"Minorities working together to protect Human Rights in post-war Sri Lanka" – Final Evaluation Report

Final Evaluation Report

Submitted to MRG by Development Strategies Group (Pvt) Ltd.

Colombo, 16th September 2013

Development
Strategies
Group

List of Acronyms

APPG - All Party Parliamentary Group on Sri Lanka

CBO – Community Based Organisation

EIDHR - European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

FTZ – Free Trade Zone

GoSL - Government of Sri Lanka

INGO – International Non Governmental Organisation

LLRC – Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission

LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

NGO – Non Governmental Organisation

NHRAP - National Human Rights Action Plan

OIC – The Organization for Islamic Cooperation

RT – Round Table

TNA – Tamil National Alliance

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNP – United National Party

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UPFA – United Peoples Front

UPR - Universal Periodic Review

Table of Contents

"Minorities working together to protect human rights in post-war Sri Lanka"

Evaluation of project

<mark>Note to the reader: *Due to security concerns, the names of partner organizations, field monitors, and other individuals associated with the project have been removed from this report. Names of towns and districts have also been omitted. The evaluation team was provided with full details during the course of the evaluation.*</mark>

Executive Summary

Background

The programme "Minorities working together to protect human rights in post-war Sri Lanka" was designed and implemented by MRG and three local partners from 2011-2013. Due to security concerns, these partners will be referred to as Partner A, Partner B, and Partner C throughout this report. The objective of the programme was to contribute towards improving the human rights situation for all communities in post-war Sri Lanka through the promotion and protection of minority rights, improved inter-ethnic relations and political participation[1]. The programme was implemented amidst a climate of fear and repression of rights; threats to rights defenders, human rights organizations and INGOs were widespread during the project cycle. Some organizations were under surveillance while certain others were frequently visited by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) for allegedly reporting on human rights abuses against the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL)[2]. In addition, government-manipulated media reports often portrayed these organizations as "agents of the West' and LTTE[3] sympathizers" threatening the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. It is against this backdrop that the project was conceived and implemented: similarly, project partners were visited by the CID owing to the project content and some project staff received anonymous telephone calls inquiring into project activities; Partner B was visited by the CID during project cycle while two staffers of Partner A received anonymous calls. MRG encountered threats from extremist parties in Geneva at the UNHRC meeting in 2012. At the same time, enforced and involuntary disappearances in the North continues to be a main concern among the minority Tamils. According to UN statistics, there were 5671 outstanding cases of war-time disappearances as at the end of 2011[4]. Arbitrary detentions, abductions, torture and extrajudicial killings are regularly reported from the North while rape and sexual violence against women and children have become common occurrences. Violations of religious rights included attacks on places of worship and clergy, theft and acts of vandalism against religious sites. Sixty-five cases of attacks on religious places had been recorded by early 2013[5]. Persistent violations of economic rights take the form of restricted access to economic opportunities, occupation of land by the military and unequal distribution of resources. Limited freedom of association, lack of due process, lack of fair trials are some violations of political rights seen across the North. The predicament of Sri Lanka is well captured in the recently issued statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights[6].

---

[1] Funding Application submitted to EU.

[2] NGO report – UPR 2012,
http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session14/LK/JS12_UPR_LKA_S14_2012_JointSubmission12_E.pdf

[3] Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

[4] UN Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, March 2012

[5] Attacks on places of worship in post-war Sri Lanka, CPA, 2013.

[6] *"I am deeply concerned that Sri Lanka, despite the opportunity provided by the end of the war to construct a new vibrant, all-embracing state, is showing signs of heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction",* statement issued during the press conference held in Colombo, 31st August 2013. https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/full-speech-un-high-commissioner-for-human-rights-navi-pillay-at-the-press-conference-on-her-mission-to-sri-lanka/

In an environment where threats, intimidation and reprisals against rights defenders reign, the programme under review has been implemented with recurring challenges. In essence, the minorities of Sri Lanka are increasingly being subject to systematic discrimination leaving them with little or no options; one such option is to pressurize the GoSL through the assistance of rights based organizations such as MRG.

Key findings

KRA 1: Strengthened capacities of minority activists (including grass root level activists, CBOs and partners), to monitor, report and conduct national and international advocacy on human rights violations against minorities in Sri Lanka

There is solid evidence to state that activists have been able to bring about concrete results through monitoring and reporting of violations. Some field monitors[7] and activists have carried out advocacy efforts locally while some others have been able to take the concerns of their communities to the international community. The reporting techniques, though basic, have enabled the monitors and activists not only to report on violations but also to raise the concern with the relevant authority. The following are some key examples of how the increased capacities of monitors and activists have contributed to better advocacy efforts:

- Working with the Government Agent (G.A.) to expedite the delayed resettlement of 115 families in a village in Northeast Sri Lanka within a week.
- Successfully advocating for the granting of access to fishing in a village in Northeast Sri Lanka where around 100 families live.
- Advocating for the distribution of food rations to a refugee camp in a village in Northeast Sri Lanka after the GoSL unexpectedly ceased the hand-out.
- Responding to women's issues in two villages in the North and Northeast areas utilizing skills and techniques learned in Geneva.

