



Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in Africa and Status of Modern Slavery

REGIONAL REPORT 2023 - SUMMARY

The Inclusivity Project and
Global Forum of Communities
Discriminated on Work and Descent



African Network on
Discrimination Based on Work,
Descent and Contemporary
Forms of Slavery



The Inclusivity Project

The Inclusivity Project (TIP) is a non-profit organization founded to advocate for the rights of communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD) and raise awareness on their issue. TIP works towards Capacity Building, Collaboration, and Research to support CDWD communities by enhancing the Social, Economic, and Political Integration and increasing their visibility at the National, Regional and Global platforms. TIP works on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially on the monitoring and follow-up/review, and providing data and evidence for the nation-state for effective and inclusive programme implementation.

<https://www.theinclusivityproject.org/>

Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD), founded in 2021 is a platform to voice the rights and entitlements of the communities in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America discriminated 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://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

<https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

Lead Researcher and Author: **Reena Tete**

Research Contribution: **Ibrahim Yacouba, Mohamed Aïcha, Moussa Zangaou, Saghid Sidi from Niger, Alioune Mzeirigue, Cheikh Sidati Mohamed, Ali Dieng, and Zeinabou Brahim, Brahim Ramadhane, Aboubekrin E Yehdih from Mauritania, Alima Taal, and Halimatou Ceesay from Gambia, Goumané Aïché, Raichatou Walett from Mali, and Queen Bisseng from Cameroon, and the GFoD (Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent) team.**

Concept and Advice: **Queen Bisseng, Paul Divakar Namala, Aloysius Irudayam SJ, Naveen Gautam**

Design: **Sajana Jayaraj**

Publisher: **©The Inclusivity Project and Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD)**

2023

Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in Africa and Status of Modern Slavery

Regional Report 2023 - Summary

Acknowledgements

W

e wish to express our gratitude to many people without whose support this status report would not have been possible. The research and compilation of this report would not have been possible without the support of activists, academicians and organisations which have been extensively working for the rights of Communities discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) in Africa and organisations raising their voices.

We would further like to acknowledge the efforts of Ms. Penda Mbow, Ms. Hannah Forster, Mr. Ibrahima Kane, Dr. Ebrima Sall, and Mr. Paul Divakar Namala who have been the guiding force in ensuring that the voices of CDWD are heard at the regional as well as the global level. We would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the me the opportunity to be a part of this global movement in unifying the voices of the Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent worldwide.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Lead Researcher and Author, Ms. Reena Tete who has given her precious time and efforts in researching and compiling this document. She has played an integral role in the development of this report, making it a comprehensive and valuable resource for understanding the status of CDWD in Africa.

Our deepest appreciation goes to Father Aloysius and Naveen Gautam for conceptualising the study and providing unwavering support and willingness to be the sounding board throughout this journey.

In furtherance of the same, we would like to make a special mention of all the Regional Experts of the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD): Ibrahim Yacouba, Mohamed Aicha, Saghid Sidi, Moussa Zangaou, from Niger, Alioune Mzeirigue, Cheikh Sidadi, Ali Dieng, and Zeinebour Brahim, Brahim Ramadhane, Aboubekrin E Yehdih from Mauritania, Alima Taal, and Halimatou Ceesay from Gambia, Goumané Aiché and Raichatou Walett from Mali, and Queen Bisseng from Cameroon. Their lived experiences and expertise have enriched this report immensely

We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Gyan Kothari, Deepak Nikarhil, Vinayraj VK, Johannes Butscher and Carla Forner for their invaluable coordination and support. We would also like to extend our thanks to Sajana Jayaraj for giving a beautiful shape to this report.

Last but not the least, we would like to acknowledge the struggle of CDWD in Africa.

GFoD Team



Children from
CDWD, Niger



Foreword

Prof. Penda Mbow

Former Minister of Culture of Senegal, Professor, Department of History, Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar; Personal Minister Representative of the Head of State to La Francophonie, Senegal

In a world that constantly aspires towards inclusivity, diversity, and equity, it is disheartening to acknowledge that discrimination based on work and descent continues to persist across the globe and especially the African Region. This report, on the status of the Communities discriminated on work and descent (referred as CDWD) in Africa stands as a testament to the fact that there is much work yet to be done in order to dismantle these systemic injustices. The concept of purity and pollution is something which forms the base of all such discrimination, oppression and vulnerabilities attached to the identity of CDWD.

Throughout Africa, communities affected by discrimination on the basis of work and descent have faced enduring challenges that not only hinder their personal and collective progress but also undermine the principles of fairness and equality upon which our societies are built. This report, dedicated to the examination of these issues, seeks to shed light on the experiences of these marginalized communities, fostering a deeper understanding of their struggles, and calling for concerted action to rectify the injustices they face.

The discrimination faced by these communities takes many forms, from social exclusion and limited access to education and employment opportunities to economic disparities, cultural stigmatization and lack of political representation. Denial of justice is yet another major challenge which CDWD face due to their identity.

Through extensive research, engagement, and data collection, this report aims to be a catalyst for change. It aspires to be more than a mere compilation of facts and figures; it is a call to action. In the following pages, you will find not only the stories and experiences of the affected communities but also recommendations and strategies for eradicating discrimination on the basis of work and descent.

The need for change is clear, and the responsibility falls on all of us to join hands in addressing these deeply rooted issues. By embracing diversity and combating discrimination, we can ensure that all individuals, regardless of their work or descent, have the opportunity to realize their full potential and contribute to the betterment of our societies. This report is a testament to our commitment to this important mission and I would like to congratulate the team of Global Forum of Communities discriminated on Work and descent especially the rights experts from Africa who have put in their efforts to collect evidences for this report.

May the findings within these pages ignite a spark of empathy, solidarity, and determination within all of us to ensure that no one is left behind.



Foreword

Hannanh Forster

Director of the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)

In the vast and diverse tapestry of Africa, we find a continent rich in culture, history, and potential. Yet, beneath this tapestry lies a deeply troubling issue that threatens to obscure the brilliance of its people and the promise of its future. Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) remains a persistent and painful challenge for many communities across Africa. It is within this context that we present this report on the Status of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in Africa.

This regional report is the result of extensive research, collaboration, and the unwavering commitment of individuals and organisations devoted to the ideals of justice, equality, and human rights. Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) affects numerous communities throughout Africa, imposing barriers that obstruct social, economic, and political progress for countless individuals.

While Africa's rich history and diverse cultures contribute to its unique identity, it is essential to acknowledge that these discriminatory practices are far from being a historical relic. Instead, they persist as contemporary obstacles to development, contributing to disparities in education, employment, healthcare, and the fundamental human rights that every individual should enjoy. As we delve into the findings of this report, we must remember that knowledge is the first step towards change. Congratulations GfD team (Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent), who have put in a lot of effort in order to compile and consolidate the information, perspective, and data in the regional report of Africa. By confronting the stark reality of Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD), we can collectively strive to dismantle the barriers that have held back far too many for far too long. It is our hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for dialogue, understanding, and the pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable Africa, where every individual is free to realize their full potential without fear of discrimination or prejudice.

I extend my gratitude to all those who contributed to this report, as well as to the communities who have shared their experiences and stories. It is through such collective efforts that we can work towards a more just and equitable future for Africa and its people.



Foreword

Ibrahima Kane

Special adviser to the Executive Director of the Open Society Foundation-Africa in charge of the Africa Union Advocacy.



Foreword

Dr. Ebrima Sall

Executive Director of TrustAfrica; former Executive Secretary, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)

In the vibrant canvas of Africa's rich cultural and social landscape, we find a diverse array of communities that have for too long been marginalized and discriminated against based on the deeply ingrained concept of Work and Descent. We must confront the painful reality that certain communities within our midst face discrimination and exclusion solely on the basis of their perceived societal roles and ancestral origins. The concept of purity and pollution is ingrained in societal thoughts and the same is impacting the CDWD at mass level.

The discrimination faced by communities discriminated on Work and Descent(also known as CDWD) is an issue of profound importance and complexity. It is not merely a historical relic but a deeply entrenched social problem that persists to this day. We must acknowledge the unjust systems that perpetuate these disparities and, more importantly, work collectively to dismantle them.

