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Library Note

Debate on 1 December: International Development Policy and the Situation of Dalits

This Library Note aims to provide background reading for the debate to be held on Thursday 1 December on:

“Government proposals for international development policy, including proposals on the situation of Dalits”

This Note provides an overview of the situation of Dalits in South Asia and looks at the issue of caste-based discrimination in India. It also examines the Government’s international development policy for India, currently the largest recipient of UK development aid.

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1. Introduction

This Library Note provides an overview of the situation of the Dalits in South Asia. It explores how Dalit identity, which is based on the notion of caste, relates to other identities in South Asia. It looks at the issues facing Dalits in different countries in the region, focusing on India and the actions taken by the Indian Government to combat caste-based discrimination. The Note also examines the current Government's international development policy for India, currently the largest recipient of UK development aid.

2. Who are the Dalits and What are the Issues They Face?

The Indian National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights gives the following description of who the Dalits are in the context of the caste system in South Asia:

Historically, the caste system has formed the social and economic framework for the life of the people of India. In its essential form, this caste system involves the division of people into a hierarchy of unequal social groups where basic rights and duties are assigned based on birth and are not subject to change. Dalits are 'outcastes' falling outside the traditional four classes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Dalits are typically considered low, impure and polluting based on their birth and traditional occupation, thus they face multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and exclusion from the rest of society.

(National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights website:

<http://www.ncdhr.org.in/ncdhr2/dalit-rights-situation/dalit-rights-situation>)

The International Dalit Solidarity Network lists the following key issues affecting Dalits in the modern day:

- Bonded labour in which a person is bonded by a loan advance taken against their work, resulting in a loss of control over labour conditions and terms of work.
- Violence and inhuman treatment, such as sexual assault, rape, and naked parading, against Dalit women serving as a social mechanism to maintain their subordinate position in society.
- The forced prostitution of Dalit girls. Originally a sacred, religious practice, the dedication of girls to temples has turned into a systematic sexual abuse of young Dalit girls serving as prostitutes for dominant caste community members and subsequent auctioning into brothels.
- Discrimination against Dalits in the educational system including the segregation of Dalits in class rooms and harassment by teachers.
- Manual scavenging, a term used to describe the job of removing human excrement from dry toilets and sewers using basic tools such as thin boards, buckets and baskets, lined with sacking, carried on the head, which is a caste-based and hereditary occupation for Dalits.
- The Dalits, are often limited from equal and meaningful political participation due to the persistence of discriminatory practices and their weak economic, social and political position.
- The non-implementation of constitutional and legislative measures to protect the rights of Dalits.

(International Dalit Solidarity Network website: <http://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/key-issues/>)

The Dalits are defined in the Indian Constitution as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes list the various groups across India previously referred to as 'untouchable'.

3. Caste System and Hinduism

The issue of Dalit identity is complex. Subrata Mitra argues that the caste system should not be seen as a fixed hierarchy which spans the whole of Indian society. Rather it is one, albeit major, factor in modern Indian identity alongside religion, class and tribe.

Subrata Mitra sets out three conflicting theories for the origins of the caste system. The first theory is of a hierarchy of spiritual purity of the four varnas:

Hindu mythology ascribes the four varnas (strata in the caste system) to a mystical deity: the Brahmins sprang from his mouth, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaishya from his thighs and the Sudra from his feet.

The Dalits are defined not only as the lowest caste but as outside this hierarchy. As such they have become the victim of the label unclean or 'untouchable'. According to this ideology Dalits are polluting to those within the caste hierarchy of spiritual purity leading to their exclusion from villages to Dalit-only enclaves and their prohibition from entering temples.

The second theory is a racial approach:

... according to which caste arose out of the race contracts between light skinned Aryans and dark skinned Dravidian and the subsequent divisions were based on the purity of colour.

The third theory is that the caste system originates from tribalism and holds that caste is little more than an ordinary class society but more rigid.¹ Mitra suggests that these three theories offer alternative explanations for the caste system but work together to create a system of exclusion of Dalits.

Mary Searle-Chatterjee argues that to understand who the Dalits are one must avoid seeing caste identity as synonymous with Hinduism. She argues that the term Hindu is used inaccurately to describe people of lower caste and that Dalits are often seen as being Hindu by default.² Journalist and media campaigner Mari Marcel Thekaekara argues that the caste system exists independently of Hinduism:

Even though the caste hierarchy is a Hindu construct, conversion does not always help: Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs and Muslims often still cling to their caste identities when searching for marriage partners.

