**Questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council resolution 53/6 on human rights and climate change**

1. Please describe through concrete examples and stories the impacts of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights in your country. Please indicate whether the impact was exceptional or whether an example of many similarly situated cases. Please estimate the number of cases that may be similar in your country.

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) was founded in March 2000 to advocate for Dalit human rights and to raise awareness of Dalit issues nationally and internationally.  IDSN focuses on several countries in South Asia, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Caste discrimination (especially in South Asia) is the root cause of many human rights violations – including discrimination in disaster. South Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate shocks. More than half of all South Asians, or 750 million people in eight countries — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka — were affected by one or more climate-related disasters in the last two decades. The changing climate could sharply diminish living conditions for up to 800 million people in a region that already has some of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Caste discrimination (especially in South Asia) is the root cause of many human rights violations – including discrimination in disaster. Caste blindness, or a lack of knowledge of the realities of caste and its consequences, will undermine even progressive, responsible businesses in their efforts to protect the most marginalised and excluded communities.

This submission has gathered information from our members in caste-affected countries and gives an overview of the climate change and justice issues faced by Dalit communities in South Asia.

Dalits are more vulnerable to both natural and climatic disasters compared to dominant ‘*so-called upper’* caste people due to their marginalised social position; the location of their homes, usually in marginal lands on the periphery of settlements; their vulnerable occupations, such as rubbish and sewage disposal, casual farm labour and lagoon fishing; and the nature of their housing – Dalits often have little or no land rights.

Below are some examples of the problems that Dalit’s face surrounding climate change.

* Dalit women and girls are prevented from receiving emergency disaster aid or accessing shelters or kitchens due to perceived ‘untouchability’ and the internalised social norms or fears of violence.
* Dalit women and girls are excluded or marginalised from the main village centres and community structures and therefore their needs are not part of formal data gathering or decision-making.
* Dalit women and girls face problems of registering in relief camps.
* Dalit women and girls often receive relief materials of a poorer quality or lesser quantity compared to other recipients.
* Dalit men and women are exploited for their labour to remove corpses and debris from disaster-affected areas.
* Dalit losses are less visible as their work or assets are not formally recognised: e.g., informal housing, fishing boats and nets used by Dalits that are washed away or destroyed by super cyclones and Tsunamis.
* Dalit women work in informal work, often in supportive day labour to official ‘casted’ occupations, is impacted by the loss of formal work in disasters, and sometimes by the response efforts that might supplant the role of Dalit day labourers.
* Dalit women are not consulted or included in decision-making in needs assessment and appropriate emergency aid provision that meets their needs. The limited presence or total absence of Dalits in local governance bodies further exacerbates the lack of engagement and consultation.
* Systemic problems of Dalit marginalisation and exclusion from formal development (like in owning land, land titles for homes, official licences for fishing etc.) undermine their ability to access opportunities for recovery of homes or livelihoods in disaster recovery programmes. Houses are often built in low lying and disaster-prone areas as Dalits are relegated to the outskirts of communities.
* Lack of appropriate assessments of loss or damage of Dalit property, crops and other assets or exclusion of their names in the compensation lists of the authorities further excludes them from receiving their entitlements.

1. Please describe any relevant quantitative and qualitative data as well as mechanisms and tools to measure, monitor, report on, and evaluate the impacts of loss and damage, including from extreme weather and slow-onset events, on the full enjoyment of human rights. Please take into account, inter alia, the disproportionate effects on women and girls, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, persons living in poverty and others in vulnerable situations.

As mentioned above, it is very difficult to measure and monitor climate change’s impact on Dalit and Dalit communities due to the informal nature of their livelihoods and housing. The lack of disaggregated data collected by governments, results in a lack of clear information of even the Dalit population.

In Nepal, IDSN’s partners have recorded more than 33 Dalit deaths in the last two years due to caste discrimination. Dalits have limited access to natural resources although they are forest dwellers and forest workers. Dalits in Nepal still do not have access to safe drinking water, or river and irrigation systems for their farms. Land and water resources are being monopolised by the dominant castes and government policies are not Dalit-friendly.