This report, published by Global forum of Communities discriminated on work and descent, is a culmination of extensive research and insights from rights experts who have dedicated their lives to understanding and addressing this issue. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the unique challenges faced by these communities, their historical context, and the contemporary manifestations of discrimination and modern forms of slavery . Moreover, it presents a call to action for individuals, governments, civil society, and international organizations to unite in the pursuit of justice and equality.

I hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for meaningful change and inspire all those who read it to join the movement for a more inclusive and equitable Africa. The fight against discrimination based on Work and Descent is not just a moral imperative; it is essential for building a brighter and more prosperous future for all Africans. The path ahead is challenging, but it is also filled with hope and the potential for transformation. As we embark on this journey together, let us be guided by the principles of justice, empathy, and unity. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that no one in Africa is left behind due to their Work or Descent.

Discrimination based on work and descent has persisted as a deeply rooted issue in Africa, shaping the lives of millions and impeding the progress of our societies. It is with great concern and a profound sense of responsibility that we present this report on the Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in Africa. This report sheds light on the ongoing challenges faced by individuals and communities who are subjected to discrimination on the basis of their work and social status.

Africa is a continent celebrated for its cultures, languages, and traditions, yet it is also home to some of the most entrenched systems of discrimination. Communities marginalized due to their traditional occupations, caste-like systems, or descent-based practices often find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty, exclusion, and social injustice. This report underscores the urgent need to address these issues in a comprehensive and empathetic manner. The fundamental principles of equality, justice, and human rights must be upheld without exception. Discrimination based on work and descent not only violates these principles but also hinders the full realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By shining a spotlight on these issues, we aim to ignite a collective effort to eradicate such discrimination, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable Africa.

Through extensive research and testimonies, this report presents a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by these marginalized communities, examining the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of their experiences.

We must acknowledge the efforts of the team of Global Forum Of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in doing extensive research that can inform advocacy and provide evidence for transformative policy, and consolidating the same in form of this report.. In furtherance of the same, by studying the stories and experiences of those who have faced discrimination, we can begin to formulate strategies and policies that will empower communities and individuals to break free from the shackles of discrimination.

The journey towards a more inclusive and just Africa may be long and challenging, but it is a journey that we must embark upon with unwavering determination. This report is a call to action and a testament to our shared commitment to a future where no one is left behind. Together, we can create a more equitable and harmonious Africa for all its diverse communities.



Preface

Paul Divakar Namala

Convenor,
Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

Africa is distinguished by its diversity, which includes a wide range of cultures, languages, and traditions. However, discrimination based on work and descent transcends national boundaries and runs through all of this diversity.

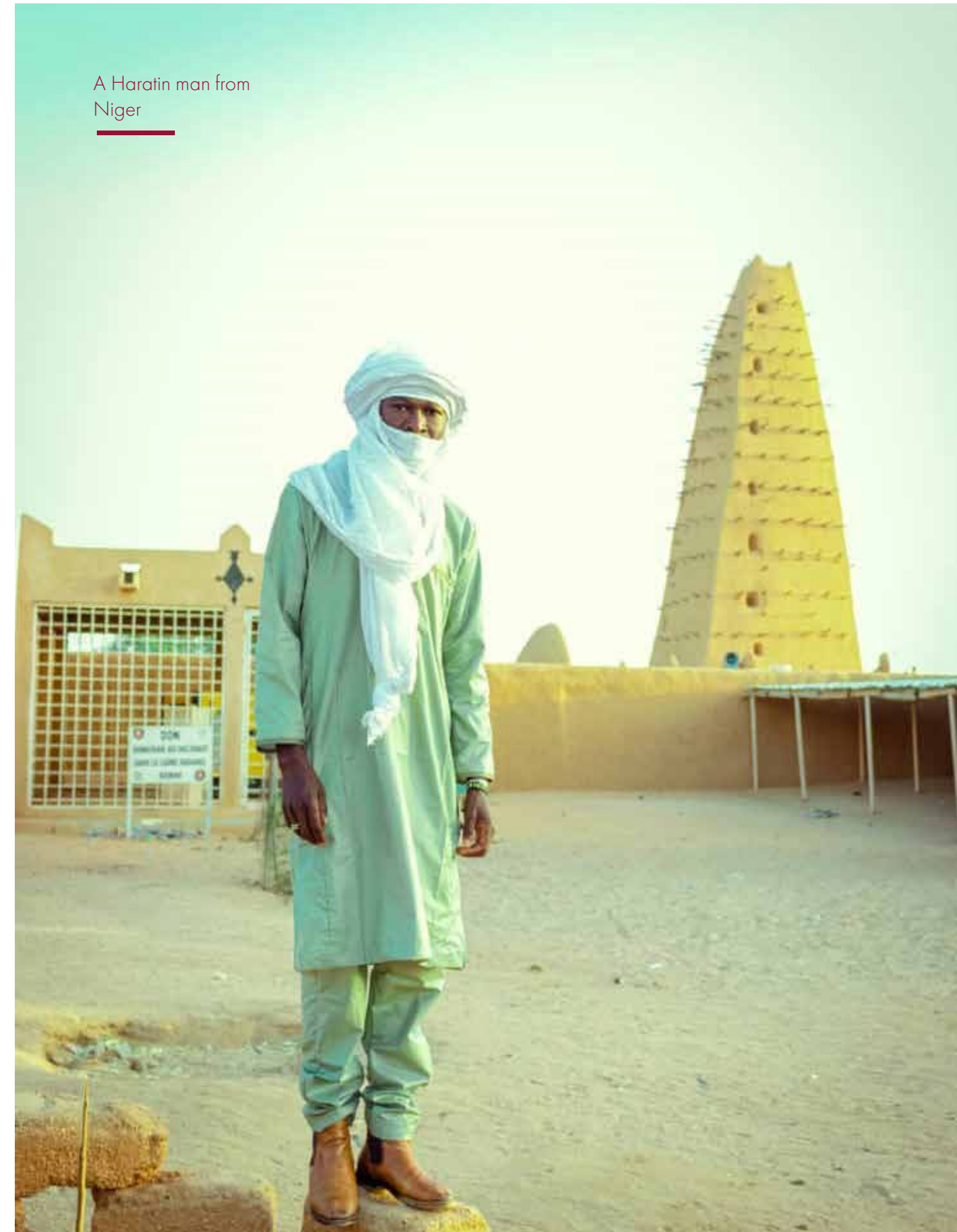
Africa has a long-standing history of slavery and slavery practices since well before European colonisation. The aftermath of domestic and transnational slavery reverberates generation after generation in various forms and intensities. In modern-day Africa, slavery and slavery-like practices persist in many countries, including, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, and Togo, among many other countries.

The identity and relationship of caste and descent of particular communities within the ethnic groups of Africa plays a crucial role in the persistence of slavery and slavery-like discrimination in the African region. The study attempts to profile communities that continue to be trapped in centuries old slavery and slavery-like practice. The study also explores the different ways in which the communities experience atrocities and discrimination.

We acknowledge the resilience and agency demonstrated by the marginalised communities as they challenge systemic discrimination and strive for their rights. Grassroots movements, civil society organisations, and international solidarity play a pivotal role in amplifying their voices and advocating for justice.

In recent years, significant efforts have been made at local, national, and international levels to address the rights of communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD). Awareness initiatives and legal frameworks have all been crucial in promoting change. However, affirmative policies, implementation flaws, societal biases, and enduring structural disparities still prevent true progress from being made.

The study provides a platform for initiating informed dialogue, evidence-based decision-making, and collaborative efforts aimed at fostering positive transformation. We hope that the study will provide insights for further research and analyses. We also hope it will contribute to the journey of realising the full spectrum of rights for communities discriminated by slavery and slavery-like practices in the Africa region.



A Haratin man from
Niger

Glossary & Abbreviations

Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) are the peoples directly affected by Discrimination based on Work and Descent. The communities discriminated against on the basis of work and descent continue to face extreme forms of isolation and discrimination, which acts as an obstacle to their attainment of civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights. This form of stigma has led to their segregation and enforced endogamy, as well as socio-economic, cultural and political discrimination.

Haratin are the former black slaves who continue to be victimised in the centuries old descent-based slavery practice in Mauritania. The report notes that correct spelling and pronunciation of the community name is crucial to the identity-assertion of the *Haratin*. The correct spelling and pronunciation may thus be noted as:

Haratin – plural form; *Hartania* is feminine, plural; *Hartani* is feminine, singular (as per the Regional Experts of Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD), Mauritania).

■	CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
■	CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
■	CMW	Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
■	GFOD	Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent
■	HRC	Human Rights Council
■	ILO	International Labour Organisation
■	IOM	International Organisation for Migration
■	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
■	UNCT	United Nations Country Team
■	UPR	Universal Periodic Review

Slavery, slavery-like practices and emanating discrimination continue to be widespread in many countries of contemporary Africa. About 7 million people are living in modern slavery today. Hundreds of thousands of them can trace back their modern forms of slavery and discrimination - to the caste-based slavery of the past, and the discrimination associated with the slavery of their ancestors.

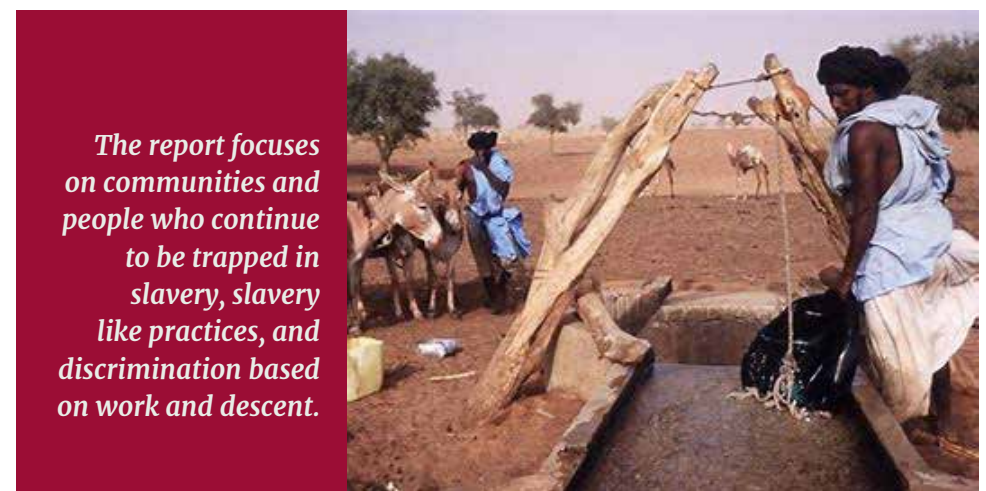
The present study titled '*Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) in Africa and Status of Modern Slavery – A Regional Report, 2023*', explores the role of caste-identity of communities in slavery and slavery-like practices.

It integrates evidence pointing to the identity of "caste" within ethnic groups as one of the predominant characteristics of modern slavery. Other intersectional factors such as class, gender, and religion have also been influenced by caste realities. The report focuses on communities and people who continue to be trapped in slavery, slavery like practices, and discrimination based on work and descent. It gives a profile of ethnic groups across different countries of Africa, the caste-affected groups within them, and their human rights concerns through lenses of slavery and slavery practices. The study also gives a country-wise brief on caste-based hierarchies, and present-day concerns. It further discusses the impact of slavery and slavery practices in the region's development through the SDG indicators. The national and international response to discrimination based on work and descent is also discussed further.

Methodology: The study collates evidence gathered through desk research of existing studies, news articles, court cases, and judgments. The study also draws upon the insights of Rights Experts of the Global Forum of Discrimination on Work and Descent (GFoD) who have authored country-level studies of Mali, Cameroon, Mauritania, Niger and Gambia, as part of the study-series on CDWD and Modern Slavery. The estimates of Modern Slavery presented in the study are derived from various secondary research sources, including UN agencies, academic research, CSO submissions to the UN Human Rights mechanisms, country reports submitted to UN mechanisms, and various news reports.

About this Report

Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) is the UN terminology used for communities who are traditionally and intergenerationally discriminated based on their identity, social-hierarchical positions, the work associated with their positions, and their lineage and descendants. Due to such a complex exclusion system, these communities are globally known as Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD). This form of discrimination is forcing the CDWD into modern form of slavery and slavery-like practices



The report focuses on communities and people who continue to be trapped in slavery, slavery like practices, and discrimination based on work and descent.

SUMMARY & RECOMENDATIONS



AFRICA

COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT

Caste systems exist in pockets in some African countries. Stigma is often attached to this problem, and as a consequence "low caste" communities in Africa suffer various forms of social exclusion and discrimination, particularly with regard to employment, political representation and inter-caste marriages. This form of discrimination is termed discrimination based on work and descent.

PEOPLE OF SLAVE DESCENT, MAURITANIA

Haratin, known as the "black moors" are made up of slaves and ex-slaves belonging to the Bidan. Although slavery has been outlawed in Mauritania, it has been estimated that around 90,000 to 300,000 Haratin exist today.

THE TUAREG PEOPLE

IN MALI, NIGER, ALGERIA, LIBYA, BURKINA FASO

A rigid caste system operates in Tuareg society between the nobles, freemen and slaves (Bellah). The Bellah are traditionally occupied by their "owners" as unpaid manual labourers, producing goods such as salt, which the "owners" then trade.

THE FULANI, MANDINKA, AND WOLOF PEOPLE IN SENEGAL, MALI, GAMBIA, GUINEA, SIERRA LEONE, LIBERIA, IVORY COAST, BENIN, GHANA, BURKINA FASO AND NIGERIA

Mande-speaking areas of West Africa have social hierarchies based on caste, generally broken down into blacksmiths (often paired with female potters), bards and leatherworkers. They are considered as dirty or impure and there are enforced restrictions on inter-group sexual intercourse and marriage, sharing of food and entering of compounds. Among the Wolof of Senegal, the concept of caste is founded on occupational groups. Accordingly Wolof society is divided into the Geer (freeborn/nobles), jaam (slaves and slave descendants) and the ñeeño (people of caste)

THE OSU IN NIGERIA

The "Osu" system in Nigeria occupies a unique space in descent-based discrimination in Africa. Osu people were historically "owned" by deities amongst communities in Igbo-land, South-East Nigeria. They were dedicated and "sacrificed" to these gods as well as being forced to live on the outskirts of villages to be the target of any bad luck that might occur. Being an Osu is a position that is ascribed at birth, based on descent.

THE FUGA PEOPLE OF ETHIOPIA

Characterized by endogamy and also by specialization in one or more occupations considered unclean or degrading, the Fuga people have been excluded from ordinary interaction with members of the host community".

THE MIDIGAN, TUMAL AND YIBIR PEOPLE OF SOMALIA

In traditional Somali society many occupational and descent based "low caste" groups and sub-groups are referred to as Sab, meaning "low caste". Concepts of purity play a large part in discrimination against Sab Somalis.

