



Edges to Centre: A Global Intergenerational Leadership Project for Marginalized Communities “Nothing About Us Without Us”

NextGen Rights Lab: Global South Intersectional
Rights & Leadership Accelerator

International Development as a Battlefield: Caste, Minorities & Global
Norms
Session – 1 (70 mins)

Introduction: What are minority rights?

1. What are minority rights?

- *Who?* Ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups, usually non-dominant, who have the **right to maintain and develop their identity**.
- *What?* **Individual human rights** enjoyed by persons belonging to these groups, often exercised **in community with others** (e.g. language, culture, religion).

2. How do we identify minorities?

- **Objective factors:** Shared language, culture, ethnicity, religion, history that differ from the majority.
- **Subjective factor:** People **self-identify** as belonging to the group and want to preserve that identity.
- **Context:** They are often **marginalised or excluded** from political, economic, or social power.

3. How do we protect minority rights? (MRG's "three pillars")

- **Non-discrimination:** Prohibit direct and indirect discrimination; adopt and enforce equality laws and remedies.
- **Protection of identity:** Safeguard minority culture, language, religion and heritage (schools, media, cultural and religious sites).
- **Effective participation:** Ensure minorities can **influence decisions** – representation in public life, consultation on laws and policies, participation in development.



1. International Development & Intergenerational Leadership: Caste, Minorities & Power

- International development = contested space where money, norms and power circulate.
- Caste-affected and minority communities are often spoken about, not centred.
- This session: map the global development arena, see how caste & minority claims travel through it, understand key norms, forums, and case patterns.

In this first session, we're going to look at art and culture not as "extra" or "soft" topics, but as a form of political power. When we say "art and culture," we mean everything from songs, films, theatre, memes, reels, murals, poetry, and rituals, to the way we dress, speak, and gather. For caste-affected, Indigenous, and marginalised communities, these are not just hobbies. They are survival strategies, memory banks, and weapons.

When we talk about **"from edges to centre"**, we are recognising that most of the powerful, truthful art is being made at the edges of society – in bastis, villages, refugee camps, small towns, and online spaces – while the "centre" often ignores or steals it. This session is about seeing ourselves as part of that long history of resistance, and understanding how cultural work is a core part of human rights, not a side activity.



2. Development as a Contested Arena: International development: who decides what “development” means?

- “Development” is not neutral – it is defined by power.
- Key actors: UN system & SDGs, bilateral & multilateral donors, development banks & climate funds, INGOs, think tanks, consulting firms, CSOs & grassroots movements, corporations, platforms, and investors.
- For caste-affected & minority communities: risk of being left out, or included only as beneficiaries / case studies, not as co-authors and decision-makers.

The global development system decides what counts as a “problem,” what counts as a “solution,” and who gets paid to deliver it. Bilateral and multilateral donors set priorities; large INGOs and consulting firms translate those into programmes; corporations and platforms shape labour markets and digital infrastructures; CSOs and movements try to bend the system toward justice. If caste and minority rights are not explicitly named in these spaces, they disappear under vague labels like “vulnerable groups” or “social inclusion.” Our task as leaders is to enter this arena with open eyes, recognising both the risks and the leverage points.



3. SDGs & “Leave No One Behind” (Unless Caste is Named):

SDGs & “Leave no one behind”: who is actually counted?

- SDGs and “leave no one behind” are now central slogans. They only become real when: work-and-descent discrimination (caste) is named in: needs assessments, log-frames & theories of change, safeguarding standards, monitoring & evaluation frameworks;
- data is disaggregated by: caste / social location, religion & minority status, migration & informal labour status.
- Without this: caste disappears inside “poor”, “marginalised”, “at risk”.

Many agencies claim they are committed to the SDGs and “leaving no one behind.” But if their data and documents never name caste, work-and-descent, or specific minority identities, then those commitments remain abstract. For example, a project on “education for all” that doesn’t track who is excluded by caste, religion, or language can easily reproduce inequality. Intersectional leaders need to ask hard questions about indicators and data: Who is counted? How is discrimination recorded? Are informal workers, migrants, Dalit and Adivasi communities visible in the numbers? Only then can development programmes be held accountable for more than nice slogans.



4. Normative Pathways: How Caste & Minority Claims Travel. the routes our demands travel

- UN human-rights & labour norms: CERD: caste as descent-based discrimination, ILO conventions: equality at work, forced/bonded labour, freedom of association. Human Rights Council & Special Procedures: communications, reports, UPR cycles.
- Development banks & climate funds: safeguard policies, grievance redress / independent accountability mechanisms.
- Donor & ESG agendas: corporate ESG, bank & investor due diligence, "responsible business" frameworks.

