHRC statistics put together by K.B. Saxena, a former additional chief secretary of Bihar, 37% Dalits live below the poverty line, 54% are undernourished, 83 per 1,000 children born in a Dalit household die before their first birthday, 12% before their fifth birthday, and 45% remain illiterate. The data also shows that Dalits are prevented from entering the police station in 28% of Indian villages. Dalit children have been made to sit separately while eating in 39% government schools. Dalits do not get mail delivered to their homes in 24% of villages. They are denied access to water sources in 48% of our villages because untouchability remains a stark reality even though it was abolished in 1955.

25. Goal 16:- There is a sharp rise in recorded crimes and crime rate, against Dalits since 2012 simultaneous with a decrease in conviction rates from 39% in 2010, 31% in 2011 to 19% in 2012 and 16% in 2015. (The conviction rates for other crimes remain largely the same. It is only the convictions rates for crimes against SCs and STs that have sharply decreased).[vii] The record for crimes against Dalit women is equally staggering, if not worse. In 40.4% of the cases, the women did not even attempt to obtain justice. In 26.6% of the cases, the survivors were prevented from filing cases. In 1.6% of the cases, the women were able to obtain informal justice. In 17.5% of incidents, the violence reached the notice of the police, but cases were left unaddressed.

26. While there are such difficulties in addressing the concerns of the DWD and Dalit communities, we way forward are through constant engagement with the state with the data and ensuring policies and programmes are reaching the designated communities. One way for ensuring state accountability is through monitoring of the programmes right from the inception till the service delivery. In many countries in South Asia, community monitoring has achieved sustainable results where state has been questioned on the basis of the outcomes of the community monitoring.

27. Participation of the communities in the decision making, implementation and monitoring is crucial for ensuring accountability, transparency and participation and overall inclusion of all in the SDG process.

28. Ensuring that targeted policies are implemented by the state for the DWD and other excluded communities with appropriate budget allocation for effective and inclusive implementation of the policies. The constant monitoring and review of these policies and participation of the private sector including CSOs in execution is important in ensuring the reach of the programmes to the communities.

29. Working with Parliamentarians to raise the issue in the Parliament on the effectiveness of the implementation of the policies and ensuring the programmes are used properly towards addressing the access to the communities as well as ensuring there are no discriminatory practices in the process.

30. Use of alternative data collection method by the CSOs and private sector to ensure that government is not providing altered data of development in the voluntary national reviews. Alternative reports/ shadow reports to be presented to the UN and other governments on the implementation of the programmes to provide light on the ground level realities visa vis theory of action.

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[i] Thorat, S. & Lee, J. (2010) Caste Discrimination and Government Food Security Programme, In: T. Sukhadeo & N. Katherine (Eds), Blocked by Caste-Economic Discrimination and Social Exclusion in Modern India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
[ii] World Development Book Caste Study: Dalit Minority in India
[iii] The Musahar community, a Scheduled Caste in Northern India, is socially and economically one of the most marginalized communities in India.
[iv] Highest level successfully completed, for instance, if the educational level for an individual was reported to be primary, it was assumed that the individual had completed 5 years of schooling.
[v] The Dalits Still Untouchable by Ajith Kumar Jha (indiatodayin, 3 February 2016)
[vi] Annual report of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (Government of India 2009), The highest number of manual scavengers was in Uttar Pradesh (2,13,975), followed by Madhya Pradesh (81,307), Maharashtra (64,785), Gujarat (64195), Andhra Pradesh (45,822) and Assam (40,413).
[vii] Crime in India, National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB).