A woman wearing a purple and yellow patterned sari stands against a light blue wall. She is holding a wooden staff in her right hand. The scene is lit with natural light, creating shadows on the wall and ground.

# Poverty and Discrimination Among Women

from  
Communities  
Discriminated on  
Work and Descent



Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD)  
2024



**Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD)**, founded in 2019, is a platform to voice the rights and entitlements of the communities in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America discriminated based on work and descent. GFoD aims for full realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent and to ensure access to sustainable development goals (SDGs).

<https://globalforumcdwd.org/>

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Author: **GFOD**

Lead Researcher: **Simona Tortocoi**

Research Contribution: **Naveen Gautam and Dinesh Johankutty**

Report Design: **Sajana J**

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*from*

**Communities Discriminated  
On Work And Descent**





Leela Gujrati, sweeper at Government school, Pakistan

Photo by GFOD Team



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## Chapter 1

# Who are Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD)

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Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) is the UN terminology used in international contexts to describe the systemic marginalization experienced by certain communities like Roma in Europe, Dalits in Asia, Burakumin in Japan, Haratin in Africa, Quilombola in Brazil due to their caste or similar inherited forms of social status, often linked to stigmatized ancestral occupations or exploitative forms of labour.

Spanning continents and cultures, these communities are among the most marginalized and excluded in terms of political, social, and economic development. The umbrella term to describe these communities is communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD). They endure stigmatization associated with “impurity,” uncleanness, or pollution,” resulting in segregation, endogamy, limited access to public services and infrastructure, harassment and violence including sexual violence against women and girls and the risk of slavery or bonded labour.

Women from these communities, in particular, experience the triple burden of descent, class, and gender - leading to further systemic exclusion and often tying them to performing sexual labour. Despite numbering over 270 million individuals globally, constituting a population equivalent to the world’s fifth-largest nation, CDWD

remain largely invisible and unrecognized by the international community, including the United Nations. While racism is a discrimination or prejudice based on skin color or ethnicity, descent-based discrimination is based on a wider spectrum of social and ancestral backgrounds, encompassing factors beyond race alone.

SPANNING CONTINENTS AND CULTURES, THESE COMMUNITIES ARE AMONG THE MOST MARGINALIZED AND EXCLUDED IN TERMS OF POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

Moreover, DWD mostly emerges within communities who share the same race and ethnicity. For instance, the Mandinka, Hausa or Wolof ethnic groups in Africa exhibit caste systems related to descent or occupation. In some other cases, descent-based discrimination can overlap with racism, especially in societies where certain racial or ethnic groups are associated with specific descent-based identities such as Quilombola

in Brazil or Haratin in Mauritania.

CDWD are different from minorities under the UN classification and as such the human rights protections guaranteed under the UN such as through the Declarations on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities does not reflect the size and nature of the types of discrimination faced by DWD as they do not revolve around language, ethnicity, nationality or religion and do not always represent a numerical minority within a country (Haratin, for instance, makeup over 45 percent of the population of Mauritania).

## Chapter 2

# Introduction

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Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) affects more than 270 million people worldwide. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) can be found on all continents: Dalit communities in South Asia and Buraku in Japan, Roma communities in Europe, Haratin, Osu and other communities in West Africa and Quilombola or Palenque communities in Latin America. DWD is a unique type of discrimination that takes the form of social exclusion based on inherited status and ancestral occupation.

DWD is often associated with notions of “purity and pollution” and practices of untouchability. Consequently, CDWD are experience harassment and violence on a daily basis from institutions, governments and broader society including discrimination in accessing employment, education, healthcare, housing, water and sanitation and other basic services. CDWD are often bound by bonded labour or modern/ancestral slavery practices.

Women from Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) are the most vulnerable groups in terms of social, economic, and political development. They experience intersectional discrimination and oppression because of overlapping social constructs of ability, age, work, caste, class, and gender. CDWD women and girls face heightened marginalization due to cross-cutting,

**CDWD WOMEN AND GIRLS FACE HEIGHTENED MARGINALIZATION DUE TO CROSS-CUTTING, INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THEIR CDWD IDENTITY AND THEIR GENDER.**

intersectional discrimination as a consequence of their CDWD identity and their gender. It is not uncommon for CDWD women and girls to be bound by sexual slavery regimes.