India has faced both drought (West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh) and flooding (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh), even sometimes in the same state (Bihar). It has lost a quarter of its wheat and a third of its rice production. In India, with its grave water crisis, Dalit women are restricted from drawing water from a public well located at the foothills of Otthakadai Yanamalai, as untouchability is still practised in this village. Locals said that the well is "sacred" and more than 150 people use the water from this well for drinking purposes. In over 100 villages affected by drought in India, Dalit women are being denied access to water sources in 48.4% of villages because of segregation and untouchability practices. More than 20% of Dalits do not have access to safe drinking water.

In Bangladesh, almost 62% of Dalits live in the coastal area of south-western Bangladesh and many are dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. Due to climate change, these natural resources and occupations are disappearing. Coastal Dalit communities are frequently hit by natural disasters, destroying their mud and thatched houses, fishing boats, crops and domestic animals. As they lose their sources of income, access to education becomes unaffordable. Most Dalit girls drop out of education and around 95% are victims of child marriage. Dalits also face discrimination when accessing relief as they are intentionally not included on relief lists. When Dalits go to shelters, they can face discrimination, sexual harassment and rape.

In rural India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh ‘water riots’ are breaking out – the dominant caste women do not allow Dalit women to use government hand pumps and wells in a water crisis. Dalit women are beaten up if they try to access these institutionalised potable water sources. To escape physical violence, Dalit women walk for more than a kilometre outside of their villages to collect water exposing them to incidents of physical and sexual violence.

The vulnerable socio-economic and political conditions of Dalit women make them highly susceptible to violence and hate crime. Most of the physical and sexual violence against Dalit women goes unreported meaning that perpetrators are able to commit these crimes with impunity.

1. Please describe any specific measures, including public policies, legislation, practices, strategies, or institutional arrangements that your Government has undertaken or plans to undertake at a national, sectoral or sub-national level, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, to avert, minimise and address loss and damage, including equity-based approaches and solutions. Please also identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability, including means of implementation.

Nepal has many climate-focused pieces of legislation, including the 2017 Forest Policy 2017; there are also many climate change policies like the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) Strategies and Disaster Risks Reductions. However, while some of this legislation pays lip service to Dalit rights, they do not favour Dalits in practice. In addition, the Green Climate Fund in Nepal does not give funding to the poor and vulnerable Dalit community, and instead funds large NGOs in Nepal.

1. Please identify and share examples of promising practices and critical challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the full enjoyment of human rights in the context of loss and damage, including examples that highlight multilateral cooperation and approaches, at global and regional levels, including equity-based approaches and solutions.
2. Please provide specific recommendations, if possible, on how to address the critical challenges that have been identified, including actions to be taken at country, regional, and global levels, as well as by different groups of stakeholders, Governments, development agencies, financing institutions, and others.

**Governments**

We urge caste-affected countries to develop a SMART climate action plan with special policies focused on Dalit issues, in consultation with the Dalit community.

Governments of caste-affected countries must ensure that climate resilience of the Dalit communities is recognized, protected, and provided for in their climate frameworks.

**International**

International human rights mechanisms must prioritize and mainstream the agenda for Dalit communities within the larger climate justice ecosystem.

International NGOs and climate human rights defenders shouldelevate the concerns and perspectives of Dalits in essential climate justice dialogues around the world.

**United Nations**

Special Rapporteurs must take Dalit community issues into consideration as caste and descent-based discrimination intersects with many different mandates. Special Rapporteurs should undertake country visits to caste-affected countries and send communications to States and other actors to raise awareness of climate impacts worsened by caste.

The UN Human Rights Council often discusses the human rights implications of climate change in its regular sessions. Special sessions should be called to focus on urgent issues affecting Dalits.

The OHCHR often organises or co-organises expert meetings and workshops focusing on the intersection between human rights and climate change, gathering academics, activists, and policymakers to discuss the issue. We urge them to consider caste as a crucial element that leads to the heightened vulnerability of 260 million people around the world.

We urge the High Commissioner in their annual report on climate change to consider how climate change affects caste and descent-based discrimination communities disproportionately.

1. Please provide any additional information you believe would be useful to support climate action and justice that promotes the full enjoyment of human rights in the context of loss and damage.

1. https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/integrating-climate-and-development-in-south-asia/integrating-climate-and-development-in-south-asia-region [↑](#footnote-ref-1)