Mari Marcel Thekaekara argues that the religious basis for caste is used as a means of structuring society to the detriment of those who are not born members of the dominant

¹ Subrata Mitra, 'Caste, democracy and the politics of community formation in India' in Mary Searle-Chatterjee and Ursula Sharma (eds), *Contextualising Caste* (1994), pp 52–3

² Mary Searle-Chatterjee, 'Caste, religious and other identities' in Mary Seale-Chatterjee and Ursula Sharma (eds), *Contextualising Caste* (1994), p 153

caste which has persisted for reasons of political convenience and the expediency of the British:

Many sociologists believe the caste system in India originated as a way of dividing labour, as well as a method of exercising social control and maintaining order. Its power—and almost absolute acceptance—stems from the fact that caste derives religious sanction for India's majority from the 4,000-year-old Manu Sashtra or laws of Manu. According to this, society was divided into four broad social orders, or varnas, each arising from a certain part of the Creator's body.

... Below all these, 'Untouchables' were considered so impure and polluting that they were not even included in the system by Manu. This translated into complete exclusion from society. Their hamlets were outside the village, and they could not even talk to or walk on the same path as the other castes, much less touch them. When the British ruled in India, they left caste well alone to avoid unrest. In some ways they even reinforced it, finding Brahmins useful as an army of clerks and administrators who served the British Empire faithfully.

(Mari Marcel Thekaekara, '[Combating Caste](#)', *New Internationalist*, 1 July 2005)

In an interview published in 2005, K R Narayanan, India's first Dalit President, gave the following explanation of why caste discrimination persists in modern India:

The caste system has fundamentally been attacked by very few people. Even the lower castes found it convenient, a kind of safety system to manage, mingle in society. Everyone had someone to exploit. Though there were many challenges, no fundamental revision was ever attempted. There was a great vision at Independence but too many people found it a useful system. The opposition was basically related to land struggles and the feudal economic system in existence. Morally only Gandhi shook the system, but the economic foundations were too strong. So when it came to the question of destroying it, as far as the mind is concerned, everyone would say it is bad and we should destroy it. But the economic foundation of caste had to be uprooted and no-one really wanted to do that. Today, caste is being perpetuated by politics and politicians.

(Mari Marcel Thekaekara, '[View from the Top](#)', *New Internationalist*, 1 July 2005)

4. Dalits in South Asia

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission the caste system has been assimilated into cultures and countries outside India.³ The International Dalit Solidarity Network list India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as the key caste-affected South Asian countries.⁴

Caste-based discrimination has been identified in countries where Hinduism is not the dominant religion. For example, research from the Asian Human Rights Commission has found that primary school enrolment rates for girls belonging to lower Hindu castes in Pakistan were just 10.2 percent; the national female primary enrolment rate was given as

³ Human Rights Correspondence School, Asian Human Rights Commission, '[An Introduction of the Caste System in India and its Legal and Social Premises](#)'

⁴ International Dalit Solidarity Network, '[National Advocacy Platforms in Caste Affected South Asian Countries](#)'

48 percent. Overall, 87 percent of women from scheduled Hindu castes were illiterate, compared to 58 percent of women nationally.⁵

5. Dalits in Nepal

In Nepal the Dalits constitute between 16 to 20 percent of the population, around 4.68 million people.⁶ In the civil war between the Nepalese government and Maoist guerrillas which continued until 2007, the Dalit community appeared to take the brunt of the violence.⁷ In an interview with *New Internationalist* in 2005, Sagar Bishwakarma, President of the Dalit NGO Federation, described the situation facing Dalits in Nepal:

The current situation in Nepal with the effective suspension of democracy is very difficult for the Dalit people. We feel very insecure and unable to speak out. In the villages, people have been beaten, arrested and killed. To date, 22 Dalit activists have been arrested. One of my colleagues has been badly beaten. Around 50,000 people have been internally displaced from their homes and are living in appalling conditions. They are unable to claim even the most basic humanitarian rights; their children are unable to go to school and they cannot work.