The marginalization and extreme poverty of CDWD women often means that as a means of survival they engage in waste collection, sex work and begging. They often face economic marginalization due to factors such as racism, sexism, and classism. Limited access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources can push these women into precarious economic situations. Economic vulnerability increases the likelihood of exploitation. Discriminated backgrounds often result in limited social support networks for women, leaving them more isolated and vulnerable to exploitation.

An immediate challenge in addressing the human rights violations faced by CDWD women is the lack of disaggregated data to strengthen focused policy making at the regional and global level. Making progress towards greater inclusion of CDWD women and girls is not only a human rights imperative, but the recognition of their existence and addressing the challenges is paramount in ensuring that CDWD women are able to access education, health services, social benefits and employment opportunities.

Both poverty and gender inequality represent distinct forms of social injustice, posing significant threats to human rights, individual well-being, and the realization of one's full potential in life, as emphasized in the human development approach.

Poverty and gender are intertwined, and in the past decade, there has been a growing use of the term 'feminization of poverty' to describe the increasing proportion of women among those living in poverty, especially women discriminated on work and descent (such as Dalit, Roma, Quilombola, Burakumin).

Some of the factors contributing to the feminization of poverty include intersectional discrimination, distribution of resources within households influenced by patriarchal values, lower rates of education and employment caused by systemic discrimination, unequal access to property, inadequate childcare, segregation in education, lack of access to digitalization etc.

Most CDWD communities are poor, voiceless, and landless and stand at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Poverty is considered one of the main reasons for exploitation. However, their caste intersecting with class, religion, and geographic location constructs a helpless position that limits them to the least-paying jobs and traps them in the vicious cycle of poverty and discrimination. CDWD women and girls are among the most deprived, facing segregation, social exclusion, discrimination and

unequal access to education, training and employment, among a host of other fields. CDWD lagged other women and girls in all development parameters. Even though most countries have a solid anti-discrimination legal framework in place, it is still indisputable that CDWD women and girls face discrimination in every segment of life.

CDWD women and girls face systemic discrimination that prevents them from accessing services and institutional protection in cases of targeted violence. Patterns of violence and discrimination against women and girls across the CDWD communities are similar and were examined vis-à-vis states' obligations to comply with anti-discrimination and anti-violence frameworks, such as national legislations, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), among others.

The mechanisms to access justice exist across several national contexts, however CDWD women and girls remain invisible as a distinct category and the existing mechanisms are not considered sufficient.

Most strikingly, there are several bottlenecks in the effective implementation of these protective laws and policies. CDWD women and girls have limited access to equality bodies and compensation mechanisms, and this is reflected in the limited information that CDWD women have when it comes to accessing these mechanisms.

***CDWD women and girls face systemic discrimination that prevents them from accessing services and institutional protection in cases of targeted violence.***





Dalit women in a tea garden of Moulvibazar district

Photo by Sultan Md. Salauddin

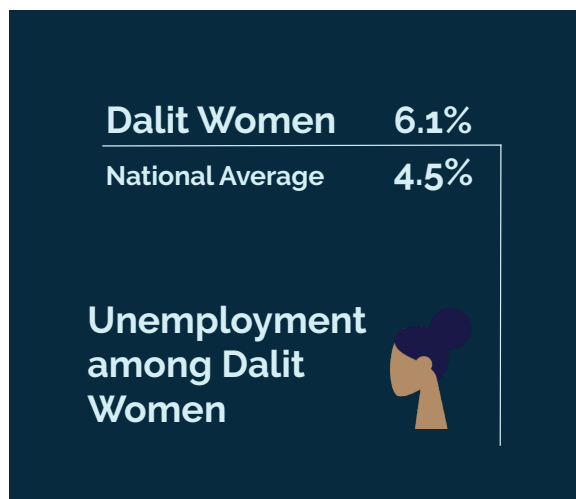


## Chapter 3

# The Situation of Dalit Women in Asia

In India, poverty and caste-based discrimination contribute to child labour, particularly among Dalit families. India has many child laborers aged 5-14, accounting for 3.9 percent of the country's total child population. These workers work in various sectors, including agriculture, household industry, and others.