THE WATTA IN KENYA

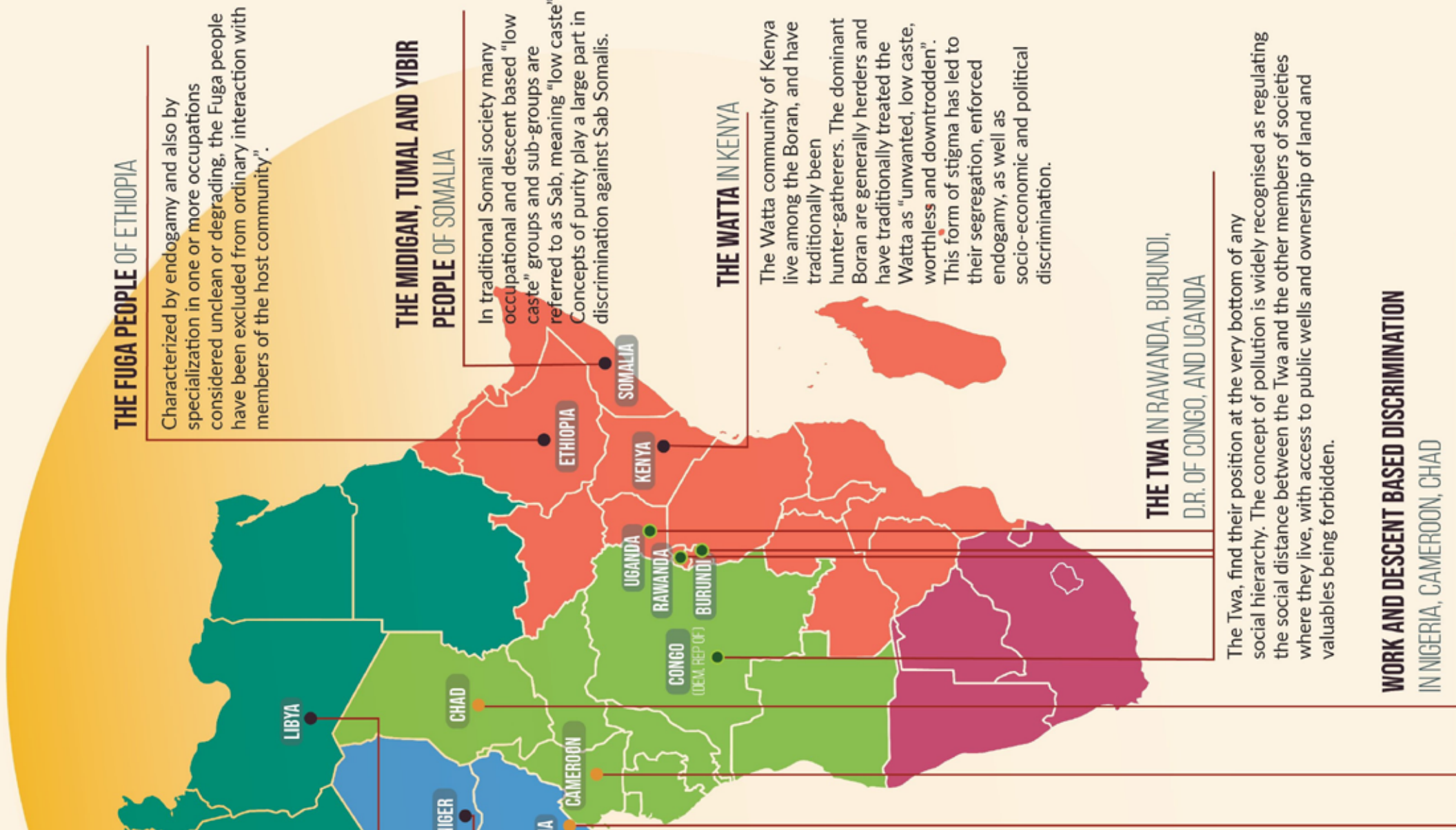
The Watta community of Kenya live among the Boran, and have traditionally been hunter-gatherers. The dominant Boran are generally herders and Watta as "unwanted, low caste, worthless and downtrodden". This form of stigma has led to their segregation, enforced endogamy, as well as socio-economic and political discrimination.

THE TWA IN RAWANDA, BURUNDI, D.R. OF CONGO, AND UGANDA

The Twa, find their position at the very bottom of any social hierarchy. The concept of pollution is widely recognised as regulating the social distance between the Twa and the other members of societies where they live, with access to public wells and ownership of land and valuables being forbidden.

WORK AND DESCENT BASED DISCRIMINATION IN NIGERIA, CAMEROON, CHAD

About 13 of the 30 ethnic groups in this region, mainly blacksmiths and potters, face discrimination based on their work; endogamy is practised, occupation and social status is ascribed from birth and concepts of pollution and impurity regulate contact between the caste and non-caste people, restricting commensality and creating conditions of discrimination. Contact with the caste peoples is seen as polluting and marriage is forbidden.



Summary and Recommendations

D

iscrimination based on work and descent and exclusion of communities on the grounds of caste or analogous status is a global phenomenon affecting over 270 million people worldwide. While the highest numbers of affected communities concentrate in South Asia, they can also be found in other regions including Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific region, as well as in diaspora communities.

CDWD face social, cultural, economic, and political exclusion, segregation, and alienation. The perpetuation of discrimination is continued through the influx of systemic violence and atrocities against these communities. Globally segregated, however, these communities have common characteristics like caste-like systems, untouchability, modern slavery, gross atrocities and violence, and low development ratings. With untouchability as one of the core concepts associated with CDWD along with endogamy and segregation, members of CDWD are the most marginalized groups when it comes to access to basic rights and entitlement. This further divides people in a social hierarchy based on their occupation. Thus, the communities (CDWD) falls largely at the bottom of this hierarchical pyramid, and are often considered the most impure or polluted.

Africa has a long-standing history of slavery and slavery practices through domestic slavery, which intensified extensively through the trans-Saharan, Indian Ocean and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Today, hundreds of thousands of formerly enslaved people in and from Africa can trace back their modern forms of slavery and discrimination - to the caste-based slavery of the past, and the discrimination associated with the caste-based slavery of their ancestors.

Yet, the role of caste and its practices remains less explored in debates and research, including that by human rights organisations. Professor Penda Mbow succinctly captures this observation in the context of human rights organisations in Senegal, saying that organisations “never carry out investigations to evaluate the impact of hierarchies of order and caste on the lives of individuals and their social relations, on their married lives and, subsequently, on their personal fulfilment.” She further comments that “a good proportion of civil society deliberately maintains total vagueness in regard to the disappearance of order and caste hierarchies”

The study titled ‘*Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) in Africa and Status of Modern Slavery – A Regional Report, 2023*’, explores the role of caste-identity of communities in slavery and slavery-like practices.

Key Findings of the Study:

- Slavery and slavery practices remain persistent in contemporary Africa
- Caste identity has a critical role in slavery and slavery like practices
- Existing evidence of engagement of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) in Slavery and slavery like practices
- Estimates of CDWD in the African region is difficult to obtain making it difficult to estimate the number of CDWD in slavery across Africa
- Persistent discrimination, prohibitions and restrictions experienced by the CDWD hampers their socio-cultural-economic and political advancement
- CDWD identity struggle and assertion
- Factors perpetuating Slavery and slavery practices
- Domestic and International Response to eradicate slavery and slavery-like practices

KEY FINDINGS

1

Persistent Slavery And Slavery Practices In Contemporary Africa

Slavery, slavery like practices and emanating discrimination continue to be prevalent in many African countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, and Togo, among other countries.

Over 7 million people are living in modern slavery in Africa, which encompasses both – the persistent traditional forms of slavery and new forms of slavery and slavery-like

practices. Among them, more than 3.8 million (54%) are in Forced Labour, while more than 3.2 million (46%) are in Forced Marriages.

The countries with the highest prevalence of modern slavery in Africa are Eritrea, Mauritania, and South Sudan. While many forms of modern slavery in contemporary Africa almost exclusively engages the CDWD, almost all forms significantly engage them.

Countries with the highest prevalence of modern slavery in Africa



- Eritrea
- Mauritania
- South Sudan

Considering the overlaps and the impact on specific groups of women, children and general adults, the study categorises modern slavery in Africa as

- Descent-based slavery, including chattel and passive slavery.
- Slavery which specifically targets women, girls and children
- Slavery which engages forced and exploitative labour,
- Trafficking in persons, and
- Adults and children in armed conflict.

Descent Based Slavery Including Chattel and Passive Slavery:

While “chattel slavery” is the traditional form of bonded-servitude which persists even today, “passive slavery” involves formerly enslaved persons rendering unpaid labour to the former slave-owners out of customary practice.

Modern Slavery Specifically Targeting Women and Girls (descent-based and new):

Sexual slavery in Africa is deeply rooted in cultural and social factors. In Niger and Nigeria, young Tuareg girls born into slavery are sold as “*Wahayu*”- the unofficial fifth wife, to wealthy Hausa individuals. 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.”

Modern Slavery Specifically Targeting Children (descent-based and new):

In Quranic schools (*Daara*), *Talibe* students are compelled into begging, street vending, and labour by their spiritual teachers to cover their education and meals. This practice is widespread in Benin, Niger, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and other nations. Another concerning tradition is *Vidomegon*, where rural families entrust children to affluent urban households in exchange for education, essentially turning them into young labourers. In Niger, through child rental, parents “rent” their children for forced begging, guiding vision-impaired individuals, or domestic servitude.