All three field monitors interviewed (East, North and Northwest) had some journalistic experience prior to the training workshop. They were correspondents for regional newspapers and websites occasionally contributing to national papers. They have had prior knowledge of human rights issues and were aware of reporting techniques. Thus, according to them, the training was basic and contained the basic principles of reporting and documentation. However, one monitor emphasized the importance of reporting to meet international standards – a key component of the training. Thus, it can be said that the training has transferred skills to enable them to meet international standards of humanitarian reporting. On the other hand, the CBO activists have gained much from the trainings: minority rights issues and documentation of violations, engagement in advocacy are some key capacity development areas that were addressed by the trainings. In particular, women's organizations have benefitted much: one respondent stated that trainings received in Geneva helped her to improve her work on women's issues; she has particularly gained knowledge on the process of making an intervention on rights violations and drafting petitions on women's issues[8]. One organization plans to train some staff on documentation of violations while one field monitor delivered training to CBO activists utilizing the

---

[7] the term 'field monitors' was used in lieu of 'human rights rapporteurs' in order to avoid potential security risks.
[8] Interview with participant - name omitted for security reasons.

knowledge gained from the workshops. Thus, there is sufficient evidence to posit that the skills gained will be in turn transferred to other activists.

The incorporation of rights issues into the organizational approaches of Partner A and Partner C has been an important accomplishment in terms of capacity building as neither of these organizations were rights-based ones. In addition, mainstreaming gender into Partner A's programmes marks the successful challenging of gendered ideology of Partner A. Thus, the programme has been able to strengthen the capacities of rights activists to monitor and report on right violations in their communities.

KRA 2: Greater collaboration between minority activists (through their participation in national and district level networks) to condemn minority rights violations and advocate for protection of minority and human rights
As pointed out in the report, maintaining networks has been challenging especially at the national level. The regional networks met around the topics of land and housing rights in the plantation sector, socio-economic and religious discrimination against Muslims, while Partner B organized meetings around the LLRC report, National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) and the Universal Periodic Review session (UPR) on Sri Lanka. While this was funded on the request of Partner B, other prominent rights organizations co-hosted the discussion. The Partner B led national network produced a joint submission to the UNHRC on the human rights situation of the country, which was translated into local languages and disseminated among local organizations. However, significant collective action could not be taken due to security risks facing the activists. Given the constraints, the bringing together of activists itself could be considered as a positive outcome to a certain extent.

KRA 3: Greater national and international awareness on the socio-economic situation of Tamils of Indian origin and of the human rights situation of all minority communities.

Awareness on the socio-economic situation of Tamils of Indian Origin
The campaign on socio-economic rights of plantation Tamils[9] was launched in London at a panel discussion with the participation of about 25 people[10]. The website http://www.priceoftea.com/ contains information on the situation of the plantation workers and 'ethical tea' and invites the visitors to take action by signing an online petition that urges the GoSL and the corporate sector to improve the living and working conditions of plantation workers. By 31st March 2013 a total of 378 people had signed up to the campaign[11]. The informative video on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE-fMuSWPP8 has had 719 views as at 08/10/13. The briefing paper on 'Land and Housing Rights' published by Partner C in March 2013 outlined the issues highlighted in the campaign. Anonymous advertisements were published in the Sunday Leader, the Sunday Times, Hirudina and Thinakuran Newspapers reaching a vast readership. Awareness was created among international organizations such as the Sri Lanka Campaign, International Dalit Solidarity Network, Amnesty International, Rain Forest Alliance, Care international, Ethical Tea Partnership with positive feedback from an EU based international group; in an e-mail correspondence with the MRG Programme Coordinator, a representative affirms that '*the campaign is absolutely necessary*'[12] and suggests that it should be extended to the tourism

---

[9] The campaign secured support from National Committee for Dalit Human Rights, India, International Dalit Solidarity Network, SUARAM, Malaysia, Society for Threatened Peoples, MEDICO International, Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice for security reasons.
[10] For security reasons, MRG and Partner C decided against a campaign in Sri Lanka; in the past, organizations linking Human Rights and economic development have come under severe criticism from GoSL subsequent to the GSP+ discussions.
[11] Report on Plantation campaign
[12] Report on Result 3.2

sector. In consequence, the campaign has been able to draw considerable international attention to the issues of plantation Tamils for the first time. This marks a considerable achievement despite the limitations of the campaign.

Awareness on the human rights situation of all minority communities and impact
MRG's consistent advocacy work at international platforms has contributed to greater awareness of the situation of Sri Lankan minority populations. MRG has effectively advocated for improved minority rights at international fora, lobbied representatives from countries around the world, and supplied information to increase their awareness ahead of important international meetings.[13] It is possible to track the effects of MRG's work, as the organisation's lobbying had an impact on the wording of the 2012 UN HRC resolution. MRG has also had some effect on changing the voting pattern of one of the UN HRC member states through a strategic in country lobbying campaign. In addition, supporting the participation of Sri Lankan activists at various international events has contributed to a greater understanding and awareness of the minority rights situation in Sri Lanka among the international community.

KRA 4: Concrete steps are taken by the Sri Lankan government to protect the economic, social and economic rights of the Tamils of Indian origin
As much effort was not exercised on the plantation campaign due to potential security risks, it is not certain whether the above result has been achieved. The literature reveals that several meetings with national and regional level politicians have been conducted by Partner C including talks with Ministers and other important leaders[14][15] suggesting that the result may have been partially achieved. These talks have centred around the issues of housing, land, wage and language rights. One MP raised these issues at the Parliament, referring to information provided by Partner C[16]. Similarly, a Provincial Council Member quoted such information in radio interviews[17]. Partner C has been able to bring about positive changes in terms of language rights; placards/name boards in the plantations are displayed in the Tamil language as a result of Partner C's advocacy while the plantation management has commenced communications in Tamil[18]. Moreover, Tamil speaking communication officers have been appointed to two Divisional Secretariats as a result of extensive advocacy by Partner C.

KRA 5: Improved collaboration between minority politicians and civil society activists with the aim of seeking solutions on political settlement, political participation of minorities and a reconciliation process
There is not much evidence to state that concrete collaborative efforts have been made on minority issues with minority representatives. However, some participants from a workshop organized by Partner A have met with prominent politicians to present the issues facing the Muslim community.[19] Parliamentarians from two prominent, national Sri Lankan organizations attended the first round table (RT)[20]. Many of these political figures are Sinhala "hardliners' who

---

[13] Further details to the evaluation report have been removed due to security concerns.
[14] Progress report April – March 2013, Partner C.
[15] Names removed due to security concerns.
[16] In particular referring to the report *"Land & housing rights of plantation community in Sri Lanka".*
[17] Interview with Partner C staff
[18] For example, minutes of certain meetings held are recorded in Tamil.
[19] Interview with a representative at Partner A

[20] Interview with a representative of Partner B.

often refuse to meet with civil society groups, therefore, securing an 'audience' itself could be considered as an achievement.

Collaborations between civil society actors and minority politicians have taken place in the form of one-to-one discussions; Partner A has been successful at improving collaboration between Muslim activists and Muslim politicians to a certain extent; as pointed out above, the activists met with Muslim politicians as well as with Sinhala politicians. Partner C took up wage, land and housing issues with minority politicians and a few other regional politicians. Partner B brought together minority Parliamentarians and activists through the Round Table discussions and advocacy efforts on the briefing papers on religious intolerance and land issues. The collaboration that took place focused on identifying violations and strengthening minority rights (particularly on the issue of religious freedom and community cohesion).[21]

KRA 6: Reduced tensions between ethnic communities at local level through targeted mediatory interventions of community leaders and local level actions as a result of awareness created through MRG and partners

Ethnic tensions in the locations visited have progressed at a steady pace over issues of land and resource distribution[22]. As explained in the first part of the Executive Summary, much of the tension is created by insensible planning that does not recognize the history and the current needs of diverse populations. In addition, a conflict between prominent leaders in a particular area is unfortunately often translated into ethnic tension between Tamils and Muslims. In terms of mediatory interventions to address ethnic tensions, the work reconciliation committees funded through a local organization no longer function and very little has been achieved; Of noteworthy mention is the clearing of a misunderstanding concerning the establishment of a school in a particular village during a committee meeting[23]; in addition, grass-roots issues such as family disputes, small-scale disputes over land affecting the local communities have been resolved[24], which is commendable given the short duration of the project. However, it must be noted that this was a short-term 'one-off' project with limitations. Conversely, there is a limit to what a community can achieve in the face of rising communal tension, especially when such tension and unrest stems from the actions of the state.

---

[21] Further details to the evaluation report have been removed due to security concerns.
[22] Opinions of all respondents interviewed in three locations.
[23] Letter to MRG representative from a Sri Lankan organization.
[24] Interview with a local citizen's committee.

I). Introduction

The project "*Minorities working together to protect human rights in post-war Sri Lanka*" was conceived by MRG in consultation with the partners of the previous project and implemented with three local partners. Designed as a two-year intervention, the project was implemented from May 2011 – March 2013. However, the actual implementation of the project activities commenced after 4 months due to prolonged negotiations with the donor on budgetary and administrative issues; during these 4 months, MRG and partners conducted preparatory work for the project and focused on international advocacy. Funded by the EIDHR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Belgium, the project was built on a previous project titled *'Strengthening the Capacity of Sri Lankan CSOs to promote minority rights'* implemented by MRG along with local partners. Thus, the project under evaluation is the second phase of the previous project.

II). Objectives of the evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation are:

- To assess the actual impact of the project vis-à-vis what was intended in project proposal
- To assess whether there have been any delays and adjustments to the project and examine the causes and impact of any such adjustments
- To appraise any challenges (internal and external) that were encountered during implementation and examine how they were mitigated
- To identify lessons learnt and recommendations

III). Methodology

The evaluation utilized Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with respondents to gather data. Interviews with respondents were held in 4 project locations: in the Western, Northeastern and Northwestern provinces. Interviews with project staff and partner organizations, trained activists, field monitors, independent experts, were conducted. The questionnaire focused on their experience in implementing the project, participation in training workshops, experience in working with partners and MRG, working on international advocacy. The questionnaire also inquired into their opinions on project impact, challenges faced and lessons learnt. Different questionnaires were administered to different respondents depending on their nature of involvement in the project. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were not conducted as it was felt that it would impose threats to their security and attract negative attention. Thus, instead of group discussions, emphasis was placed on one-to-one interviews. In the current security context, we judged it impossible to have meaningful discussions with the ultimate beneficiaries in terms of members of communities who were not actively involved in the programme but who may have benefitted from its outcomes and impacts, as we felt that the risks of putting programme staff and field workers in danger constituted undue risk.

IV). Limitations[25]

The evaluation research was confined to four districts though the project was carried out in 8 locations; one district in the north was omitted as there were no participants/beneficiaries residing there aside from one participant who was contesting for an election and the project partner advised that it would not be possible to meet with them due to their tight schedule; the other beneficiaries were either based out of Sri Lanka or gone underground and their whereabouts could not be traced as per the project partner at the time of the evaluation. Thus, the participants from the omitted district were not a part of this evaluation albeit the importance of their involvement in the project[26].

The evaluators were unable to visit four locations as the project partner responsible for these locations declined to participate in the evaluation owing to an outstanding administrative issue with MRG. Thus, the focus of the evaluation is limited to the capacity building and networking, monitoring and reporting of rights violations, international advocacy and post-conflict work in four districts. However, the evaluators were able to meet the partner very close to the date of submission of this report but were unable to visit the field locations. Therefore, the evaluation, for the most part, excludes the advocacy work conducted in the plantations (apart from what is learned from literature provided to the evaluators and the discussion with the partner) and capacity building and networking, monitoring and reporting of rights violations in the districts not visited during the research.

Some recommended respondents were not available for interviews at the time of writing. Thus the evaluation could not benefit from their views.

V). Background

The people of the North have clearly expressed their wishes for an independent North at the recently held Provincial elections (held on 21/09/13). The manifesto of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is being viewed as separatist and reclamation of the lost "Eelam" by the GoSL and nationalist elements in the political stream. The victory of the TNA is an indication of the minority Tamils' discontentment with the Rajapakse regime while it marks the significance of the political nature of the unresolved 'Tamil question' despite the end of the conflict in 2009. Accelerated development initiatives in the North have failed to gain trust and confidence of the minority Tamils as evidenced by the defeat of the ruling party. This also points to the fact that Tamil grievances are not merely economic; moreover, the benefits of large-scale infrastructural projects are yet to trickle down to the minorities of the North where permanent housing and basic facilities such as drinking water and sanitation and equitable economic opportunities are still lacking. Land grabbing, military occupation of land and the Sinhala colonization of the North contribute to the rising tensions in the North. Rights violations reported are increasingly related to development. There is little or no apathy from the public on minority issues, which compounds the declining situation.

---

[25] Names of specific districts and cities have been removed from this section due to security concerns.
[26] It is noted in the literature review that it was the first time that participants from the omitted district were involved in a programme conducted by MRG.

The North continues to be heavily militarized while military administration is being increasingly introduced to the government apparatus. The military is taking over certain police functions as seen in the public gazette authorizing the Armed forces to engage in the maintenance of public order[27]. The ineptitude of the military in handling civil protests was clearly seen in the Rathupaswela incident which gave rise to the debate of the role of the military in civilian affairs[28]. Disappearances and abductions are still rampant while the GoSL have failed to account for those who have disappeared under its rule. Freedom of expression and freedom of association are increasingly being challenged in a politically deteriorating environment where rights defenders and those of dissenting views constantly face threats to their security.

While the minority Tamils continue to be marginalized, the Muslims are being discriminated against based on religious grounds; the incidence of attacks and assaults on Muslims and their places of worship have increased during the latter part of project cycle; as at early 2013, a total of nine attacks on Muslim religious places have been documented[29]. Extremist elements such as the *Bodu Bala Sena* overtly incite violence against Muslims and encourage attacks on religious places. Such violence seems to be sanctioned by the State and investigations into attacks have not materialized. Thus, the situation of minorities is worsening sans proper mechanisms to safeguard their cultural and religious rights while their physical safety remains uncertain.

As space for freedom of expression is shrinking, opposing views and dissenting voices are often crushed by the regime and are replaced with pro-regime thinking. The self-imposed censorship of the media persists whilst GoSL manipulates information for political gain and often uses the state media to feed the masses with fabricated information about dissidents or elements that are not in line with the views of the regime. Such 'demonising' leads to further isolation of 'alternative voices' and in turn solidifies the position of the regime. The civil society and NGOs find it increasingly challenging to work in a hostile environment where their interventions are closely monitored and their staff harassed[30].

Violence against women is on the rise in all parts of the country; a common occurrence in the militarized North is rape of girls and women by civilians and military personnel. Crimes at various levels denote widespread violations of rights; at the same time, a culture of impunity reigns. The public has mechanically accepted the decisions of the ruling family as those of the GoSL and the boundaries between the two are ever more blurred. Thus, the ever-increasing *'Rajapakserisation'* of the state apparatus is an affirmation of the languid public attitude towards escalating authoritarianism. The statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethen Pillay well embodies the current state of affairs in relation to the human rights situation of the country.

 "I am deeply concerned that Sri Lanka, despite the opportunity provided by the end of the war to construct a new vibrant, all-embracing state, is showing signs of heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction"[31].

As pointed out in the Executive Summary, the project was implemented in a hostile operating environment where rights defenders and, similarly, the project staff received threats and were intimidated by anonymous calls, texts and e-mail messages. The situation was also compounded by the travel ban

[27] http://www.documents.gov.lk/Extgzt/2013/PDF/Jul/1817_31/1817_31%20(E).pdf
[28] http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-141-2013
[29] Attacks on places of worship in post-war Sri Lanka, CPA 2013.
[30] http://www.sundaytimes.lk/070211/FinancialTimes/ft324.html, NGO report, UPR
http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session14/LK/JS12_UPR_LKA_S14_2012_JointSubmission12_E.pdf
[31] http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-163-2013

imposed on the Programme Coordinator by MRG while recurrent visits by the CID added to the complexities. In sum, the project was carried out in a deteriorating political environment where discussion on minority rights was not tolerated.