Statistics show higher unemployment among Dalit women and poor health indicators. For example, unemployment among Dalit women (6.1 percent), is more than the national average of 4.5 percent. In terms of health, the average lifespan of Dalit women is comparatively much shorter, and the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is significantly higher than the national average (about 27 percent). The intersection of being a Dalit woman coupled with poverty and economic vulnerabilities means women are forced into human trafficking, and forms of sexualized ritualistic slavery such as the Devadasi system. Forced marriages, particularly of underage girls, are reported across the country, driven by gender imbalances and male-to-female ratios, with girls often trafficked from DWD communities in poorer regions to compensate for the deficit.



### Bedia Community in Central India

Bedia community has been engaged in singing and dancing as 'rai' folk artists. It is mentioned in colonial literature that Bedia were a nomadic tribe and often engaged in criminal activities too. After the end of monarchy and change in the laws of the state, Bedias had nothing left for their survival. Therefore, Bedia women engaged in prostitution. Prostitution gradually became their primary source of livelihood. They trained their daughters to become prostitutes in the future. Girls were introduced into this profession as soon as they reached puberty. These girls worked at dance bars and also as professional sex workers in metro cities and villages. Their fathers and brothers worked as pimps/agents for the girls and their clients. Their families survived on the female's earnings. Bedia community inhabits many villages of Madhya Pradesh and central India. Since these villages are close to the city, customers find it easy to visit prostitutes regularly, and occasionally prostitutes also visit a customer on demand. Bedia women have been vulnerable victims of their community's traditional and cultural practices. Prostitution has a social stigma and is seen as immoral by other communities. Thus, Bedias are never accepted by other communities due to their disreputable professional practices.

Rana, U., Sharma, D. & Ghosh, D. Prostitution in northern Central India: an ethnographical study of Bedia community. *Int. j. anthrop. ethnol.* 4, 2 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-020-0027-5>



A 2016 study found that over 60% of women and girls in Tamil Nadu's spinning mills were Dalits, and 88% of women workers were under 18 years old. Nearly 5 million sanitation workers, mostly women, are employed in India, mainly in municipal solid waste collection, road sweeping, and cleaning school toilets. Various caste communities that are a part of the CDWD tend to be generationally involved in different forms of sex work, often hidden under religious traditions, traditional practices/artforms.

Oppressed caste communities (Ex untouchables/Dalits) such as Nat Community, Perna community, Bacchara community among others are excluded DWD communities where families are socially involved and economically dependent on sex work. Women born into families of these caste communities are forced into prostitution at puberty, earning bread for the family. In many "performer" communities such as Kolhati and Bediya communities, women engage in Drama (Nautanki)/Dance performances, their bodies are sexualized in dance performances, and they are forced to satiate the sexual hunger of men.

Forced marriages for marital relations and progeny through bride trafficking are prevalent in India where minor girls – majority of whom are likely from CDWD – are purchased from poorer backgrounds and sold for marriage in states with skewed sex ratios. Moreover, an estimated 1.2 million children are exploited in sex trade. In India's textile and clothing industry, Tamil Nadu, a state in Southern India, produces between 40 to 65 percent of India's yarns using the slave labour of women and girls recruited through a system called "Sumangali" scheme.

The Committee of Experts on the Applications of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) International Labour Organisation, notes from the observations made by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Garment Labour Union (GLU), received on 9 September and 22 October 2015 respectively, that the Sumangali scheme (marriage assistance scheme for girls and young women), which has been prevalent for over two decades, applies to fixed term labour arrangements for young women, mainly between the ages of 15–25 years, employed in spinning mills in Tamil Nadu. Under this scheme, a significant portion of the wage is withheld until workers complete their tenure of the contract which ranges

from three to five years. There are 1,600 mills in Tamil Nadu with a work force of 400,000 of which 60 per cent of girls and young women, mainly Dalit (scheduled castes) and tribal girls from remote and rural areas, are vulnerable to the practices of the Sumangali scheme.

The Committee also notes from the ITUC's and GLU's observations that the Sumangali scheme is a form of bonded labour practice as it relates to practices such as denial of minimum wages; withholding wages; misusing provisions of the Apprenticeship Act of 1961 by not regularizing the apprentices as regular workers whereby they are denied the benefits in place for regular workers; exploitative working conditions (abusive, excessive working hours and confinement within the factory premises); extremely poor living conditions (in the factory hostels resembling labour camps, with severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and from keeping any contact with family and outside world); and deceptive and discriminatory recruitment practices.

