

ICERD

BURKINA FASO

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Joint Civil Society Report by

The Inclusivity Project



The Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on
Work and Descent



The Inclusivity Project is working for the rights of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) and raising awareness of CDWD issues nationally, regionally, and internationally. The Inclusivity Project works towards capacity building, collaboration, and research to support CDWD and looks at their development aspects, bringing stakeholder networks and organizations together to facilitate dialogues and strategy sharing to overcome the hurdles of marginalization. The Inclusivity Project focuses on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially monitoring and follow-up/review, and provides data and evidence for the nation-state for effective and inclusive program implementation.

The Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD) is a platform to voice the rights and entitlements of the communities discriminated on work and descent in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. GFoD aims for full realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent and ensuring access to sustainable development goals (SDGs). GFoD was founded in 2021 and formally recognizes the core motto of 'Leave No One Behind' propounded by "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", which ensures Planet, Peace, and Prosperity for all, especially those who are marginalized through generations and suffered social prejudices while aspiring for a life of dignity and peace.

General Context on CDWD

Communities Discriminated on Work & Descent (CDWD) is the UN terminology to refer to historically marginalized and systemically excluded communities facing caste and analogous forms of discrimination, such as (but not limited to) Dalit communities in South Asia, Roma community in Europe, Quilombola and Palenque community in Latin America, Haratin, Osu and other similarly oppressed communities in Africa.

These groups, while distinct, share a common experience of systemic discrimination compounded by intersecting factors. An estimated 270 million people globally belong to communities who face discrimination based on work and descent. Women and girls in these communities experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) focuses on occupational descent, where the position within the social stratification (unlike in racism, the color of the skin) becomes the core factor of discrimination. DWD is inherently intersectional because it involves multiple overlapping forms of marginalization tied to inherited social status, ancestral occupation, gender, race, and socio-economic factors.

Caste Practice and Discrimination Based on Work and Descent in Burkina Faso

Slavery was officially abolished in the French colonies on 27 April 1848 and in 1833 in the British territories. Yet, the existence of domestic slavery in hierarchical African societies whose power was centralized is persistent.

While the State's national report has referred to Article 1.3 of the Constitution, on the elimination of discrimination, and Article 513-1 of domestic legislation, on cultural violence based on customs, traditions, and religion, caste and descent-based violence remain widespread. The government has put in place several legislations¹ policies² and public awareness and education campaigns³ to address discrimination on caste and descent. However, concrete enforcement of these measures falls short.

There is no specific piece of legislation that deals specifically with caste or descent-based discrimination. Legislation that deals only generally with this issue may face serious enforcement challenges. As will be seen in the next section, the shortcomings of the existing legislation currently in force lead to persistent patterns of caste and descent-based discrimination.

Caste and descent discrimination is dealt with only indirectly vis-à-vis the magnitude of the issue at stake. As will be seen in the next sections, this type of racial discrimination persists and there are no analytical study or disaggregated data to correctly diagnose the challenges ahead.

¹ CERD/C/BFA/20-24, para. 21.

² Id., paras. 25-27.

³ Id., paras. 22-24.

Persistence of Caste Practice in View of Formal Generic Legislation

Among the several communities in Burkina, one can identify the Mossis, the Fulani, the Tuaregs, the Songhois, and the Foulces. In these communities, power is held by a ruling individual or family. These societies are stratified into tribes, clans, castes and slaves. The first level is the noble class; The second level is reserved for free men and tributaries, the third level includes craftsmen, griot and the fourth level is composed of slaves. This stratification governed by the charter of Soudiata Keita of 1236 is still in force in the former Mandinka empire, especially in the environment where education has lagged.

Lack of an Analytical Study and Disaggregated Data on Caste, Descent and the Intersecting Gender and Age Forms

Despite the enactment of laws and the establishment of policies that may have an effect on caste and descent-based discrimination (above), the State has not promoted a serious debate on the issue at the national level, as was the case in neighboring countries, such as Niger and Mali which share cultural similarities with Burkina Faso.

Neither has the state elaborated statistical data disaggregated on case, descent, which would channel the correct resources, make a precise diagnosis and identify the drivers of caste and descent-based discrimination in the country.

The State also should elaborate disaggregated data including its intersecting gender and age modalities. This challenge “would permit more factual, accurate and evidence-based legislation- and policy making.”⁴

Dynamics of Caste and Descent Discrimination

While slavery no longer exists in Burkina Faso in its triumphant and exhibitionist form of yesteryear, the aftermath of non-enforced and pernicious slavery exists to the point where it is a brake on living together.

Taking the Tuareg or Kel Tamachek community as an example, in the past, in history books, the white race was called the Tuareg and the black race the Bella. Tuareg (noble) was designated as master of the Bella (slave). Nowadays, this name is denounced as a source of division and an insult to a numerically more representative community. Some claim to be Tamachek and others are black Tamacheks. In the Tamachek culture and the relationships that govern this community, the surname known is kel tamachek.

Intra-community marriages are extremely rare. Some tribes claiming to be high nobility only organize marriages within it.

Hate speech and stigma against CDWDs is widespread including through pejorative terms. In the Tamachek environment, for example, to designate a tamachek of slave stock, some terms are used, for example:

⁴ GFoD and UN Women: [Policy Paper Women Belonging to Communities Discriminated Against Based on Work and Descent: Advancing Intersectional Rights and Justice](#). 2025, p. 9.

- Àkli / taklit designates a slave;
- Ashkou / tashkout refers to a young slave;
- Alyad / talyad designates a young noblepersons;
- Abarad/ tabarat designates a distinguished young nobleperson;
- Ellili/ tillilit denotes a nobleman.

Stratified and Racialized Labor Relations

Among many settings of society, the noblepersons are not supposed to work, whereas they rely on slave-like relations, without any dignifying remuneration or minimum labor conditions for this work.

Contemporary slavery includes agro-shepherd activities, where the workers expect nothing from the master but his protection or his blessing to access even paradise, in a true sovereign-vassal relationship.

Blacksmiths, woodworkers, shoemakers, jewellers, lyricists and griots, are at the service of royalty to dispense their art.

This classification based on descent-based slavery is contested today, especially in the Sahel where, according to some sources, individual victims have joined the ranks of terrorism to boast about history.

During past political campaigns, candidates of servile ancestry have claimed that they no longer allow themselves to be led by the old class. Similarly, in the Tuareg community, the ancient term that distinguishes persons of the same language and culture into master and slave, must be banished for a dignified and harmonious community life.

Suggested Recommendations to Burkina Faso

- Strengthen the legislation in force, by specifically address caste and descent-based discrimination, in line with ICERD's Article 1 and CERD General Recommendation No. 29;
- Formally recognize caste and descent-based violence in the country and put in practice targeted policies, benchmarks and goals;
- Promote a nationwide dialogue on caste and descent-based discrimination, in close consultation with the affected communities, including women, children and the elderly;
- Design, collect, elaborate and process statistical data disaggregated data on caste and descent-based discrimination, including its intersecting gender, age, and disability forms.