(Sagar Bishwakarma, '[Between a Rock and a Hard Place](#)', *New Internationalist*, July 2005)

In their 2011 annual report, Minority Rights Group International note that the government of Nepal appears to be striving to erode caste-based discrimination. However, at the time of writing, a new post civil war constitution for Nepal has still to be agreed. Key to the success of any constitutional settlement, according to Minority Rights Group International, is ensuring an end to discrimination on the basis of caste including the lack of access to justice.⁸

6. Dalits in India

According to the [2001 Census of India](#) 16.2 percent of the population are members of the Scheduled Castes and 8.2 percent of population are members of the Scheduled Tribes. This means that a total of 250 million people are recognised as members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India). This figure includes Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh Dalits but does not include converts to Christianity and Islam.⁹ The Indian Government's 2007 Misra Commission, which was set up to look into situation of minorities in India, has recommended that the definition of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes should include these converts so that their rights might also be protected.¹⁰

⁵ Minority Rights Group International, *State of World's Minorities and Indigenous People 2011—Focus of Women's Rights* (July 2011), p 148

⁶ Hira Vishwakarma, 'The Dalits of Nepal and their Struggles for Social Justice', *Development* (September 2002), vol 45, no 3, p 90

⁷ Claire Colley, '[Durga Sob: Nepal's Trailblazing Dalit Feminist](#)', *New Internationalist* (May 2010)

⁸ Minority Rights Group International, *State of World's Minorities and Indigenous People 2011—Focus of Women's Rights* (July 2011), pp 146–7

⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Hidden Apartheid—Caste Discrimination against India's Untouchables* (February 2007), p 76

¹⁰ All India Christian Council press release, '[India's Government Advised to Reverse Divisive Policy Linking Assistance for Dalits to Religion](#)' (23 December 2009)

7. Violence and Discrimination Against Dalits in India

In 2010, India's National Crime Records Bureaux recorded 32,712 reported cases of crimes committed against Scheduled Castes. This is a decline of 2.6 percent on the 2009 figure of 33,594.¹¹ However, Human Rights Watch spokesperson Smita Narula argued in an interview with *National Geographic* in 2003 that many more crimes are committed but remain unreported due to the collusion of the police, village councils and government officials.¹²

Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch, gives the following example of an instance of violence against a Dalit activist and her family:

Surekha Bhotmange, a Dalit (or so-called "untouchable") member of the Hindu caste system in Maharashtra, was cooking the family evening meal on 29 September 2006 when a group of upper-caste men surrounded her home. Surekha, her 17-year-old daughter Priyanka, and two sons, 23-year-old Roshan and 21-year-old Sudhir, were dragged out of the hut. The two women were stripped, beaten and paraded through the village. The young men were beaten up so badly their faces were disfigured. All four died. Almost all of Khairlanji village witnessed this spectacle of caste vengeance. No one did much to stop it.

The attack was a retribution for previous activism. The upper-caste farmers from the area were using the Bhotmanges' land as a throughway for their tractors. The family resisted, with the help of a Dalit rights activist, Siddharth Gajbhiye. Gajbhiye himself was beaten up. Surekha Bhotmange was a witness, identifying twelve perpetrators who were then arrested. On the day that the Bhotmange family was attacked, all twelve had been released on bail. They took their ghastly revenge.

Surekha's husband, Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange, was visiting a neighbour at the time of his family's murder. He saw his family being dragged out and remained helplessly hidden, watching what happened. He was the only witness to come forward. At his village, there are only a handful of families from his Dalit caste. The rest, perpetrators or spectators, who consider themselves higher caste, did not say a word. Police arrived a few hours after the incident, but no report was filed. When a terrified Bhotmange filed a police complaint the following morning, he was initially ignored. Only when the bodies were discovered was a case registered and some arrests made. The main perpetrators, however, were not taken into custody.

For a month, photographs of the brutality circulated among Dalit rights activists. The incident, however, barely registered in the national press. In November, a protest was organised by some Dalit activists and erupted into violence. Police teams were stoned, cars set ablaze. Eventually riot police were called in, some politicians rushed to the area to promise justice, while others blamed the Naxalites (Maoist groups leading a violent insurgency in the region) for instigating the violence. Several policemen were suspended for dereliction of duty, as were the doctors who failed to file proper autopsy reports. In December, the Central Bureau of Investigation finally filed charges against eleven of those accused.