## **SANITATION WORK IN INDIA IS PREDOMINANTLY AND HISTORICALLY LINKED TO CASTE, WITH 98% OF SANITATION WORKERS BELONGING TO DALIT COMMUNITIES.**

The Committee encourages the Government to continue to take measures to ensure that women and young girls are protected from practices amounting to forced labour in textile mills in Tamil Nadu.

Moreover, despite the recommendations made by ILO and the ruling of the Supreme Court to abolish the system and legalize the service with proper remuneration to female employees the illicit practice continues to exist. Sanitation work in India is predominantly and historically linked to caste, with 98% of sanitation workers belonging to Dalit communities. The work varies across urban and rural areas, with its most hazardous forms of work concentrated on removal of urban waste. Despite the ban on manual scavenging, engagement of human labour in manually handling excreta and other wastes is still prevalent in India.

Nearly 5 million sanitation workers, mostly women, are employed in India, mainly in local government operated (municipal) solid waste collection, road sweeping, and cleaning school toilets. The sanitation workers come from Dalit sub-castes (castes within a caste) and face further exclusion from within the Dalit community due to the nature of their occupation being stigmatized as 'unclean' and 'polluting'.

Many sanitation workers have died due to the toxic and hazardous nature of the work, often performed without proper protective equipment. In July (2023), the Indian government said that 339 people had died in the past five years while cleaning sewers and septic tanks.

Another report by the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) - a government-appointed organisation that oversees the conditions of sanitation workers - says that 928 sewer workers died between 1993 and 2020, with the states of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat reporting the highest casualties. Even this could be an undercount - most of the affected workers are hired on contract, which makes it easier for authorities or the people who hired them to not claim responsibility. In Pakistan, women of DWD communities are at high risk of forced marriage. Gender intersecting with class, caste, religion, geographical location makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Incidents of forced conversion by getting DWD women married to Muslim men is common. They are either deceived into prospects of having a better life after conversion or kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam and married, including sometimes being abandoned. These incidents are under reported and if reported, hardly any girl or woman recovered to her home because it is made a religious issue. The myriad vulnerabilities of DWD women means they are targets of sexual violence.

Extreme vulnerabilities and dire poverty means DWD communities including Dalits, Christians and other lower caste Hindus are forced to take up forms of labour that are often stigmatized by the broader community as being unclean and polluted. In parallel, government municipalities who also strongly believe that these forms of work must and should be performed only by CDWD communities are ready to assign work such as manual scavenging, street and sewer cleaning, and waste removal, carcass disposal and leather tannery to DWD communities who have no other option but to take up these forms of labour as other alternate forms are

closed to them. It is truly a vicious cycle of discrimination and marginalization leading to entrenched forms of poverty and a flagrant violation of their human rights by respective State Governments.

According to the Global Slavery Index 2018 about 3,186,000 people in Pakistan are living in slavery like conditions. Different reports suggest that 80-90% of bonded laborers are scheduled caste. Taking reference from Shah 2007 which shows that 84% of bonded laborers are scheduled caste communities, it is estimated that 2,676,240 DWD communities are involved in modern slavery. Most of these are women from DWD communities. Majority of DWD communities in Pakistan are involved in low paid and less respected jobs such as farming and cleaning.

## **GENDER INTERSECTING WITH CLASS, CASTE, RELIGION, GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION MAKES WOMEN FROM CDWD VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION.**

Bangladesh, like other South Asian countries including India and Pakistan, have similar social structures of the caste system, that defines the structural hierarchies in the social systems. The Dalits are the major DWD communities in Bangladesh. They live in absolute poverty and slave-like conditions. In Bangladesh, caste discrimination affects both the Hindu and the Muslim population, perpetuating poverty among these communities. While Hindu Dalits are often categorised as Harijans, Muslim Dalits are classified as Arzals.

Bangladesh is home to 6.5 million Dalits, at least half of them are women. The vulnerability of Dalit women and their weak socio-economic conditions and disadvantages makes them targets of forced prostitution and sex trafficking. The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children on their country visit to Bangladesh from 31 October to 9 November 2022, highlighted concerns about Dalit children who face discrimination and violence and may be at heightened risk of child trafficking, in particular those living in street situations.





Woman working at her business, Nepal.  
Photo by GFOD Team



Dalit Women Training on Local Self Governance, India  
Photo by GFOD Team

Whilst In Bangladesh, the majority of Dalits are engaged in cleaning work. The stigma associated with this type of work, often seen as indecent, drives Dalit women to work in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry.

The Ready-Made Garment RMG industry in Bangladesh is rife with extreme labour exploitation, unsafe factories, prone to building collapse, and subject to anti-union discrimination and violence. The deprivation of labour rights and highly exploitative working conditions in Bangladesh's garment supply chains are akin to forced labour. The evidence indicates recruitment through debt bondage, trafficking, and child labour.

The withholding of wages, long working hours with production targets, threats, intimidation, and abuse are commonly reported.

In Nepal, out of a population of 26 million, civil society organizations, NGOs and Dalit organizations estimate that approximately 4,5 million Nepalis are Dalits, while the national census counts only about 3 million.

The national index of empowerment and inclusion reveal Dalit women to be the most marginalized, much worse off than Dalit men. As women, they have no control over resources such as land, housing or money. When given the opportunity, Dalit women voice their concern over being deprived of these livelihood options as well as lack of access to education for their children.

Apart from being forced into the most demeaning jobs, Dalit women are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and are often victims of trafficking and forced sexual labour. Amongst the Dalit communities themselves, the women of the Badi group are largely looked down upon as sex workers.

In Nepal the Haruwa-Charuwa system is a forced-labour system based on debt bondage, prevalent in the agricultural sector. There exist traditional systems of slavery referred to as Haruwa-Charuwa. Haruwa means ploughman or tiller, and charuwa means cattle herder. Men work as tillers within Haruwa and Charuwa families, and women, children, and the elderly work as cattle herders or domestic servants. Two-thirds of Haruwa and Charuwa households are Dalits, traditionally considered untouchables. Forced labour is most common in agriculture and forestry. Mostly, forced labour is practiced in the Terai region of Nepal.

**APART FROM BEING FORCED INTO THE MOST DEMEANING JOBS, DALIT WOMEN ARE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ARE OFTEN VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND FORCED SEXUAL LABOUR.**

Landless, Dalit, and untouchable communities are forced by their circumstances to borrow money from wealthy landowners to meet their subsistence needs. Generations of a family get trapped in this cycle of loan repayment – working as laborers without pay for the landlords. In Nepal's far western Terai region, bonded labour exists in Brick Industries, foreign employment, adult entertainment industries, and child enslavement in embroidery industries.





CDWD women from West Africa

Photo by GFOD Team



## Chapter 4

# The Situation of Roma Women in Europe

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In Europe, Roma are the largest CDWD with an estimated population of 10-12 million, including around 6 million in the European Union. It is not uncommon for Romani people to be referred to as nothing more than “annoying” beggars, welfare dependents, prostitutes, and thieves. For example, in Slovakia many Roma women are victims of human trafficking, forced marriages, child prostitution or become involuntary prostitutes either in Slovakia or abroad. Usually, women and girls are forcibly taken from the eastern part of Slovakia, where poverty prevails, and a high number of Roma communities are vividly present.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency 2021 data, four out of five Roma live at risk of poverty. On average, 80% of Roma in the surveyed countries were at risk of poverty in 2021. They live in households with an equivalised income after social transfers that is less than 60% of the median income in their country. Some 83 % of Roma children below the age of 18 are at risk of poverty. One out of every second Roma lived in a household that cannot afford to pay for at least four out of the following nine items: unexpected expenses; a one-week annual holiday away from home; a meal involving meat, chicken, or fish every second day; the adequate heating of a dwelling; material goods such as a washing machine; a color television; a telephone; a car; and payment arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills, hire purchase instalments or other loan payments).

Similarly, Roma children (0–17) face severe material deprivation. Every second Roma child (54%) lives in a household in severe material deprivation. A 2022 study from Turkey shows that an estimated 2.5 to 5 million Roma people living in Turkey suffer from extreme levels of poverty and nutrition. Most Roma people in Turkey

primarily eat carbohydrates - pasta, potatoes, and bread. Most said they didn’t even eat meat once a year. This problem is most acute in young children aged zero to 5 - over half of this age group experiences severe nutritional or starvation issues.

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Roma women’s experience of racism results in unequal access to health care services and poor living conditions. Environmental racism creates bigger issues for women since they are often care providers at home and engaged in domestic duties such as cooking, household work, and fetching drinking water. Disparities in access to tap water and sanitation become a source of gender inequalities, as in most cases they create hardship for women and girls, who are more

frequently responsible for collecting water.

Moreover, it increases exposure to poverty and exclusion among Roma as the need to buy bottled water contributes towards financial hardship. A higher level of hazardous environmental conditions increases the potential for miscarriage and stillbirths, neonatal deaths, and high rates of maternal death during pregnancy and after childbirth.

In order to empower Roma women to access the labour market and become economically independent, absolute poverty has to be fought in all its aspects. Those who did not have an opportunity to gain a proper education and who due to the lack of support and information did not manage to leave the cycle of intergenerational poverty, still live in poor living conditions and in homes that do not satisfy the minimum space for the number of members, in many cases lacking electricity, running water, a toilet or bathroom; become asylum seekers at some point, in particular those without EU nationality.





Roma women leading a protest against discrimination

Photo via Ergo Network

## Chapter 5

# The Situation of CDWD Women in Africa

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Nearly 3.8 million men, women, and children experience forced labour in Africa, particularly in the mining, agriculture, plantations, fishing, domestic work, entertainment, and hotel industry. African job seekers misled by traffickers with false promises are subjected to forced labour abroad, such as in the Gulf States.

Human trafficking poses a grave concern in Africa, serving as a significant source region for victims who are trafficked to various parts of the world, including Western Europe and the Middle East. Additionally, domestic, or intra-regional trafficking is prevalent in specific areas, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Women and children constitute a large proportion of the victims in Sub-Saharan Africa, enduring exploitation in sectors like agriculture, domestic work, forced prostitution, child soldiers, and in forced marriages.

Sexual slavery in Africa is deeply rooted in cultural and social factors. In Ghana, Togo, and Benin, virgin girls

become sexual and domestic slaves, given to appease deities in the practice of “Trokosi.” Prostitution, often tied to caste-based exclusion, leaves many vulnerable to exploitation. Nigeria has “baby farms” where women are forcibly impregnated to deliver children for adoption, labour, and exploitation. Togo has “Devissime markets” for trafficking young girls, while in Ghana, “Kayayee” girls endure exploitative conditions as head porters in city marketplaces.

Armed groups like al-Shabaab and Boko Haram abduct girls, subjecting them to forced marriage, sexual servitude, and bearing children for members.

These practices primarily affect Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia. South Sudan has also seen forced marriages as compensation for inter-ethnic killings, further darkening the landscape of sexual slavery in Africa.

***Women and children constitute a large proportion of the victims of human trafficking in Sub-Saharan Africa, enduring exploitation in sectors like agriculture, domestic work, forced prostitution, child soldiers, and in forced marriages.***



'Trokosi' is a distinct form of religion-based sexual slavery, where young virgin girls are offered as sexual and domestic slaves to appease a deity for the wrongdoings of a family member. These girls serve priests for life and any children born from these relationships also become the property of the priest.

**Baby Farms:** Women are often trafficked into 'baby factories/ farms', where they are forcibly impregnated and made to deliver children who are sold to families seeking to adopt, or to other traffickers for the purposes of labour or sexual exploitation. Evidence of the same has been found in Nigeria among other countries. Pregnant women and girls living in poverty are also targeted by traffickers, who sell the babies to couples or middlemen.

**"Small girls" markets:** NGOs and government officials have reported the existence of 'small girls markets' or 'child markets' in Togo.

**Kayayee:** In Ghana, young girls and women known as Kayayee work as head porters in city marketplaces, carrying loads for vendors and shoppers for a fee. Initially done by young men using carts as a temporary livelihood, the practice shifted to young women in the 1970s, accepting lower fees. The number of Kayayee has grown over time, leading to decreased wages (10 to 30 cedis or US\$ 3-9 daily). They face challenges like forced evictions, health issues, work injuries, physical violence, sexual abuse, unplanned pregnancies, illegal abortions, and human trafficking. Some seek protection from older street boys through sex or money, and some are at risk of child prostitution and trafficking abroad. They belong primarily to the Mamprusi and Muslim communities, with some from other ethnic backgrounds, regions, and religions.

**Forced Marriage:** Non-state armed groups, terrorist and militant groups like al-Shabaab, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa, among others, are known to abduct or traffic girls, often as young as 13 years for forced marriage and sexual servitude with group members. As sexual and domestic slaves, they are also required to bear children for the so-called husband. They not only lose their childhood, but live in constant fear, drudgery, and experience rape, assault, trauma, and coerced religious conversion - till they are freed or manage to escape.