Child labour is pervasive across almost all African countries, encompassing domestic work, mining (gold, salt, trona, gypsum), agriculture and plantations (onion, cotton, cocoa, tea), quarries (stone, salt), markets, bus stations, handicrafts, cattle herding, and manufacturing. *Child trafficking* for forced labour and sex trafficking is prevalent in nearly every nation. Shockingly, international terror groups and extremist organisations exploit children as young as 13 for combat and support roles, subjecting women and girls to forced marriages through abduction and exploitation in countries such as the Central African Republic, DRC, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan.

Child labour is pervasive across almost all African countries, encompassing domestic work, mining, agriculture and plantations, quarries, markets, bus stations, handicrafts, cattle herding, and manufacturing.

Forced and Exploitative Labour and Trafficking in Persons:

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.

Adults and Children in Armed Conflict:

Anti-Slavery Groups report a resurgence of racially based slave trade, with northern armed militias raiding southern villages for slaves in Sudan. Anecdotal evidence shows the recruitment and kidnapping of Somalis and Kenyans (both adults and children) by the non-state armed group al-Shabaab for combat roles.

Countries deeply impacted by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) -West Africa and Boko Haram, include Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and are known for recruiting or trafficking adults and children for military support or direct combat roles.

Men from The Gambia working in a landfill.



2

Caste Identity Has a Critical Role in Slavery And Slavery- Like Practices in Africa:

Slavery and slavery-like practices persist within various ethnic groups across Africa. These ethnic groups are highly stratified into caste-like rungs of - *Nobles, the free-born Commoners and Peasantry (including scholars, clerics and farmers)*, followed by the *Occupational castes or Artisans*, and finally the so-called “*Slaves*” (household and war-slaves). The social stratification displayed within the African ethnic groups is very similar to the caste-structure of South Asia, barring two distinct ways:

- Slavery is embedded in social stratification and is inherited. Children of slaves were and are the property of the so-called “masters”, with no rights of parents over their children, nor any rights over own relationships, and
- Caste stratification including slavery is not ascribed in religion, but passed down generations over past political power/ chieftdom, dominance and perceived supremacy.

Some enslaved-caste groups who continue to be *victimised in slavery* and slavery-like practices include the:

Komo, Maccudo, Rimmaybe, Dimaajo, Baleebe, Jaam, Jongo, Diam, Horso, Bannye and Kogno (or Kono), Ohu, Osu, Bellah, Iklan (Eklan, Ikelan, or Akli), Hratin, Kamadja, Jareer (Somali Bantu), and Andevo among others.

Some of the *Occupational / artisan caste* groups within the ethnic groups of the mentioned countries, who continue to be discriminated based on the occupation of their ancestors include - *Taggo, Numolu, Numoo, Tegga, Tumul (blacksmiths); Garanko/*

Karankolu, Faraboo,Uude, Midgan (leatherworkers); Laube (woodcarvers); Ràbb (weavers), Yibir (craftpersons); Djeli, Jaloo, Nyamakale Géwël Jaaru/ Jalolu, Agguta (griots/ praise singers or troubadours), among others.

Stratified Caste-like rungs within various ethnic groups in Africa

- *The Nobles*
- *The free-born Commoners and Peasantry (incl.scholars, clerics, farmers)*
- *Occupational castes or Artisans*
- *“Slaves” (household and war-slaves)*



Gambian woman

Slavery is embedded in social stratification and is inherited. Children of slaves were and are the property of the so-called “masters”, with no rights of parents over their children, nor any rights over own relationships

Barring the instances when nobility and commoners captured in war were sold off as slaves as a form of punishment, it was generally the so-called “lower-caste” people whose status in the social hierarchy was that of “slaves”.

3

Existing Evidence Of Engagement Of CDWD in Slavery and Slavery-like Practices:

In the context of slavery in Africa, historically it has been the “caste” status of a particular group which put them in slavery, in the first place. Barring the instances when nobility and commoners captured in war were sold off as slaves as a form of punishment, it was generally the so-called “lower-caste” people whose status in the social hierarchy was that of “slaves”. Furthermore, it was the slave-caste groups who were sold and exported during the trans- Saharan, Indian Ocean and trans-Atlantic slave-trades in Africa, as well as within the African region.

The enslaved caste groups and the artisan caste groups, who collectively are identified as CDWD continue to be victimised by modern forms of slavery and similar practices even today. Some forms of persistent traditional slavery which exclusively engages the CDWD include:

- *The Wahaya practice* of sexual slavery of young black Tuareg girls of enslaved status is prevalent in Niger and Nigeria. The purpose of keeping a *Wahayu* is for “sexual and domestic servitude” – the nomenclature of “wife” being farcical and more importantly, illegal.
- *The Osu caste system* is prevalent in Nigeria in which the descendants of a group of people traditionally identified as Osu, continue to be consecrated to the deities for life. The purpose of their consecration is to absolve the sins and follies of the dominant sub-caste *Diala* among the Igbo people.

Persistent discrimination against Osu, including restrictions in inter-caste marriage and commensality, segregation in living in the outskirts, “untouchability” since traditional belief is that touching an Osu will make one an Osu, denial of access to common resources and entitlements, and stigma among other forms of discrimination, mark the lives of the Osu.

- *Somali Bantu of Somalia:* Historically, the Somali Bantu people of Somalia were not ancestrally related to the other Somali ethnic groups. They were brought to Somalia from Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania as part of the Arab slave trade (trans-Saharan slave trade) to work as slaves in the plantations along the fertile floodplains of Shebelle and Jubba rivers.

- *Descent-based slavery of Hratin of Mauritania:* The Hratin are of Black African or Negro-African origin and comprise the freed slaves and their descendants of black origin.

Traditionally, the Hratin were the “slave-caste” of the highly stratified *Beidane* (White Moors) society. The Hratin constitute the majority (45%) of Mauritania’s population, yet it is estimated that half of them are in slavery, while the other half suffer from the legacies of slavery - exploitation, marginalisation and socio-political exclusion.

4

Caste Identity Has a Critical Role in Slavery And Slavery-Like Practices in Africa:

Estimates of CDWD across Africa are difficult to obtain, let alone within each country, given the inadequate research on CDWD, from the lenses of "caste-descent-and work". The hitherto one track discourse on slavery and racial discrimination in Africa has eclipsed the role of Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD). Theoretically, this task will require a study of ethnic groups of each country and collate the numbers of CDWD across the region. The practical challenge however is that most countries do not capture their Census data in terms of sub-caste disaggregation. In many a Census, the CDWD population are clubbed with the dominant sub-caste groups, serving to cloak the actual numbers of the CDWD. For instance, the Haratin of Mauritania, though they constitute the highest ethnic population (45%) are clubbed in government records with the Beidane, an ethnic group which traditionally enslaved the Hratin.

5

Discrimination, Prohibitions and Restrictions Experienced by CDWD

Professor Penda Mbow in the context of Senegal comments that the *"reality of the caste phenomenon can be grasped through examples that reflect the everyday reality, primarily at the level of the lower social classes."*

Asbjørn Eide and Yozo Yokota in a working paper for the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, 2002 analyse the causes and consequences of Discrimination based on Work and Descent as overlapping elements which include social

and cultural segregation, and economic and political marginalisation, among others. The paper observes that – *"even where the original occupational roles no longer exist, the marginalization caused by association with stigmatized traditional occupations may lead - as a consequence – to members of the affected groups being relegated to the most menial jobs, whether or not those jobs are related to the original occupational roles."*

Essentially, the present study reiterates that the concept of purity and pollution is central to Africa's caste system, seen in practices like untouchability, akin to South Asia, notably among groups such as Nigeria's Osu, who face social segregation as outcasts. Hamlets in West Africa, like Kassa village in Niger, bear caste-specific names like *dabey* or *tunga*, indicating their history as *"slave-quarters."* Africa's ethnic groups typically adhere to strict endogamous caste structures, prohibiting inter-caste and inter-occupational marriages, resulting in social boycotts, punishments, assaults, and conflicts. The existence of separate burial rites, cemeteries, and restrictions on religious activities reveals the perceived supremacy of dominant castes. Skin colour-based discrimination, evident among the Tuareg, further underscores inequality. Superstitions in *Trokosi* and *Osu* practices have religious roots. The CDWD face economic hurdles, limited land ownership, and are relegated to low-income trades. They perform ancestral, menial jobs at village events. Their involvement in political administration, village activities, and development is restricted. CDWD are systematically denied land ownership and work in their masters' fields through practices like renting (*Hiiyan*) or debt repayment/pledging (*Tolme*).