(Meenakshi Ganguly, '[India's Dalits: between atrocity and protest](#)', *Open Democracy*, 9 January 2007)

¹¹ National Crime Records Bureaux, *Crime in India 2010* (September 2011), p 109

¹² *National Geographic*, '[India's 'Untouchables' Face Violence, Discrimination](#)' (2 June 2003)

Human Rights Watch and other campaign groups give details of abuses of Dalit human rights including Dalits being prohibited from eating and drinking with others or using the same utensils. They are also prevented from entering temples and other places of religious worship. The wearing of shoes while walking through a higher caste's village, or of wrist watches or riding bicycles have also been judged as transgressions of caste station.

Minority Rights Group International state in their report *State of World's Minorities and Indigenous People 2011—Focus of Women's Rights* (July 2011) that violence against Dalit women is used as a means of collective punishment against Dalit communities:

Dalit women's oppression is deepened via ingrained patriarchal values and norms. Violence against Dalit women in India has thus been described as serving as 'a crucial social mechanism to maintain Dalit women's subordinate position in society, [that] is the core outcome of gender based inequalities shaped and intensified by the caste system', according to a 2006 publication by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, National Federation of Dalit Women and the Institute of Development Education, Action and Studies.¹³ As a minority, Dalit women are thus subject to a 'triple burden of inferiority' based on caste, class and gender. This combination of structural factors renders Dalit women vulnerable to some of the most abhorrent forms of physical violence.

(pp 36–7)

8. Government Action to Combat Caste Discrimination in India

Caste discrimination is officially banned in the Indian Constitution under Article 17, the Abolition of Untouchability:

The constitution institutionalised affirmative action, providing Dalits with a quota of guaranteed seats in Parliament, reserved places in higher education and a quota of jobs in the government sector, roughly equivalent to their proportion of the population.

(Jens Lerche, 'Transnational Advocacy Networks and Affirmation Action for Dalits in India' *Development and Change*, March 2008, vol 39, issue 2, p 244)

Article 46 of the Constitution provides that the State has among its primary duties the promotion of the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Various attempts have been made to legislate to strengthen the position of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes against the infringement of their rights including the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 was designed to prevent abuses of Dalits and punish those responsible, to establish specialist courts for the trial of such offences and provide relief and rehabilitation for the victims. The Act sets out the types of atrocities faced by people identified as being of a

¹³ National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 'Dalit Women Speak Out—Violence against Dalit Women in India' (March 2006)

lower caste. These include:

- Forcing a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe to drink or eat any inedible or obnoxious substance;
- Dumping excreta, waste matter, carcasses or any other obnoxious substance in the victim's premises;
- The forcible removal of clothes and parading of the victim naked or with painted face or body;
- Wrongful occupation or cultivation of their land;
- Forced or bonded labour;
- The use of force or intimidation to prevent someone from freely exercising their vote;
- Making false allegations to public officials leading to legal proceedings and procession;
- Forced sexual exploitation and humiliation of women;
- Pollution of the water supply of a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe;
- Denial of the right to access to public places; and
- Forced eviction from place of habitation.

However, Human Rights Watch argues that government action such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act has been insufficient in combating the abuse of the human rights of Dalits:

National legislation and constitutional protections serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below the 'pollution line'.

... The potential of the law to bring about social change has been hampered by police corruption and caste bias, with the result that many allegations are not entered in police books. Ignorance of procedures and a lack of knowledge of the act have also affected its implementation. Even when cases are registered the absence of special courts to try them can delay prosecutions for up to three to four years. Some state governments dominated by higher castes have even attempted to repeal the legislation altogether.

(Human Rights Watch, *Broken people: caste violence against India's 'untouchables'*, 1999, p 2 and p 8)

9. Dalits and Deprivation in Modern India

According to data collected by Unicef, nearly 60 percent of all maternal deaths in six northern states occurred in what could be classed as Dalit or tribal communities.¹⁴

The Indian National Records Bureau's *Prison Statistics India 2009* (July 2011) reports that 22 percent of convicts belonged to Scheduled Castes (p 95).