Countries severely affected by such forced marriages include Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, DRC, Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia, among others. Girls who manage to escape face stigma, abuse, fear for life and struggle for livelihood and support. Forced marriage of girls to compensate for inter-ethnic killings have been reported in South Sudan. While reports and studies do not delve into the ethnic identity of girls, many girls abducted by Boko Haram are Christians.

The challenge in properly identifying this information as related to CDWD is due to the lack of government reporting and disaggregated data. However, based on our information from local Rights Experts, African NGO partners and sites visits made by GfOD members to Africa, we strongly believe that people who experience these forms of discrimination come from communities discriminated on work and descent.

## GIRLS WHO MANAGE TO ESCAPE FORCED MARRIAGES FACE STIGMA, ABUSE, FEAR FOR LIFE AND STRUGGLE FOR LIVELIHOOD AND SUPPORT.

According to government data released in 2023, more than 2.3 million people in Mauritania live in multidimensional poverty, accounting for 56.9% of the population. This means they are deprived in various aspects, including education, health, living standards, and employment, with an average deprivation rate of 56.3% across these indicators. The most vulnerable group comprises children aged 0 to 17, who make up over half of the population (50.7%). Among them, 61.9% live in multidimensional poverty, the highest rate compared to other age groups. Rural areas are particularly affected, with 77.1% of the population living in multidimensional poverty, making them significant areas of concern that require attention from the government. Haratin women in Mauritania are disproportionately affected by poverty.

In Nigeria, poverty and lack of access to employment contributes to a higher likelihood of involvement in sex work. Nigerian girls seeking employment as domestic helpers to help pay for schooling are also subjected to domestic servitude. This is characteristic of girls in the CDWD, especially the Osu communities in Nigeria. They move into cities where their status is unknown and engage in prostitution to survive. Lack of access to quality education in the Osu communities in Nigeria limits the employment options of girls, therefore increasing their likelihood of engagement in the sex industry especially outside their communities to earn a living. Girls from the Osu communities, due to stigmatization within and around their communities and lack of proper education tend to be easily lured to migrate for prostitution.

Obtaining disaggregated data on women and girls affected by prostitution in Nigeria is challenging due to the clandestine and stigmatized nature of the sex industry and CDWD.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, with over 16.18 million people (66.1%) living in multidimensional poverty. Without disaggregated data, it is hard to estimate how many of these people come from CDWD. Experiences of Rights Experts from different regions show that many formerly enslaved families live in extreme poverty, forcing them to remain in a passive form of slavery.

Slavery persists primarily among groups at the intersections of caste, poverty, and other factors in rural areas, where limited income-generating opportunities hinder their self-sufficiency and ability to support their families. Their restricted options stem from being denied access to education as children and being forced into labour. Moreover, the constant threat of physical violence since childhood has instilled a sense of powerlessness, impeding their ability to assert their rights. In Niger and Nigeria, young Tuareg girls born into slavery are sold as “Wahayu”- the unofficial fifth wife, to wealthy Hausa

individuals. ‘Wahaya’ is a distinct form of descent-based “sexual slavery” of women and girls, which involves the sale of young girls born in slavery in Tuareg communities of Niger, to wealthy Hausa individuals as an unofficial fifth wife. The girls, often under 15 years, are forcibly taken from the slave-parents in Tuareg households, since as slaves themselves, they too have no say over their children. The practice persists in Niger and Nigeria, despite being punishable.

In the Gambia, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims and traffickers exploit victims from the Gambia abroad, according to the U.S. Department of State’s 2022 Trafficking in person’s report the Gambia Within the Gambia, women, girls, and, to a lesser extent, boys are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour in street and domestic work. Traffickers recruit women and children from West African countries for sex trafficking in the Gambia. Some families encourage their children to endure such exploitation for financial gain. This is most common and prevalent amongst the DWD communities that are exploited the most.

Within the Mbororos community in Central Africa, there existed a slave-caste system, wherein domestic slavery was highly prevalent. The Mbororos, estimated to number over a million and accounting for around 12% of Cameroon’s population, were significantly affected by the transatlantic slave trade, which sourced slaves from Cameroon. Over 10.9 million of the 26.5 million population (41% of population) live in multidimensional poverty, with 24.6% living in severe multidimensional poverty. Over 37.5% of the population live below the national poverty line (2022). Over 155,000 people out of the 26.5 million total population are victims of modern slavery. Since the population data is not captured by ethnicity, caste and race, there are no official records of the status of CDWD in Cameroon.

