



IIDS

Increasing employment options for disadvantaged groups in India

High quality research by the *Indian Institute of Dalit Studies* (IIDS), and a diverse engagement and dissemination strategy, led to affirmative action for India's marginalized castes and tribes.

SETTING THE SCENE —Almost one-quarter of India's population are members of scheduled castes (known as "Dalits") or scheduled tribes (indigenous peoples). Both groups have long suffered widespread discrimination in Indian society and, as a result, have fallen well behind other Indian citizens in all indicators of human development. To help remedy their plight, the government of India has established an affirmative action policy that earmarks about 25 percent of public sector jobs for these groups. However, that policy exempts jobs in the private sector.

Historically, India's private sector has opposed affirmative action on the basis that its hiring practices are already non-discriminatory. Although they recognize the social and economic inequalities suffered by these groups, private sector organizations have favoured a more general policy supporting educational development and economic empowerment for scheduled castes and tribes.

WHAT IIDS DID —The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization founded by social activists and academics who sought to understand the causes and effects of discrimination in Indian society and to recommend policies to overcome it. Since it was established in 2003, IIDS has studied the discriminatory hiring practices of private employers, the effects on the groups who suffer discrimination and the potential for a private sector affirmative action policy. After considerable research and open dialogue with stakeholders, IIDS proposed a compulsory, quota-based affirmative action policy for the private sector.

IIDS based its proposal on high quality research that provided convincing evidence for affirmative action. It then targeted a wide range of audiences, providing information to and engaging in dialogue with key actors, including the national government, the private sector, Dalit and tribal associations, the academic community and the media, as well as international bodies such as



the United Nations. It presented its proposal in books, reputable research journals and newspapers widely read by the Indian corporate sector, as well as at conferences and on Indian television.

THE OUTCOME —The Indian government endorsed IIDS's policy in 2007, although it chose to make it voluntary and self-regulatory, with an

associated code of conduct and periodic reporting requirements. IIDS is currently involved in evaluating the private sector's implementation of the policy. As a result of its work on this issue, IIDS has become known as a leader in the study of economic discrimination, and now runs a separate research unit on social exclusion and discrimination.

You can read more about this story in [Twelve Stories of Policy Influence from Asia, Africa, and Latin America](#), a working paper prepared by Grupo FARO for the conference "Think Tank Exchange" held in South Africa, June 18-20, 2012.

For more information on IIDS, visit www.dalitstudies.org.in

TTI's Stories of Influence Series

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