The CDWD, in their respective societies, remain the most disadvantaged and economically poorest owing to their persistent marginalisation. In some instances, the stigma of poverty itself is the cause of marginalisation. Efforts of social mobility are often met with violence.

6

CDWD Identity Struggle And Assertion:

The *Haratin* of Mauritania and the *Gambana* movement of the Soninke community, are notable for their struggle for identity and assertion towards their emancipation. The *Haratin*, the descendants of formerly enslaved black African people, traditionally served the *Beidane*. Today, they comprise the majority (45%) of the country's population and are the most visible ethnic groups who are victims of descent-based slavery. Many *Haratin* of contemporary Mauritania identify themselves distinct from the *Beidane*. The anti-slavery activism which started in the late 1970s saw the abolishment of slavery in 1981, and criminalisation as late as 2007. The *Hratin's* fight for emancipation is also an economic fight – of the poorest against the richest. *Hratin's* claim for a separate identity for the minority group with a majority population, is significant for their socio-political and overall advancement. Similarly, the *Gambana movement*, meaning "we are all equal" in the Soninké language, emerged around 2016 with the aim to combat slavery and caste-based discrimination and exclusion of the *Komo* community (formerly slave-caste of the Sarahulleh/ Soninké ethnic group). The movement has gained support from oppressed caste groups within the Soninké community and has established chapters in Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, the USA, Spain, and other countries with a significant Soninké population.

7

Factors Perpetuating Slavery and Slavery like Practices

Slavery and slavery like practices in contemporary Africa is driven by the cause-and-effect factors of centuries-old colonisation which have robbed the human

and social capital and natural resource of the continent, resulting in extreme multi-dimensional poverty and hunger, political instability, displacement due to conflicts and climate change, capitalistic international policies, and the impact of pandemic such as Ebola, COVID-19 etc., among other factors.

8

Domestic And International Response in Eradicating Slavery, Slavery-Like Practices and Discrimination:

Almost all African countries have prohibited slavery, servitude and forced labour in their Constitutions, followed by their criminalisation in Criminal and Penal Codes. Notably, Mali has not criminalised slavery and slavery-like practices. Very few countries speak about slavery-like practices in their legislations. Almost all countries have anti-trafficking laws which are more recent and more detailed than other laws.

Human Rights institutions like CERD, CEDAW, CRC, ESCR, CMW, and ILO Conventions have made vital recommendations regarding the persistence of descent-based slavery, slavery-like practices, sexual slavery, and discrimination. These recommendations stress the need for ethnicity-disaggregated population data and the importance of combating harmful practices against women and girls. They also call for robust enforcement of anti-slavery and anti-trafficking laws, including training for officials and increased allocation of resources. Additionally, they emphasise the necessity of effective investigation and prosecution, leading to more convictions when applicable, with penalties that match the gravity of these crimes.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Discussion on Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) in Africa is eclipsed by the discourse on slavery and racial discrimination.
2. The “caste” of people is the critical factor for perpetuation of modern slavery and discrimination in Africa region, and hence it is imperative to view Modern Slavery from the lenses of Caste and discrimination based on work and descent, not just class and race.
3. The estimated global CDWD population of 270 million, as advocated by CDWD rights activists, may be an underestimation. This is because, in addition to the 200+ million CDWD individuals in South Asia, there are also over 200 million people of African descent who carry the legacy of slavery and colonisation residing in the Americas and other parts of the world.
4. It is crucial to build evidence of role of caste within ethnic groups in the persistence of modern slavery and discrimination in Africa, through studies on affected communities and case laws.
5. Given the high foreign investment in resource rich Africa, it is a matter of absolute accountability and liability of transnational corporations and not just their social responsibility, to give back for direct development of Africa and to ensure that modern slavery and slavery like practices are not encouraged and engaged, either directly or through supply chains and other intermediaries.
6. The absence of special measures for the advancement of the significant number of people who were victimised in slavery and similar practices for generations, is glaring.
7. Perspective building on co-relation of caste and slavery practices is required among local, national and regional advocacy groups. Nurturing of rightsholder leadership and building solidarity for advocacy on eradication of descent and caste-based slavery and discrimination in Africa region is required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ending modern slavery of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) in Africa will require a multi-faceted and multi-pronged response.

I. Recommendations for States:

1. Formally recognize Discrimination based on Work and Descent at the national and regional level (Africa) , taking into account the continuing relevance of ancestry and occupation to practices of modern slavery and caste, with a view to ensuring meaningful policymaking that reaches affected communities.
2. To recognise the **relevance of caste, ancestral occupation and descent** in persistent modern slavery and similar practices.
3. To ensure that disaggregated data on CDWD is captured in respective countries, so as to enable evidence building in order to captivate the ground situation
4. To ensure effective enforcement of existing legislations, review their relevance and applicability and amend, repeal or enact new legislations, as required.
5. To immediately prohibit through specific legislations, the harmful practices against women and girls.
6. To ensure data collection disaggregated by caste and ethnicity among other factors, to enable targeted policy-making for CDWD and other marginalised groups.
7. To provide Special Measures/ Affirmative Action for mainstreaming of the CDWD.
8. Continuous and concerted mass communication and social messaging for sensitisation of public on slavery, slavery-related products and the responsibility of good labour practices.
9. To ensure adequate training to all law enforcement, judicial and administrative officials on slavery and caste-based discrimination; and to establish effective monitoring mechanisms.
10. To increase efforts in victim-centric rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of enslaved persons.

II. Recommendation for Corporate Accountability:

11. To develop Ethical Business Policy in accordance with decent-work international standards

III. Recommendation for CSOs and INGOs:

12. To continue to build evidence on caste and descent -based discrimination, and a rightsholder cadre of human rights defenders, with a special focus on youth and women.

IV. Recommendation for Human Rights Mechanisms:

13. To internalise the elimination of caste and descent -based slavery and discrimination in all its observations that affect marginalised communities, and develop common platforms for discourse and knowledge sharing.



Children from CDWD
from The Gambia

CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGIES



SLAVERY, SLAVE-TRADE AND INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES SIMILAR TO SLAVERY:

The Slavery Convention, 1926 defines Slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”, and “slave” means a person in such condition or status. The Supplementary Convention on Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956, further adds the concepts of “Slavery practices and institutions similar to slavery” to include - debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriage, child exploitation and child labour. The Convention defines Slave-trade as “all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a person acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged; and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves by whatever means of conveyance.

TRADITIONAL SLAVERY:

The definition of slavery as mentioned in the Slavery Convention 1926, states “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” is considered as “Traditional Slavery”.

DESCENT-BASED SLAVERY:

Descent-based slavery describes a situation where people are born into slavery. This is usually because their ancestors were captured into slavery, and their families have ‘belonged’ to the slave-owning families ever since. The slavery status is passed down the maternal line. Descent-based slavery is found in both traditional and modern forms of slavery and slavery-like practices.

MODERN SLAVERY:

Modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world, and cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious lines. Modern Slavery is not defined in law. It is used as an umbrella term to include practices such as – forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage and human trafficking. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.

CASTE STRUCTURE AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS IN AFRICA

With few variations, most ethnic groups share similar caste structure. In general, the caste-structure has three to four major stratifications:



NOBLES were considered free-born and formed the royalty or chieftaincy with power and authority. Today, they continue to comprise the dominant caste of the society.

COMMONERS AND PEASANTRY were also considered free-born, and generally were the advisors of the nobles. Traditionally they comprised the peasants, landholders, marabouts (scholars and religious leaders), and traders. Today, they continue to hold similar positions of power and affluence.

OCCUPATIONAL CASTES OR ARTISANS AND COURTIERS were considered to be the so-called "lower-caste" in most societies, though in few societies such as Tukulor, the artisans comprised part of the 'commoners'. In any case, the occupation of the artisan-caste group was skill-based and they included – *praise-singing (griots, troubadours), blacksmiths, goldsmiths, leather-workers, and carpenters*, among others.