**SLAVERY PERSISTS  
PRIMARILY AMONG  
GROUPS AT THE  
INTERSECTIONS OF CASTE,  
POVERTY, AND OTHER  
FACTORS IN RURAL AREAS.**



## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

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Financing needs for poverty eradication and sustainable development remain significant. Both poverty and gender inequality represent distinct forms of social injustice, posing significant threats to human rights, individual well-being, and the realization of one's full potential in life, as emphasized in the human development approach. Despite ongoing efforts to advance gender equality, all women continue to occupy an underprivileged position, consequently facing an increased susceptibility to poverty. Women grappling with poverty encounter a dual risk and injustice, both based on their gender and economic status.

The likelihood of women living in poverty is multiplied with intersectional characteristics such as belonging to a decent community. The unequal distribution of resources within households influenced by patriarchal values, a lower rate of education and employment caused by systemic discrimination, unequal access to property, inadequate childcare, segregation in education, lack of access to digitalization are just some examples of factors which make women more susceptible to poverty and all the negative consequences resulting from it including life expectancy.

As per the Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, UN agencies, funds, and programmes commit to integrate anti-discrimination into the work of the UN system at global, regional, and country level, including through coordination mechanisms. This commitment is also inherently embedded in the Call to Action for Human Rights, as well as the human rights-based approach to programming and a moral imperative of the Leaving No One Behind principle.

## Chapter 7

# General Recommendations

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- **We call for a recognition as Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD)** and the hierarchical systems of oppression surrounding these communities. We urge the Commission on the Status of Women to recognize issues of women, girls and gender-diverse people from Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) i.e. Dalit communities in Asia, the Haratine in Africa, the Roma/Romani people in Europe, the Burakumin in Japan, and the Quilombolas in Brazil, adopt an intersectional approach in all programmes and policies both within the United Nations (UN) and government policies.
- **We call for the creation of a UN special mechanism such as a Special Rapporteur or Working Group** mandate in the context of existing gaps and the urgent need for accountability for human rights abuses against CDWD globally, and continuing discrimination and exclusion. United Nations mechanisms and processes such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Rapporteurs need to adequately address challenges related to CDWD women, girls and gender-diverse people.
- **We call for a U N Declaration on the Rights of CDWD, adopted by all states, thereby enshrining the rights of CDWD**, and ensuring global protection and legitimacy of all CDWD across the globe. We urge the UN mechanisms to adhere to key human rights standards and adopt a Declaration for the rights of CDWD, highlighting the intersecting marginalization faced by women, girls and gender-diverse people and ensure it consistently reflects in national laws, policies and practices, and in the programmes and activities of the UN through thematic research, awareness-raising and capacity-building.
- **We recommend that member states use the opportunity and platform provided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** to make recommendations that address rights violations faced by CDWD women, girls and gender-diverse people and call for sustained action within countries to combat, in all its forms, the discrimination and marginalization faced. We would urge recommendations to be made in a clear and targeted manner following the SMART framework, so as to ensure maximum impact.
- **We urge the Commission on the Status of Women to review the CSW mandate** — encompassing normative support, UN system coordination, and operational activities which are imperative to mobilise urgent and sustained action to advance the rights of CDWD women, girls and gender-diverse people. In addition, we call upon CSW to develop capacities of states, civil society, and UN personnel to engage and integrate intersectionality from the lens of CDWD women, girls and gender-diverse people in all its policies and programming.
- **Advance the participation of women, girls and gender-diverse people from CDWD in UN processes.** The UN must maintain an active policy to promote and facilitate the participation of CDWD women, girls and gender-diverse people's representatives in all UN processes, including regional and international intergovernmental forums. This will afford opportunities for CDWD voices to be heard on a wide range of issues affecting their lives.
- Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD) calls for the design and implementation of programs to increase public education on descent based discriminatory practices and calls on all types of institutions and civil society organizations to implement such learnings from the classrooms, shop-floors and workspaces. **We call for justice and the protection of CDWD rights to be free from discrimination, violence, and exclusion.**







Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on  
Work and Descent (GFoD)  
2024



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<https://www.globalforumcdwd.org>

Suite 10A, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

X: @CastoutSlavery

Email: [gfod@globalforumcdwd.org](mailto:gfod@globalforumcdwd.org)