According to figures presented at the International Dalit Conference that took place 16–18 May 2003 in Vancouver, Canada, nearly 90 percent of all the poor Indians and 95 percent of all the illiterate Indians are Dalits, as reported by *National Geographic News*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Minority Rights Group International, *State of World's Minorities and Indigenous People 2011—Focus of Women's Rights* (July 2011), p 144

¹⁵ *National Geographic*, ['India's 'Untouchables' Face Violence, Discrimination'](#) (2 June 2003)

One aspect of caste-based poverty is the legacy of certain jobs being traditionally the reserve of Dalits. These include working with leather, shoe making, agricultural work and manual sanitation work referred to as 'manual scavenging':

In India the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA)—the 'Sanitary Workers Movement'—is fighting to eradicate the practice of maila dhona, which is Hindi for 'lifting shit'. ('Manual scavenging' is the leftover English Victorian term still used by the Government, but this is rejected by SKA). SKA reckons that there are over 1.3 million people cleaning dry latrines in India. Of these, more than 95 percent are Dalits ('untouchables' or 'scheduled castes') and 92 percent are women. In 2003 the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment declared officially that there were only 676,009 safai karamchari left—still a very large number, but a serious underestimate according to the SKA.

(Mari Marcel Thekaekara, '[A lifetime in muck](#)', *New Internationalist*, 1 August 2008)

Manual scavenging was banned in India in 1993 and the enforcement of this was demanded by a Supreme Court Ruling in May 2009.¹⁶

10. Dalit Politics and the International Movement

Since the 1990s, politics in North India has been dominated by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a party led and dominated by Dalits. They are, at the time of writing, the sole governing party of India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh. During the same period there has been a growth of an international movement to combat caste-based discrimination, with NGO pressure leading the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination to declare that the situation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes falls within the scope of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.¹⁷

Although recent developments in Indian politics have led to Dalit issues having greater prominence domestically, Jens Lerche gives the following explanation for why abuses against Dalits persist:

There are few places in India, if any, where the underlying social, cultural and economic oppression of Dalits has ceased to exist... The oppression is less intense today compared to the time of Independence, due to a combination of developments. While direct economic dependency on the local landed classes, and exploitation by them (in the form of bonded labour relations) have lessened significantly, other areas such as implementation of legal and statutory rights, access to state resources, and access to political influence are still highly skewed against Dalits. Anti-Dalit power relations may dominate at several levels: at local village level, at district level, at state level, and even at all-India level. As rural elites, and landed communities belonging to middle ranking castes, strive to maintain and/or improve their own positions, classic oppression occurs across India on an alarming daily basis, including events such as rape, beatings, murder

¹⁶ International Dalit Solidarity Network, '[Supreme Court ruling brings India a step closer to ending manual scavenging](#)' (15 July 2009)

¹⁷ Jens Lerche, 'Transnational Advocacy Networks and Affirmation Action for Dalits in India', *Development and Change* (March 2008), vol 39, issue 2, pp 245–6

and, now and then, larger scale atrocities. In 2003, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights listed 22,603 such cases registered by the police under the prevention of atrocities act. Indications are that underreporting is widespread.

(ibid, p 254)

11. UK International Development Policy and Aid to India

In June 2010, the Government announced the launch of multilateral and bilateral aid reviews. The scope of these reviews and their results are examined in House of Commons Library Standard Note, [The Bilateral and Multilateral Aid Reviews](#) (March 2011, SN/EP/5906).

Following the publication of the review's finding in March 2011, Andrew Mitchell, Secretary of State for International Development, announced that the amount of bilateral aid given by the UK to India would be frozen. However, India would remain the largest recipient of UK aid in 2011. The aid given by the UK to India is the subject of House of Commons Library Standard Note, [India: Development Aid from the UK and Other Donors](#) (July 2010, SN/EP/5578). This Note also outlines the debate over whether the UK should be giving this amount of aid to India given the current economic climate.

Following the reviews, Andrew Mitchell has stated that India would be overtaken as the largest recipient of British aid. In an interview published in *The Telegraph* he is quoted as saying:

Now is not the time to stop the programme in India but I don't think we will be there for very much longer.

(Christopher Hope, '[Aid to India will be stopped, pledges minister](#)', *The Telegraph*, 13 June 2011)

Andrew Mitchell gave further detail regarding this in his evidence to the House of Commons International Development Committee in March 2011. He explained that spending would probably change over the course of the four year Spending Round:

... India has been Britain's largest development programme for many years. Next year it will probably be Ethiopia, and the year after that, subject to the agenda for macroeconomic reform taking place there, it will be Pakistan.