Our claims don't just live in protests; they also move through formal channels of norms and money. UN treaties and ILO conventions already recognise forms of discrimination that cover caste, forced labour, and persecution of minorities. Human Rights Council processes, Special Rapporteurs, and UPR can bring these issues into the spotlight. At the same time, development banks and climate funds have their own safeguards and grievance systems, while corporations and investors talk about ESG and responsible business. All of these are routes our demands can travel – if we know how to use them. International development leaders need to be conversant in these pathways, not to become technocrats, but to translate community struggles into pressure points in these systems.



5. Case Study 1: Dalit Rights & CERD. Case study – Dalit rights through CERD

- How Dalit rights were advanced via: shadow reports to CERD, highlighting caste-based violence, segregation, and labour exploitation, concluding observations that explicitly name caste and descent-based discrimination.
- Key ingredients: rigorous documentation, coalition-building (Dalit groups, allies, legal experts), timing with state review cycle.

This case shows how caste-affected communities and allies used CERD to get caste named clearly in an international legal space. Civil society groups prepared detailed shadow reports on caste atrocities, manual scavenging, exclusion from services, and impunity. They coordinated to brief CERD members before the state's review and proposed **specific questions and recommendations**.

As a result, CERD's concluding observations contained strong language on caste and descent-based discrimination. That text then became a tool for domestic advocacy: groups could say, "The UN Committee has told you to act; where is the implementation?" The lesson: **documentation, coalitions, and timing** matter more than charismatic personalities



6. Case Study 2: Rohingya Displacement & International Forums: development & protection system

- Rohingya rights and protection advanced via: protection clusters & humanitarian coordination, fact-finding missions & inquiry mechanisms, strategic litigation support and amicus briefs, integration into development planning (education, health, livelihoods).
- Lessons: align humanitarian + development + legal strategies, maintain evidence standards usable in multiple forums, build regional & global coalitions.

Rohingya communities pushed their case into global consciousness not just through refugee camps and media, but via **formal humanitarian and development structures**. Protection clusters documented violations; fact-finding missions collected evidence; litigators used that evidence in national and international courts; some development actors integrated Rohingya needs into programmes.

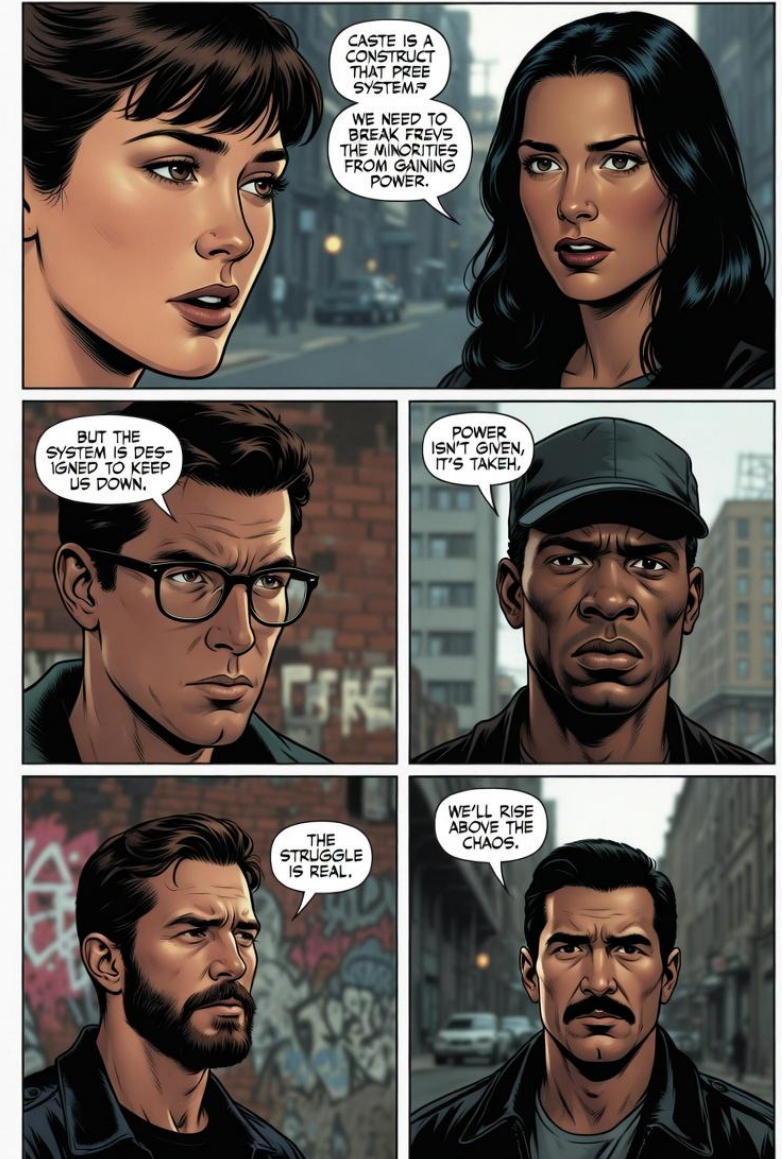
This case shows the importance of **connecting humanitarian and development worlds**, so that a crisis is not treated only as temporary emergency, but as a long-term rights and development question. For caste-affected and minority struggles, similar multi-forum strategies can be useful: combining relief, long-term development, and legal accountability instead of treating them as separate silos.