VI). Introduction to project

Specific objective: To strengthen the capacity of and networking between minority community based organizations (CBOs) working on minority issues, in order to enable them to monitor and report on human rights violations, raise awareness of minority issues, address local-level tensions between communities and advocate nationally and internationally for the promotion and protection of minority rights, pluralism and political participation in a post-war context.

Project partners
MRG partnered with two partners at the grassroots level, Partner A and Partner C, and one partner at the national level, Partner B.[32]

Project Locations:
Project locations have been omitted from this evaluation report due to security concerns. The evaluation team was provided with full details during the course of the evaluation.

Target Groups:
Tamil and Muslim CBOs and activists in the former war-torn areas, CBOs and activists from the plantation Tamil community, Tamil and Muslim political leaders and activists, conflict resolution committees.
Final beneficiaries - Tamils and Muslims from different regions of the country and Tamils in the plantation sector.

VII). Key findings

The project has been designed by MRG, the principal applicant of the grant with input from local partners in early 2010. Thus, consultations with Partner B and Partner C were held during this time with the project proposal shared for their input. Partner A was not consulted at this stage as they joined later on subsequent to another partner's withdrawal. All partners interviewed were satisfied with the level of consultation and the ensuing amendments made. E.g. Muslim religious leaders were included as Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) based on a recommendation made by Partner A. A respondent from Partner A was highly appreciative of this fact[33].

1.   Relationship with MRG

MRG has demonstrated a high level of flexibility in terms of responding to issues faced by the project partners; it has shown great sensitivity to the various developments in the ground situation of Sri Lanka; security issues encountered by partners and beneficiaries have been responded to with care and

---

[32] Names of partner organizations have been changed due to security concerns.

[33] Interview with representative from Partner A

understanding. E.g. a) the field monitors were generally satisfied with the specific security guidelines given to them; separate email accounts were created, MRG was quick to respond to any security threats they faced. b) an activist who participated in Geneva was provided security from a foreign mission through MRG from the time of landing in Sri Lanka[34].

MRG has had good relationships with project partners; both Partner A and Partner B were in general pleased with the way that MRG managed the project. They expressed willingness to continue working with MRG on similar projects. As stated earlier in the report, Partner C initially declined to take part in the evaluation owing to an unsettled financial matter from the previous project; in this light, it is difficult to assess whether, in general, the Partner C – MRG relationship was cordial. However, up to this point, the relationship has been without strain[35]. The fact that Partner C finally agreed to meet with the evaluators indicates that there is still mutual recognition and respect. As the evaluators were unable to meet Partner C beneficiaries, a sizable vacuum in the report may exist, as one key project component is partially omitted. Again, normally, the decision of one partner to not cooperate with an evaluation would not preclude interviewing beneficiaries and others involved as well as experts. However, given the security situation, it was impossible to carry out interviews about Partner C activities without an introduction from, and the blessing of, Partner C as those involved would not disclose information to any external person for fear of putting Partner C staff, programmes and the whole organization at risk.

2. *Monitoring mechanism and reporting of rights violations*

The Monitoring mechanism has been successful for the most part; depending on the level of enthusiasm and passion,[36] field monitors have been able to bring about substantial results. Some noteworthy achievements are discussed in the section on impact. Most field monitors are regional journalists by profession and demonstrated a good understanding of reporting techniques and maintaining confidentiality. Monitors interviewed opined that the initial training was not sufficient as only the basics of reporting were shared at the workshop. There have been recurrent problems with the quality of reports submitted by monitors e.g. reports from one monitor failed to comply with expected standards. Some field monitors overtly engaged in advocacy while some refrained from advocacy for security reasons.

One field monitor expressed concern over possible 'leakage' of information supplied to MRG through Partner A[37]. He stated that during interrogations (over the phone) by what he believes to be the CID, the contents of the reports submitted were questioned, sometimes using the same words used in the reports. Though this needs verification, a breach of information signifies a loss of confidentiality and possible threats to those involved in the project. Moreover, it is important to ensure that trust is maintained at all levels. However, the monitoring and reporting system was designed in close consultation with the monitors in order to ensure their security, fostering trust. The respondent was asked to send his reports to Partner A for translation whereas the other monitors who were competent in English sent their reports directly to MRG. The other 2 monitors interviewed had not come across such incidents involving disclosed information. Asked why the concerns were not shared with MRG, he stated that he did not think it was necessary at the time of the incident. However, he insisted that the evaluators incorporate the incident into the report. Despite the common security threats faced by the field monitors and programme staff, the

---

[34] Interview with individual.
[35] Interview with Partner C staff
[36] Figure with monitoring reports received by district removed for security reasons.
[37] Interview with Field Monitor.

concerns of one monitor should not be undermined attributing to the general security situation; rather, his insistence on the inclusion of the incident in the evaluation report calls for a close exploration of the same[38].

Another field monitor opined that the safety provided to the monitors was not sufficient[39]. He also stated that, as MRG was based out of Sri Lanka, they were not in a position to look into the security of the monitors. However, this view is not shared by other field monitors, although they felt that security could be improved.

