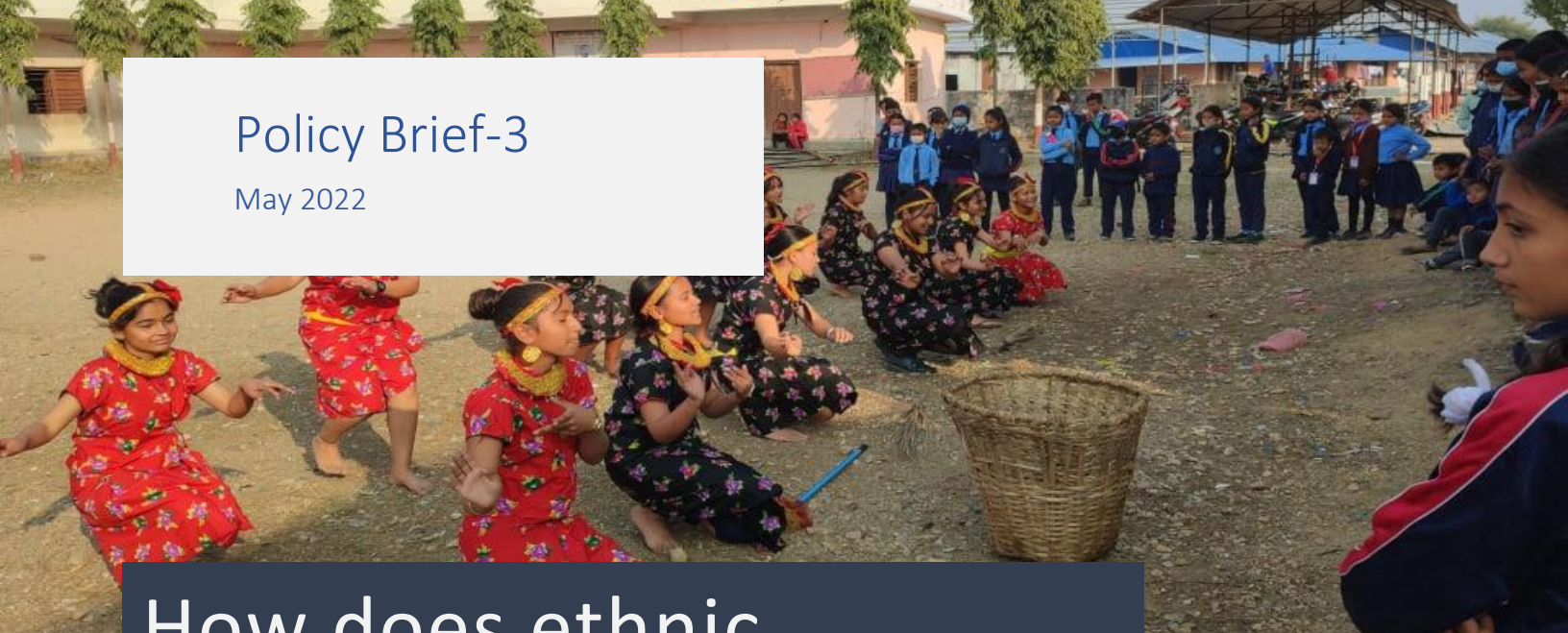# How does ethnic untouchability affect our society?

Summary:

Despite legal protections – both in the UN Convention of Children's Rights and in the Constitution of Nepal – caste-based discrimination is still a prominent feature of Nepali society. People who are considered of low caste – known as 'Dalits' or 'untouchables' – are considered lesser human beings. They often face marginalization, social and economic exclusion, and segregation in housing, with women and girls particularly vulnerable to different forms of abuse. Members of the Divyasewa Child club of Janajyoti Secondary School, Makwanur, decided to explore the issues surrounding caste-based discrimination, using art-based methods to understand different perspectives. This policy brief captures their findings and key policy recommendations.

Key Recommendations

1. Local government should launch a campaign against social discrimination.

2. The local government should implement Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2068 with proper monitoring.

3. It is imperative to ensure the representation of Dalits in the decision-making mechanisms of sub-metropolitan cities.

4. It is highly recommended to raise awareness at the community level against caste discrimination through regular campaigns.

Introduction

Caste-based discrimination is one of the most abhorrent realities of the 21st century and represents a violation of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Although the state of Nepal has enshrined non-discrimination within its Constition as well as policies, the community is one of many states that continues its archaic system of caste. In Nepali society, caste remains a fundamental part of the social structure, in many cases transcending faith and religion.

The practice of untouchability, deeply rooted in the caste system, also persists and is one of the most overlooked human rights issue in our society today. People who are considered of low caste, also known as 'Dalits' or 'untouchables', are considered lesser human beings, impure and thus polluting to other caste groups. They face marginalization, social and economic exclusion, and segregation in housing, and are often denied their basic human rights. Dalit women and girls are particularly vulnerable and face serious forms of discrimination and violence, sexual abuse, early and forced marriage as well as bonded labor. Young girls from Dalit communities are at severe risk of being trafficked and sexually exploited.

All this means that Dalit young people are highly unlikely to get a chance at any meaningful participation in public and civil life, including in decision making.

The research

Members of the Divyasewa Child club of Janajyoti Secondary School, Makwanur first met with teachers and members of the community to identify key issues. They analyzed the issues using the conflict tree method and selected street drama as the art form to present the issues. They presented the drama to community leaders and local policy makers, as a way to raise awareness and encourage dialogue.

Research Findings:

By talking to different people about their experiences, Child Club members found different examples of caste-based discrimination, which they used in the street drama. Here are just three examples:

-I had to go to Kathmandu for some personal work. There was a landslide on the road and I was supposed to stay on the way. I found a hotel and ask for a room to stay. But I was not allowed to stay in the hotel because of my lower cast.
-There was a festival, I wanted to go to the temple for worship, But I was not allowed to go inside of the temple and worship.
- One day, I was thirsty, there was a water tap, but I was not allowed to drink water from the tap because of my cast

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