7. Case Study 3: IDSN & Inserting Caste into EU/UN Conversations. the long campaign to name caste

- IDSN's long-term work to put caste on the radar of: EU institutions, UN bodies (HRC, Special Procedures, CERD), development agencies and parliaments.
- Focused on: documentation standards and consistent language, strategic use of hearings, side events, and briefings, cross-regional alliances and diaspora.
- Lesson: norm change = slow, disciplined, collective work, not one-off events.

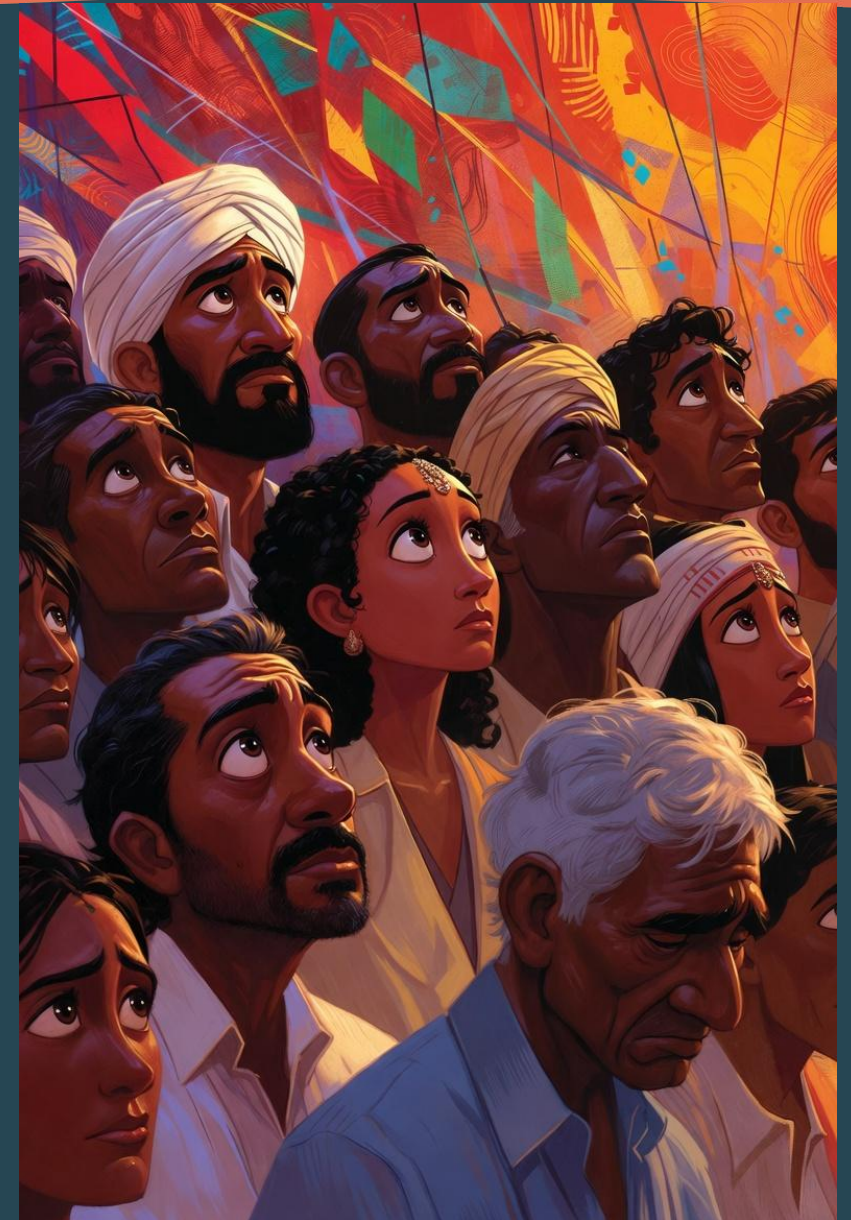
The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) didn't "win" recognition of caste overnight. It built a careful architecture of reports, briefings, side events, and alliances. It maintained a consistent glossary and harm-right-remedy framing over many years, even when states resisted or blocked accreditation. For emerging leaders, this is a reminder that international development and human-rights advocacy is a long game. You need patience, documentation, coalition hygiene, and narrative discipline, not just viral moments.