In many ethnic groups (like the Mandinka), the artisan-caste people were further sub-divided in terms of subservience. In many societies, the occupational caste had specific names, such as *Nyamakala* or *Nyamakalaw* among Madinka, *Nyaxamalo* among the Soninke and *Nyenyoy* or *Neeno* among the Wolof. Today, the artisan-caste or occupational caste continue to be discriminated because of their "descent", and are often pushed into performing similar "work" of their ancestors. The group constitutes "Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent".

SLAVES, who were at the bottom-most of the social hierarchy and were normally of two types:

- (a) Household and agricultural slaves, and
- (b) Captured-slaves, who were prisoners-of-war, slaves captured during raids, or hardened criminals or people having committed serious crimes, who were sold off as slaves in slave-markets, as part of punishment, or were kidnapped, or were purchased as children from desperate parents post difficult times. The condition and treatment meted out with household slaves were comparatively better than the captured-slaves. The latter were treated like disposable merchandise.

Today, the formerly enslaved persons and descendants of enslaved persons continue to be victimised in persistent forms of traditional slavery, in addition to modern slavery and slavery-like practices.



Nomadic Bororo girls selling curdled milk in Matyo Darlé region of Adamau after building their capacities on milk fabrication

Caste Structure in Africa

The innumerable ethnic groups of the African region have their own distinctive culture, language and history. Most display a similar caste-structure as compared to the caste structure in South Asia and other regions - further substantiating the existence of caste and caste-like systems worldwide. Some such ethnic groups include the *Mandinka, Wolof, Fulani, Serahule (Soninke), Serer, Hausa, Zarma, Beidane, Igbo peoples, and Bambara* among others. The essential caste-like features across most ethnic groups include:

- Designated Work and Division of Labour
- Descent-based Occupation – Inherited Status
- Rigid Hierarchy
- Membership by Birth
- Endogamy and Commensality, and
- Concept of Purity and Pollution
- Separate Housing Settlements

Distinguishing features of Caste-based discrimination in Africa



- Slavery is embedded in social stratification and is inherited. Children of slaves are the property of the so-called "masters", with no rights of parents over their children, nor any rights over own relationships
- Caste stratification including slavery is not ascribed in religion, but passed down through generations over past political power/chieftdom, dominance and perceived supremacy.

A child labourer
from CDWD in
Niger



CASTE STRUCTURE AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS IN AFRICA

Some of the ethnic groups discussed here are but few examples of the numerous ethnic groups of Africa with slavery and caste-systems.

Tuareg of North and West Africa

The Tuareg (*Twareg*, *Touareg*) are a Berber ethnic group primarily found in North and West Africa including countries of Libya, Algeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and a smaller population in Nigeria. Estimates of Tuareg range upto 2.5 million in these countries, with the majority population (2 million) in Niger itself.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: They are among the major slaveholders in the western Niger. They are also known for the purchase and selling of *Wahaya* – (sexual slaves or the fifth wife). The Tuareg followed a strict caste system. The stratification included (i) *Imajaghan*, meaning "the proud and free (nobles/ chief), semi-noble - the marabouts (*Ineslemen* or marabouts (religious leader or imam), free born Vassal – herdsmen - *ímad* (*Imghad*);

(ii) the Artisans - blacksmith, jewellers, wood workers and leather artisan castes, *Agguta* (griot); and at the bottom most

(iii) Slave-caste – *Bellah* (livestock herders), or *Iklan* (*Eklan*, *Ikelan*, or *Akli*) were bonded slaves. They would acquire slaves through slave-raids, war-slaves, or purchase at slave-markets. A distinguishing feature of Tuareg caste-structure was that they had developed a strata system for the slaves.

This differentiated the enslaved role, expected behaviour, marriageability, inheritance rights if any, and occupation. This factor differentiated the *Ikelan* and *Bellah*. The *Ikelan* were later bonded caste, while *Bellah*'s role was livestock herding.





Wolof of West Africa

The Wolof or Jollof (or *Jolof*) are primarily found in Senegal (43% of country's population), Mauritania (7%), and Gambia (15%). They constitute the largest ethnic group in Senegal. Estimates of Wolof range from 7-8 million worldwide.

Wolof are primarily engaged in the occupations of business, traders, or farmers. Most people in the urban areas of Greater Banjul and the Kombo have adopted the Wolof language as the Lingua Franca.

Slavery and Caste hierarchy: Slavery in Wolof culture pre-existed the European colonisation and transatlantic slavery. Slaves were born into slavery or acquired through slave-trade and slave-capture. Caste-structure continues to be rigid in Wolof society. They have three caste-based stratifications - *Geer*, *Neeno* and *Jaam*. The *Geer* included free-born royalty/ noblemen; and free-born Commoner and Peasantry (*Badola*, *Baadoolo*); the *Neeno* or *Nyeno* were the Occupational or Artisan group including blacksmiths (*Tega*), goldsmiths, leather-workers (*Uude*, *Faraboo*), griot/ praise singers (*Gewel*), wood-carvers (*Laube*), weavers (*Räbb*) and lastly – the Slave-caste known as *Jaam* or *Jongo*.

The slaves were of two types: Household slaves who often stayed with the same family for many generations and were seen as nominal members of the family and those caught in war who were less well treated and were treated as personal property to be bought or sold.

Mandinka of West Africa

The Mandinka are primarily found in Mali, Gambia, Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone among few others. They comprise the largest ethnic group in Gambia (34.4 % of country's population), followed by Mali and Guinea. Estimates of Mandinka population range from 2 million – 8 million - 11 million across Africa and diaspora. The Mandinka are the descendants of Mali empire.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: Domestic slavery among Mandinka pre-existed the European colonisation and transatlantic slavery. The caste-stratification included 4 levels - the Nobles/ ruling class called "*Foro*"; the Commoner caste comprising - marabouts (scholars, religious leaders), farm owners and traders. Both the noble and commoner class were considered free-born. The third caste group were the artisan-caste comprising griots or "*Jaloo*", blacksmiths "*Numoo*", and leather workers "*Faraboo*", among others. At the bottom of the social rung were the slaves – "*Jongo*".

Fula of West Africa

The Fula (*Fulani*, *Peul*, *Fulbe* or *Pulaar*, *Mbororos* (in Cameroon)) are widely dispersed in Africa - in West Africa, Sahel region and Sahara. Fula speaking people comprise the significant population of Nigeria, Gambia, Guinea, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau among others.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: The Fula were victims of transatlantic slave trade in large numbers, as well as being slave-traders themselves. The Fula follow a strict caste-based hierarchical system, comprising four distinct stratifications – the nobles – "*Dimo*", followed by marabouts (clerics) and commoners/ peasant-class (cattle-owning people), then the artisans (blacksmiths, potters, griots (*Nyamakale*), woodworkers, dressmakers etc.). The artisans were considered "caste-people", ie. of so-called 'lower caste', but they were free-born.

The slave-caste, known as *Maccudo*, *Rimmaybe*, *Dimaajo*, and less often *Baleebe*, like in other ethnic groups, were at the bottom most rung of caste-hierarchy. They were of two types – serfs or slave descendants and war slaves. The serf-people were treated better than the war slaves, and very often brought into the family circle and adopted the surnames of their owners.

Soninké of West Africa

The Soninké (*Sarahulleh*, *Sarakholés*, *Serahuli*) are primarily found in countries including Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Guinea Bissau. Estimates of Soninke population is about 2 million worldwide.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: Like the other ethnic groups, the Soninke followed a strict caste-based hierarchical system, with three broad categories – (i) *Horro* or *Horon* (noble/royalty), (ii) free-born *Namaxala* or *Nyaxamalo* (occupational or artisan caste), and (iii) *Komo* (slaves). The occupational/ artisan caste included smiths (*Taggo/Numolu*), delegates (*Mangou*), griots (*Jaaru/Jalolu*) and leather-workers (*Garanko/Karankolu*). The slave-caste, like in other ethnic groups were domestic slaves and war-slaves.

Mandara of Central and West Africa

The Mandara people can be found primarily in Central Africa (Cameroon, Chad) and West Africa (Nigeria).