3. Cooperation and partner organizations

There have been some delays in implementation of certain activities, especially those carried out by Partner B. Although Partner B felt that timing is important to raise issues, the round table discussions were inadvertently timed in line with LLRC and UPR. The first round Table (RT) took place soon after the attack on a mosque in Dambulla. The RT was attended by parliamentarians from TNA, UNP and a professor representing GoSL. Though invited, GoSL ministers did not turn up. As per Partner B, the immediate impact of the RTs was that they provided the civil society with a 'space' to discuss crucial issues as religious intolerance was rising. Understandably, there are certain standards that Partner B tries to adhere to and proper timing of activities is important to contextualize them, as one respondent from Partner B points out[40]. There is an 'internal logic to the way that Partner B does things' notes one respondent and it seems that the project was implemented in line with this philosophy. Nonetheless, actual delays in delivery were caused by delays in identifying suitable resource persons, e.g. two reports were delayed, as suitable authors could not be found within the allotted time period. On the other hand, the capacities of Partner B were being stretched due to limited staff and it found itself in a difficult position where it had to manage other donor-funded projects and respond to on-going issues of national importance at the same time[41]. However, it must be noted that the project accommodated a dedicated staffer and another with 70% of his/her salary paid by the project budget so that Partner B could enhance its engagement with the project and implement the same without delays. The project coordinator from Partner B may have had to refer to seniors within the organisation for approval of decisions and signing off reports. Thus, the delays in implementation may have been due to the unavailability of senior staff. Conversely, Partner B has independently drawn their own conclusions about the project; the original purpose of the RTs was to advocate for a political solution and to discuss post-conflict reconciliation processes[42] whereas Partner B has utilized the RTs to expound on on-going issues; 3 RTs were centered around: "*Religious Tolerance and Related Land Issues*" focusing on violence and intolerance faced by religious communities in Sri Lanka; *"Benchmarks for Peace and Reconciliation in Post-War Sri Lanka'* looking at post-war achievements and addressing the outstanding issues prevailing in the post war context giving special emphasis to the National Action Plan on Human Rights and to the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission; *''Attacks on Religious Freedom in Sri Lanka''* examining the possible issues which would emerge in the current context pertaining to religious freedom and how to respond to these issues at individual and at group levels. While these topics are current and important, adherence to original project objectives is also significant.

---

[38] The monitor was more concerned about his security than his counterparts.
[39] Interview with Field Monitor
[40] Interview with representative from Partner B.
[41] Interviews with representative from Partner B.
[42] Project Proposal submitted to EU

Certain project components such as the Web portal[43] have not been very successful; the web portal encountered technical issues several times before it was hacked and had to be shut down. The site encountered technical issues in the second phase; it went offline from 11th October 2012 to 3rd December 2012 due to a malware attack and measures were not taken by the host company to restore it as per Partner B's Narrative Report for September – December 2012. Partner B then commissioned another server host to restore the site, which became functional from 3rd December onwards. During this time content on the LLRC, UPR and other Human Rights and Minority Rights related issues were posted on the site. The web brief "Guide to UNHRC Resolution on Sri Lanka" was published on the site in February 2013 in the lead up to the 22nd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The site has been offline since March 2013 as it was hacked by an unknown group as stated in Partner B's Narrative Report for January – March 2013. Though the site was not able to become a 'hub' for Human Rights monitoring as envisaged at the start of the project, it did make available useful content on rights-based issues. Apart from the technical issues, as a respondent from Partner B points out, Partner B was not 'enthusiastic'[44] about the idea of an on-line portal, perhaps because it did not fit into the specificities of Partner B's approach to 'meaningful work'. However, such concerns should have been highlighted at the design stage where Partner B had ample opportunity to provide input and feedback on the previous project.

On the whole, the project partners have had varying levels of understanding of the project. Each partner's understanding was limited to the programme component implemented by them and demonstrated limited knowledge of activities implemented by the other partners. Partner A has had a strong religion-oriented development focus as an organisation and much accompaniment from MRG was required to keep them focused on minority rights in general as they 'struggled' with this new subject matter and tended to focus on Muslim issues in response to rising violence against Muslims[45]. However, Partner A has been very enthusiastic from the outset and has put much effort into training of CBOs. Partner C on the hand has had a longer-term relationship with MRG and has had a reasonable understanding of the programme but has not been very forthcoming with sharing details of work perhaps due to their vast experience in working with the target group[46]. As the Programme Coordinator – MRG states, Partner C has taken the project 'piece by piece' instead of treating it as one coherent programme[47]. MRG had faced challenges in working with Partner B in the previous project owing mainly to unmet deadlines and particular style of working. However, as Partner B had demonstrated experience in working on rights issues and was willing to take risks, it was decided to retain the partnership[48]. The challenges of working with Partner B primarily included their tendency to 'think big' which often resulted in being over-ambitious and setting high standards[49] and inadaptability to be less 'sophisticated' and 'complex' in their thinking and planning[50]. In addition, Partner B has tended to implement activities 'in their own way' rather than adhering to what was specified in the project proposal, often posing challenges to MRG[51].