8. Political Economy of International Development. Who funds whom? Political economy of the development sector

- Bilateral & multilateral donors: set agendas, fund large programmes.
- INGOs, think tanks, consulting firms: translate donor priorities into frameworks & toolkits.
- CSOs & grassroots groups: compete for visibility & funds, often constrained by donor logic and compliance.
- Private sector & platforms: shape supply chains, labour markets, and digital infrastructures, can entrench or challenge discrimination.

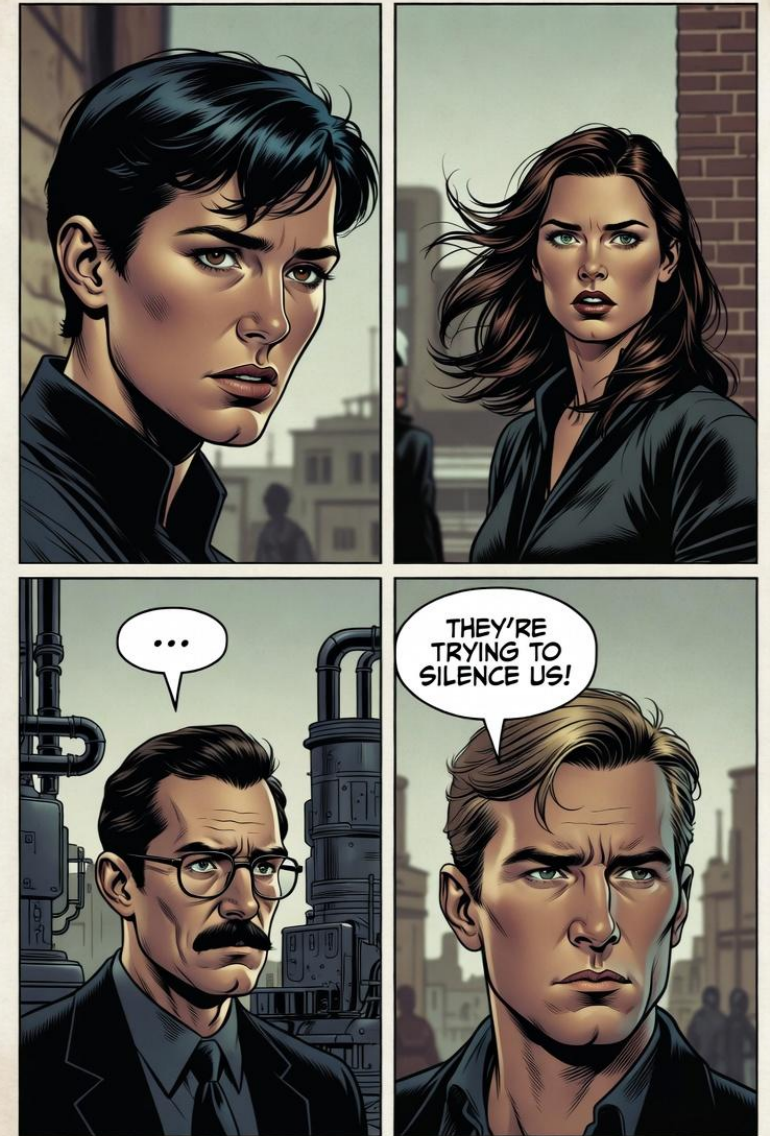
To operate in this field, you must understand its political economy: who pays, who designs, who delivers, and who is evaluated. Donors and big agencies like neat logframes and “scalable pilots.” Large INGOs and consulting firms often mediate between donors and local realities, sometimes smoothing out the sharp edges of caste and minority struggles. Grassroots organisations may get small project grants while carrying the risk and frontline work. Meanwhile, private actors – from global brands to gig platforms and contractors – determine the conditions under which many caste-affected and minority workers live and labour. International development is not just about UN reports; it is also about how money flows through these networks and whose lives are shaped by those flows.