(House of Commons International Development Select Committee, *The Future of DFID's Programme in India*, 7 June 2011, HC 616 of session 2010–12, Ev 58, [Q206](#))

The Department for International Development states in its [India Operational Plan](#) (October 2011) that their work in India over the period of the current Spending Round, 2011–2015, will focus on India's three poorest states, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, and will catalyse the private sector's potential to combat poverty. The *Operational Plan's* two other strategic objectives are to improve the lives of over ten million poor women and girls and engage with India on global issues that might benefit poor people everywhere.

A DFID pilot scheme to replace aid to India with recoverable loans to small businesses has been pioneered according to a report in *The Telegraph* published in October 2011:

The Indian government... [have] given their backing to the plan to switch funding in a move which will take DFID officials into the world of small scale merchant banking—assessing business proposals and picking which are most likely to be able to repay seed capital loans.

[DFID] Officials said they hope that within four years half of its Indian aid programme will be recoverable loans.

“The money which will be returnable will be progressively rising and will rise to half the programme by 2015. The money will go out in a competitive way,” said one.

The department will bring in specialist staff to assess loan applications and monitor their effectiveness.

(Dean Nelson, '[Government to phase out Indian aid replaced with loans to small businesses](#)', *The Telegraph*, 21 October 2011)

12. UK Aid Policy and the Dalits

The House of Commons International Development Committee made the following recommendation in its recent report on India specific to tackling poverty and inequality in India:

India has high levels of inequality—particular castes, tribes, and religious groups do less well than others because of entrenched discriminatory practices and despite laws against such behaviour. We met groups of Dalits, including children, who were beginning to challenge social norms about their role in society. We were impressed by their brave and determined outlook. However it will be virtually impossible for most of these children to change their social status while other parts of Indian society, and social institutions, tacitly accept this level of exclusion and discrimination. We recommend that DFID place greater explicit emphasis on tackling inequalities throughout DFID's programmes.

(House of Commons International Development Select Committee, *The Future of DFID's Programme in India*, 7 June 2011, HC 616 of session 2010–12, p 27, para [69](#))

The Government addressed this recommendation in its response to the report:

... the Government of India has approved DFID grants to 56 more civil society organisations to work with the poorest and most excluded people in the poorest states. These grants are under DFID's Poorest Area Civil Society programme, which focuses explicitly on tackling social exclusion, discrimination and inequality.

(House of Commons International Development Select Committee, *The Future of DFID's Programme in India: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2010–12*, 14 September 2011, HC 1486 of session 2010–12, p 7, para [28](#))

The India Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme supports civil society organisations working in India focusing on advocacy to draw members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes into the electoral process.¹⁸

The issue of how best the UK Government might seek to tackle inequality through aid while maintaining its commitment to value for money was addressed directly in Andrew Mitchell's oral evidence to the International Development Committee. When questioned by Richard Burden, MP for Birmingham Northfield, whether DFID would be resourcing activities to empower the Dalit community in Madhya Pradesh, the Minister gave the following response:

I cannot give you a clear answer on this specific point, because I would need to see what you meant by empowerment. I am, as the Committee will recall, suspicious of using taxpayers' funds to support nebulous concepts... I recognise that tackling these cultural things, as well as empowering children to go to school, are very important. I think that getting children to school is an incredibly good start, and there may well be ways of tackling the specific problem that you have set out, which we should consider. As in all these matters we will be evidence-led.

(House of Commons International Development Select Committee, *The Future of DFID's Programme in India*, 7 June 2011, HC 616 of session 2010–12, Ev 67–68, [Q251–Q252](#))

When further questioned as to the role DFID had to play in producing moments of empowerment for people who face discrimination in India, the Minister went on to say:

I think that we have a huge role to play in that. We should always seek to work with the grain of the Government's programmes, and in tackling caste discrimination, clearly in India we should work very clearly with the Government. Providing those moments of empowerment that you described is incredibly important. What we have to be careful about is that our intervention is really effective, delivers value for money for British taxpayers who are providing the support, and really delivers on the ground. That is why, at the end of my answer to Mr Burden I emphasised the importance of being evidence-led. But do I recognise the importance of what you say? Absolutely.

(ibid)

¹⁸ John Heath, *An evaluation of DFID's India programme 2000–2005* (August 2006), p 18