4. Gender issues

---

[43] The web portal 'People's Rights" was developed in the previous programme to publicise Human rights violations but did not succeed in the first phase of the project. The programme under review continued the portal under the management of Partner B.
[44] Interview with Partner B representative
[45] Interview with MRG representative
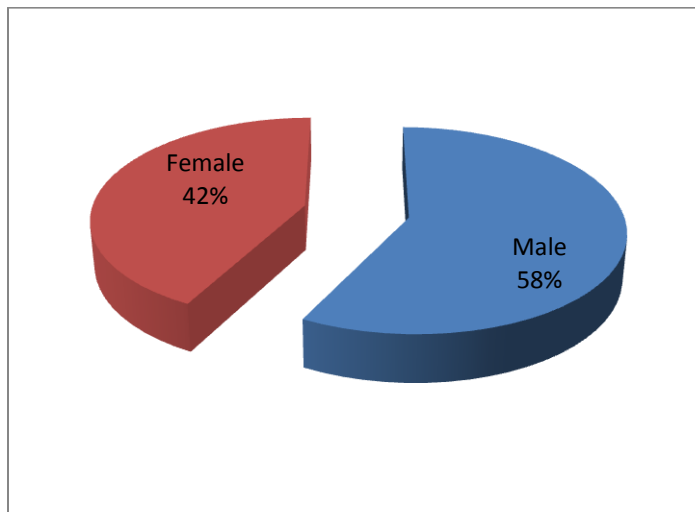[46] Ibid
[47] ibid
[48] Ibid
[49] Ibid
[50] This was particular seen in the Early Warning briefings and RTs.
[51] Interview with MRG representative

Most training workshops have been able to maintain a fair gender balance according to most participants. One workshop was attended by approximately 26 participants of which 11 were women. (see figure 2) The first workshop organized by Partner A allegedly had no presence of women and Partner A had not shown sensitivity to gender at first[52]. As the project evolved, the gender balance of participants has improved[53]. Partner A has faced difficulties in ensuring female participation owing to cultural reasons[54]; traditionally, Muslim women are discouraged from social life; a woman in a social engagement must be accompanied by a male in the family. This is especially true in remote areas and particular regions in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. In order to create an interest among Muslim women on minority issues, children's and women's rights were incorporated encouraging female participation. As one respondent from Partner A points out, Muslim women have not been given the opportunity to contribute to social activities and their capacities have gone unrecognized over the years[55]. At the same time, it must be noted that the exclusion of women in Partner A-led activities may have been due to the fact that Partner A is a male dominated organisation with limited understanding of women's rights. However, as a result of the project, Partner A has gained the ability to mainstream gender not only into the programme under review but also into their other programmes[56]. As per MRG's narrative reports, both Partner B and Partner C have been able to maintain a good gender balance in programme activities. As per the discussions with Partner C staff, efforts have been made to ensure a good gender balance in the activities implemented by Partner C. In addition, the campaign on plantations focused entirely on women's rights in the estate sector.

Figure 2: National Training: participation by gender

(Source: Evaluation Analysis, 17th – 18th October 2011, MRG)

One respondent was of the opinion that the project had very little focus on gender and that a separate report on gender should have been produced, considering the high levels of gender-based violations

---

[52] Interview with Partner B representative
[53] Interview with Partner A representative
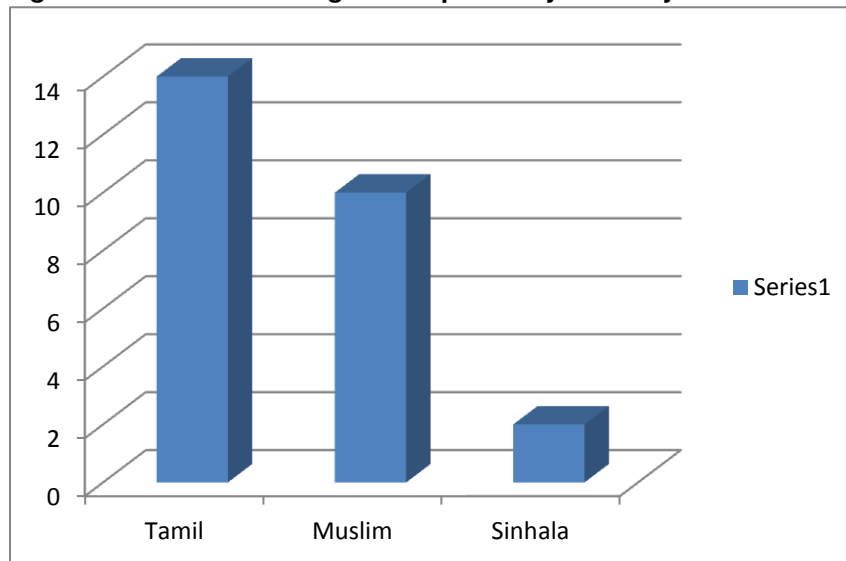[54] Ibid
[55] Ibid
[56] Ibid

reported from one region in the North[57] (a brief on gender is being produced by MRG with additional funds from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April – October 2013).