9. Recurring Tensions in Development Work. what we must learn to navigate

- Donor timelines vs. community pace.
- Scalable pilots vs. slow institution-building.
- Compliance-heavy M&E vs. participatory learning & community-defined success.
- Risk-averse branding vs. truth-telling about caste and oppression.
- Token representation vs. shared governance & co-ownership.

No matter where you work – UN agency, INGO, grassroots org, union, or foundation – you will meet these tensions. Donors want results in 18 months; communities may need 10 years to build power. Funders want “scalable pilots”; we know that deep change requires patient institution-building. Monitoring and evaluation requirements can become paperwork that eats time without feeding learning. Branding teams may fear strong language on caste or minority persecution. Intersectional leaders don’t pretend these tensions can be wished away. Instead, they name them openly, negotiate boundaries, and look for ways to protect community priorities inside imperfect systems.



10. Key Takeaways & Bridge to Session 2

From mapping the system to shifting it

- International development is a battleground, not a neutral service.
- Caste and minority rights must be explicitly named in SDGs, data, and safeguards.
- Normative pathways (UN, ILO, banks, climate funds) and case studies show routes we can use.
- Political economy and recurring tensions remind us why leadership must be strategic, patient, and honest.
- Next session: focus on governance, safeguards, coalitions, fundraising, diplomacy, private-sector leverage, climate finance, and intergenerational roles.

We end this session with a clear message: you are not powerless in the development arena, but you must understand its rules, levers, and contradictions. Caste and minority struggles can and do enter this space, but only when leaders insist on naming them and using the available normative pathways. In Session 2, we will move from mapping to changing: how to embed marginalised communities in governance, how to do due-diligence properly, how to build cross-border coalitions, how to fundraise without erasing caste, how to leverage private-sector and climate-finance mechanisms, and how to practice intergenerational leadership within all this.





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Changing the Machinery: Safeguards, Coalitions, Funding &
Intergenerational Leadership
Session – 2 (70 mins)

1. From Knowing the System to Moving It: one move at a time

- Today: tools for changing international development practice.
- Focus areas: governance & representation, due-diligence and safeguards, coalition-building across borders, fundraising as politics, diplomacy & timing, private sector & tech platforms, climate finance, intergenerational leadership.

Now that we've mapped the terrain, we look at what we can actually do. This session is practical: it gives you a vocabulary and toolkit for reshaping programmes, funding, and governance from inside and outside. Whether you are in a CSO, an INGO, a union, a foundation, or a company, the ideas we cover can help you hold caste justice and minority rights at the centre while navigating the realities of international development.



2. Embedding Representation & Shared Governance: From “beneficiaries” to co-owners of programmes

- Real representation means: community seats with voting power on boards & advisory councils, co-design of metrics and indicators, participatory budgeting processes.
- For caste-affected & minority communities: not just “consultations” and photo-ops, but shared governance over strategies, narratives & resources.

Many organisations claim to “centre marginalised voices” by holding consultations or featuring a few community members in reports. Intersectional leadership demands more: power over decisions, not just presence in workshops. Caste-affected and minority communities must sit on boards, steering committees, and advisory councils with actual voting power. Community representatives should help define what success looks like, help choose indicators, and participate in budgeting decisions. This shifts people from being “beneficiaries” or “storytellers” to co-authors of programmes and narratives. It also changes who gets to say “no” when something is off.



3. Due Diligence & Safeguards: Beyond Paper Compliance:

Due-diligence literacy: making safeguards real

- Rights-compatible due diligence includes: worker-driven and community-driven monitoring, living-wage and safe-recruitment benchmarks, accessible, independent grievance channels, anti-retaliation safeguards, remedies that deliver concrete redress, not just reports.
- For caste & minority justice: social audits must actually check work-and-descent discrimination, audits and safeguards should involve affected workers and communities.