Slavery and Caste hierarchy: The Mandara society traditionally has been stratified into endogamous caste-groups including the nobles, commoners (peasants), occupational caste groups – smiths etc., and the slave-caste people. The occupational and slave caste people were considered polluted and were segregated and stigmatised.

Zarma of West Africa

The Zarma (alternatively called *Zerma*, *Zaberma*, *Zabarma* *Zabermawa*, *Djerma*, *Dyerma*, *Jerma*, or other terms, though they self-identify as Zarma) are primarily found in West Africa including the countries of Niger, Nigeria and Benin in large numbers and in lesser numbers in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Ghana. Estimates of Zarma people range over 3 million worldwide.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: Slavery has been a part of the Zarma history in terms of domestic slavery, slave-trade to other African countries, mainly North Africa. They were among the major slaveholders in the Western Niger.

Caste system among Zarma was somewhat different from other ethnic groups. The *Zima* or priests/ clerics were initiated and was not an inherited position. The hierarchical system included free-born nobles/chiefs, farmers and herders; occupational / artisan caste - weavers, hunters, fishermen, leather workers, hairdressers (*Wanzam*). They were known by names of *Yagga*, *Bagney*, *Dabay*, *Banda*, *Zamey*. The slave-caste were at the bottom-most rung, and were called *Horso*, *Bannye* and *Kogno* (or *Kono*).



Hausa of West Africa

The Hausa (*Haoussa*, *Hausawa*) are the largest ethnic group in all of West Africa, and also the largest ethnic group in Niger (47% of country's population). They are primarily found in West and Central Africa including countries of Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Chad, Sudan, Republic of Congo, Togo, Eritrea, Senegal and Gambia, among others. Majority of Hausa speaking peoples are in Niger and Nigeria. Estimates of Hausa population ranges above 30 million. The Hausa have three distinct sub-groups: *Habe* (pure Hausa), *Hausa-Fulani* or *Kado*, ie. mixed with Fula peoples, and *Banza*.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: The CDWD groups include: *Ein Zari* (griots), *Bayou*, *Makéra*.

Merina people of South-Eastern Africa

The Merina people are primarily located in South-eastern Africa (Madagascar) and are estimated to be about 26 per cent of the country's population. Population data of CDWD is not known.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy: Domestic slavery existed among the Merina people – the largest ethnic group of Madagascar, much before the slave-export trade to French islands in mid-18th century. The Merina society has traditionally been highly stratified, with caste structure including the *Andriana* (nobles), *Hova* (freemen including commoners like clerics, scholars, peasantry) and *Andevo* or slaves. Each strata had sub-divisions and was strictly endogamous. The slave-trade in Merina society included both import and export. The descendants of *Andevo* (slave-caste) face discrimination and exclusion, and are exploited in modern forms of slavery in contemporary Madagascar.

Igbo people of West Africa

The Igbo people (*Ibo*) are one of the largest ethnic groups of Africa and are primarily found in Nigeria (erstwhile Igboland), with migrants in Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana and Equatorial Guinea. Estimates of Igbo population ranges from 30-42 million people (about 18% of its 218.5 million population).

Slavery and Caste Structure: The Igbo people were one of the principal ethnic groups who were victims of transatlantic slavery. There is little evidence of domestic slavery.

However, the caste system of Igboland or Nigeria is critical to note for its persistent descent-based discrimination. The *Osu* and *Ohu* are two types of caste-system among Igbo people of Nigeria. The *Osu* were traditionally consecrated to a deity and as "outcasts" they had to live in forest, away from the other Igbo people. The *Ohu* on the other hand, could live with the free-born, and could also regain their freedom. Descent-based discrimination of *Osu* is highly prevalent today and they are victims of visible segregation, untouchability, exclusion and prohibitions in marriage. More of *Osu* caste system is discussed in Chapter 3.

Beidane (White Moors) of North and West Africa

The Beidane (*Bidan*, *Baydan*, *Beydan*), or "White Moors" (literally the "white" in Arabic) or "*Maures blancs*" (meaning White, Arabic speaking), are primarily found in Mauritania and constitute over 1 million persons (25%) of the country's 4.2 million population.

Slavery and Caste Structure: The Beidane or White Moors are a highly stratified society. Traditionally, the caste stratification included nobles - Arabs" or "warriors" (also known as *Hassanis*), the "*murābi*" (marabouts in French, or *zawāyā* in Hassaniya language), followed by the artisan caste and slave-caste – the *Hratin*. In modern day Mauritania, the *Hratin*, who are descendants of Beidane-slaves, comprise the majority and most visible of ethnic groups who are victims of descent-based slavery. The *Hratin* identify themselves as distinct from the Beidane, hence their classification as a separate ethnic group. More on *Hratin* is discussed in Chapter 3.



CDWD women from West Africa

Somali people of East Africa

The Somali people constitute the largest ethnic population ranging from 15 to 20 million in Somalia, a significant population also residing in neighbouring Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. The slave caste – Bantu Somali are estimated to be about 0.9-1 million. Estimates of other slave-caste are not known.

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy:

For centuries, the Somali society has been divided into distinct social strata, where the concept of purity and pollution holds significant importance. These strata include the *Gob* or *Asha*, which represents the nobles, a servile occupational caste known as *Sab* or *Saab*, and the slave-caste called *Jareer* (Somali Bantu). The *Sab* groups were considered impure and "dirty" (*haram*) in Somali society. They consist of three subgroups: *Midgan*, *Tumal* (or *Tomal*), and *Yibir* (*Yebir*). The *Midgan* were previously slaves or servants to noble clans and were also involved in hunting and leatherworking. The *Tumal* traditionally engaged in blacksmithing, pottery, leatherworking, jewellery making, and other crafts. The *Yibir* were craftsmen specializing in making prayer mats, amulets, performing rituals for protection, marriage, birth, and crafting saddles. The *Tumal* were descendants of nomads who had intermarried with the *Midgan*.

The Somali Bantu or *Jareer* caste was the slave caste among the Somali ethnic group. They are not ancestrally related to the Somali ethnic group, and were brought to Somalia from Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania as part of slave trade. Collectively, these Bantu groups were known as *Mushunguli* (implied meaning – slave foreigner, worker). They were made to work in cotton and grain plantations owned by Somalis along the fertile floodplains of Shebelle and Jubba rivers. The Somali Bantus of contemporary Somalia are descendants of the enslaved Bantu plantation-slaves. The physical features, outsider and enslaved-status at plantations put the Somali Bantus at inferior position than the rest of Somalis, leading to their marginalisation. They were referred to as "*habash*", a derogatory derivation for Abyssinian slave. Other derogatory terms used were *ooji*, *addoon*, *boon* (meaning slave, inferior). Their name of "*Jareer*" which means "hard hair" from their African ancestry, was later adopted by Bantu as a positive identification. (More information on Somali Bantu in Chapter 3).

The distinction between *Sab* and Somali Bantu was more prominent in treatment and status in northern Somalia, as compared to the South.

Toubou and Zaghawa people of Central, West and East Africa

The Toubou and Zaghawa people can primarily be found in North Africa (southern Libya), Central Africa (northern Chad), East Africa (northwestern Sudan) and West Africa (northeastern Niger).

Slavery and Caste Hierarchy:

The Toubou and Zaghawa societies have traditionally been highly stratified with three to four strata including - royalty, peasantry, artisan-groups and slaves. The occupational castes of Toubou (*Azza*) and Zaghawa people (*Hadahid*) have traditionally been despised and segregated, as also the slave-caste of Toubou (*Kamadja*) and Zaghawa people. Segregation and endogamy within occupational groups and inter-caste-groups was also very strict. Hereditary slavery is not as evident in contemporary Chad, as it is in Western Africa. However, modern forms of slavery, particularly child labour is highly prevalent.

MODERN SLAVERY IN AFRICA



Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) is the UN terminology used for communities who are traditionally and intergenerationally discriminated based on their identity, social-hierarchical positions, the work associated with their positions, and their lineage and descendants.

This study explores the role of caste and analogous identity of communities in slavery and slavery-like practices in Africa and focuses on communities and people who continue to be discriminated based on work and descent.

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

<https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>



Scan the QR Code to visit our website