Many companies and projects say they've done "social audits" or "human rights due diligence," but often these are checklist exercises that fail to see caste or minority harms. Intersectional development leaders must learn the basics of what good due diligence looks like: worker-driven monitoring, fair wages, safe and transparent recruitment, trusted grievance channels, and real remedies when harm is found. For caste-affected and minority workers, this means asking: "Where is caste in your risk assessment? How did you consult Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, migrant, or other minority workers? What happens when they complain? Who protects them from retaliation?" You don't have to be a corporate lawyer to ask these questions – you just need due-diligence literacy.



4. Coalition-Building Across Borders & Sectors: Coalitions as infrastructure, not one-off campaigns

- Strong cross-border alliances can knit together: labour unions & worker centres, women's and youth collectives, faith & cultural organisations, diaspora groups, strategic litigators, independent media & researchers.
- Coalition hygiene: clear shared purpose & division of roles, equitable authorship & attribution, language justice & accessible formats, secure data-sharing & communications, conflict-of-interest management when donors/corporates are inside.

No single organisation can shift multinational supply chains or donor priorities alone. Coalitions provide the scale and diversity needed. A good coalition might involve unions documenting workplace abuse, women's collectives offering safe spaces, diaspora groups lobbying parliaments, litigators filing cases, and media partners amplifying stories. But coalitions can also become messy and extractive if not managed well. "Coalition hygiene" means agreements on who does what, how credit is shared, how languages and formats are chosen, how data is protected, and how to handle conflicts when funders or companies are part of the tent. Coalitions are infrastructure for long-term power, not just WhatsApp groups around a single campaign



5. Fundraising as Politics & Craft: Fundraising: translating justice into fundable language without washing it clean

- Read donor theories of change: know their language & constraints.
- Translate community-defined problems into fundable hypotheses: without sanitising caste or minority persecution.
- Negotiate: overheads that cover safety, decent work & care, flexible funding for long-term institution-building.
- Diversify revenue: pooled funds & solidarity subscriptions, ethical brand partnerships, mission-aligned impact investors & community endowments.
- Measure structural change, not just vanity metrics: anti-discrimination policies, grievance uptake & resolution, budget shifts & institutional reforms.

Fundraising is not just paperwork; it is politics + craft. You need to understand how donors think – their theories of change, risk appetite, and buzzwords – and then decide how far you are willing to adapt your language without erasing caste reality. You should push for budgets that pay staff fairly, support safety and mental health, and allow for genuine community participation. Diversifying funding reduces dependence on one donor's mood. And your monitoring frameworks should look beyond numbers like “people reached” to indicators that show structural change: have policies changed? Are caste-based grievances recorded and resolved? Have budgets moved? This is how fundraising becomes a tool for justice, not just survival



6. Diplomacy & Timing in Development Spaces: knowing when to whisper, when to shout

- Key skills for advocates & programme leads: briefing missions before UN & bank sessions, using pre-session UPR platforms, timing releases to: parliamentary debates, donor board meetings, shareholder AGMs.
- Converting global findings (CERD, ILO, bank safeguards) into: domestic policy debates, municipal and sectoral reforms.
- Escalation ladder: start with private dialogue, move to joint statements & public pressure, escalate to formal complaints & legal action when needed.

Diplomacy here doesn't mean being polite to power; it means using timing and forums strategically. If you know when your country is up for UPR, when a climate fund board meets, or when a parliament debates a key law, you can time reports and campaigns for maximum impact. You also need to convert global findings – CERD recommendations, ILO observations, bank safeguard decisions – into hooks for domestic advocacy. And you should think in terms of escalation: sometimes quiet engagement gets better results; other times you need to go public. Feminist, anti-caste leadership in development spaces means mastering this ladder without losing your integrity.



7. Private Sector & Platform Leverage: Using law & norms to move companies and platforms

- Legal & policy hooks: public procurement clauses on labour & non-discrimination, stock-exchange disclosure rules, import bans on forced labour, extra-territorial due-diligence laws.
- Escalation path: factory/site grievance → brand buyer pressure → national regulators → OECD NCPs → investor questions at AGMs.
- Platform & tech safeguards for caste & minority rights: transparent moderation standards & audits, appeals and remedy for wrongful takedowns, worker data rights in gig platforms, caste-aware harassment reporting & non-discrimination clauses for creators and advertisers.

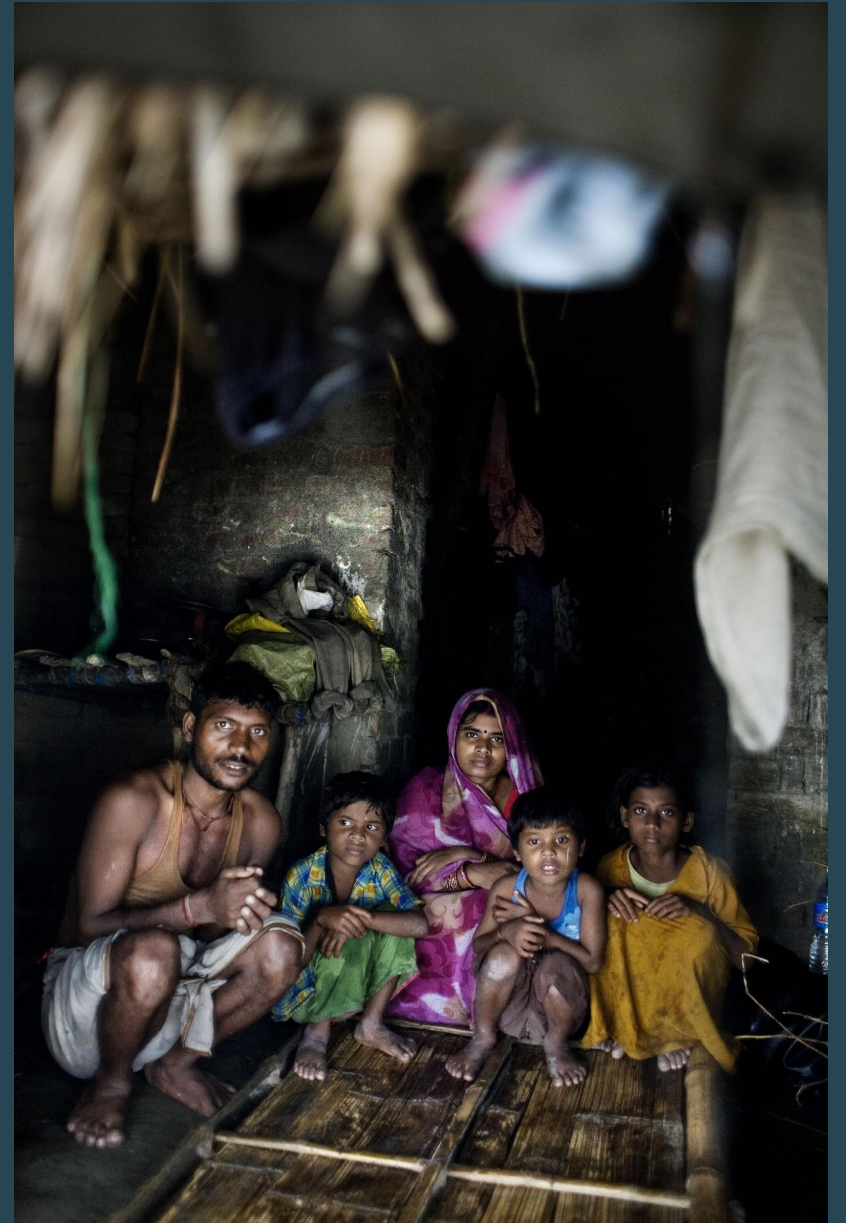
Companies and platforms respond to law, contracts, markets, and reputation. Public procurement rules, import bans, and due-diligence statutes can force better behaviour. You can move along an escalation path: start with on-the-ground grievance, then pressure the brand, then use regulators, OECD National Contact Points, or investors. For tech and platform economies, caste discrimination and hate speech often hide behind “community standards.” Intersectional leaders must demand transparent moderation, appeal mechanisms, and specific recognition of caste and minority harms. Gig workers need control over their data and non-discriminatory algorithms. Creators need policies that ban casteist harassment and biased demonetisation.



8. Climate Finance & Just Transition: Climate finance: will it entrench or dismantle caste hierarchies?

- Climate debates & funds: loss & damage, adaptation, mitigation, just transition.
- Projects can: displace caste-affected and minority communities, entrench unequal access to land, water, and jobs, or create new rights-based pathways.
- Accountability mechanisms: World Bank Inspection Panel, IFC/CAO, ADB Accountability Mechanism, Green Climate Fund & others' Independent Redress Mechanisms (IRMs).
- Evidence thresholds: show harm, causal link, and failure of safeguards.

Climate finance is pouring into energy, infrastructure, and adaptation projects. Without strong safeguards, these can repeat old injustices: land grabs, displacement, caste-ordered labour, and exclusion from benefits. With careful design and pressure, they can instead support just transitions that prioritise those who have contributed least to the climate crisis and suffer most. As leaders, you need to understand both the politics (who decides which projects get funded) and the accountability mechanisms available when things go wrong. Complaints to IFI and climate-fund accountability bodies require solid evidence and a clear narrative about harm and safeguard violations. This is another space where development, law, and community organising intersect.



9. Intergenerational Leadership in Development Spaces:

Intergenerational Leadership in Development Spaces

- Elders: carry memory of past negotiations, safeguards won, and fragile gains, know the informal rules of donors, banks, and ministries.
- Mid-career bridge-builders: translate community priorities into fundable, diplomatic proposals, protect narrative integrity in MoUs, logframes & press releases.
- Younger organisers & analysts: bring OSINT, data visualisation & social listening, run digital mobilisation and community reporting.
- All commit to: narrative discipline, ethics & consent in data, trauma-informed and secure practice, holding caste justice & minority rights at the centre.

In international development, institutional memory is gold. Elders remember which conditions donors tried to impose, which safeguards were hard-won, and where the traps are. Mid-career leaders often sit at the interface between communities and institutions, writing proposals and negotiating frameworks. Younger people can track information flows, spot disinformation, design dashboards, and mobilise networks quickly. Intergenerational leadership is about sharing this work instead of burning out one group. It relies on shared glossaries, ethical standards, and security protocols. When elders, bridge-builders, and Gen Z leaders all commit to centring caste and minority rights, the work becomes more coherent and durable.

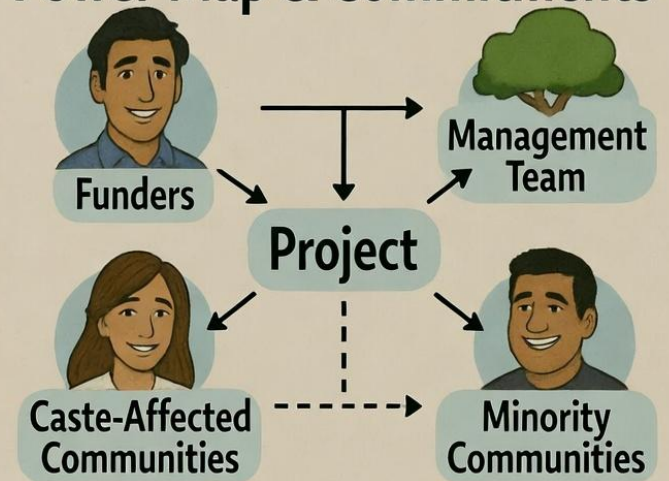


10. Online Individual Activity & Closing Commitments: Your Development Power Map & Commitments

- Pick one real or realistic development initiative from your context: e.g., a skills programme, a climate project, a CSR scheme, a social-enterprise pilot, or a donor-funded “social inclusion” project.
- In a shared online doc or form, answer: Who are the top 5 power-holders in this initiative (donors, ministries, INGOs, companies, local partners)? Where are caste-affected and minority communities in the governance (board, advisory group, staff, “beneficiaries” only)? Name 2 potential safeguards or due-diligence levers (e.g., bank grievance mechanism, ESG commitments, donor safeguarding policy). Suggest 1 realistic change to make the initiative more caste-just and minority-inclusive (e.g., community seats with vote, data disaggregation, living-wage clause, or grievance system upgrade). “From this module, one change I will make in how I work with donors, projects or companies is...”

This online activity works for both legal and non-legal participants. It asks you to choose one concrete project and map its power structure: who funds it, who runs it, and where caste-affected and minority communities appear (or don't). You then identify possible safeguards or due-diligence levers and propose one realistic change that would shift the initiative towards justice. You don't need deep legal knowledge to do this; you need curiosity and political clarity. The closing question invites you to name one change in your own practice – maybe asking about caste-disaggregated data in every project, insisting on community seats in governance structures, checking donor safeguarding policies, or refusing language that erases caste. Saying it aloud makes it more real, and together these individual shifts can slowly re-wire the development machinery from the edges inward.

Online Individual Activity & Closing Commitments Your Development Power Map & Commitments



Your Commitments

- ✓ Identify one concrete project
- ✓ Map its power structure
- ✓ Identify possible safeguards
- ✓ Propose one realistic change

You don't need deep knowledge; you need curiosity and political clarity towards justice

Thanks