5.   Other

Limited participation of the Sinhalese in the workshops could mean that the issues discussed did not get through to the majority; as the majority, the Sinhalese should be aware of the varied issues faced by the minorities. (see figure 3) There has to be some level of engagement with the Sinhalese, both moderates and hardliners, to promote greater understanding of minority rights among the majority. The danger involved in working only with the minorities is that one tends to 'preach to the converted[58,] without reaching out to those whose perceptions need to be challenged. However, the current climate of hostility negates this possibility as fear among the minorities and rights defenders is escalating, leading to self-censorship; thus, exposing the programme to extremist elements of the majority contains certain dangers. The Muslim activists' meetings with two prominent Sinhalese leaders, Secretary of Defence, Champaka Ranawaka and Wimal Weerawanse, have laid the foundation for engagement with the majority. Such continuous dialogues are needed to ensure that minority grievances are recognized by the majority. The newspaper advertisements related to the plantation campaign have been translated into Sinhala to reach out to the majority. While certain factors have posed challenges to the programme, certain other factors have acted as enablers: the LLRC report opened up space for civil society to work on reconciliation amidst a hostile environment and provided space to advocate on reconciliation. The Religious freedom report drew heavily from the on-going incidents. Thus the environment has created opportunities for the programme by feeding in minority issues in 'real-time'. Similarly, international focus on Sri Lanka and its Human Rights situation made available a framework to render the project relevant and timely in 2012. MRG has undoubtedly played a crucial role in bringing about this conducive environment along with similar organizations such as Amnesty International, International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch.

Figure 3: National Training: Participation by ethnicity

---

[57] Interview with representative from Partner B
[58] Ibid

(Source: Evaluation Analysis, 17th – 18th October 2011, MRG)

VIII). Challenges

Internal challenges

Provision of technical support[59] from MRG to its partners was limited due to gaps in communication, notes a respondent from Partner B; support that could have been given was limited perhaps due to physical distance; as MRG was not based out of Sri Lanka, this physical distance has been unhelpful to project success according to the respondent; communication was problematic and often posed delays in decision making according to a respondent from Partner B[60]. Monitoring could have been improved had there been regular supervision and support according to the respondent. However, another respondent from Partner B opined that the physical distance did not impose serious delays[61]. The discrepancy in these two views could be due to the level of engagement in the programme by each respondent; the first respondent held the responsibility for overall coordination[62] whereas the second was engaged at an intellectual level. However, these gaps in communication have not posed grave setbacks to the programme.

The distance coupled with the travel ban may have had a minor impact on monitoring. However, during the 2-year period, 4 project partner meetings have been held to discuss issues affecting the project. Electronic correspondence was satisfactory to most project partners interviewed but was not sufficient to ensure effective monitoring according to some[63]. In terms of MRG's role in the programme, in certain instances, being based out of Sri Lanka has posed minor administrative challenges to partners; on the other hand, thanks to its international base, MRG has been able to challenge the GoSL. In this respect, had MRG been based in Sri Lanka, the dynamics of the project would have changed drastically. Thus, the existing project structure well suits the nature of the programme.

It has been challenging for Partner B to manage multiple roles and tasks during the project cycle. As a national-level think-tank, the organisation has had to respond to developments in the political environment, e.g. impeachment of the Chief Justice, and defend itself against attacks by the media and GoSL while implementing the project. However, commitment to the MRG programme should not have been undermined due to other engagements especially when the programme financed the salaries of staffers.

As working with a partner during the last project became difficult owing to security reasons, MRG had to introduce Partner A as the new partner to the project. Partner A did not have much experience in, or understanding of, working on rights issues and required regular accompaniment by MRG. At the outset,

---

[59] Training given on financial and narrative reporting at the start of project has been very useful according to a participant from Partner B.

[60] Interview with Partner B representative.

[61] Ibid

[62] The respondent from Partner B stated that decision-making on programme issues took time as consulting MRG was difficult as they were travelling in the field most of the time. As per the respondent, reminders were sent out on outstanding matters but nothing much could be done until MRG responded. Similarly, MRG sent reminders to Partner B on delayed activities including a warning to withhold funds.

[63] Interview with Partner B representative

Partner A found it difficult to regard Muslim issues from a 'minority' or 'rights' based standpoint. However, as violence against Muslims increased at an exponential rate, Partner A was quick to adopt this view.

In certain instances, partners have been given additional responsibilities; Partner C had to organize a network meeting on behalf of Partner A, owing to security concerns faced by the latter. Thus, Partner C has had to perform additional tasks not falling under their purview. Though this has been a learning experience for them, it has been challenging. It must also be noted that Partner C faced the same security risks cited by Partner A in working on minority rights issues[64]. Partner C has also faced difficulties in supplying certain information[65] to the donor at short notice; obtaining such information from the relevant CBOs (who are not project partners) have been often challenging as most of these CBOs are voluntary and do not posses facilities such as E-mail and Internet.

It has been challenging for some field monitors to cover the areas assigned to them as they were operating on their own. For instance, one field monitor who covered two areas had difficulties in following up on cases reported. Covering a vast area, consisting of 450 villages, by a single individual is a daunting task and may well be impossible. The monitor has encountered difficulties in travelling to the field locations; the only modes of transportation available were public buses and motorbike. He further stated that transferring information gathered from the field was often very risky[66].

External challenges

The project partners were visited by the CID due to the information used at the Geneva events. The negative media reports on MRG and the calls and visits (to partner office premises and in some cases to their residences) by the CID have certainly created fear among the partners and field monitors. The Programme Coordinator of MRG received threatening text messages and e-mails from a source linked to the GoSL, and received negative media attention following the UNHCR event in Geneva. As a security measure, MRG temporarily suspended the Coordinator's travel to Sri Lanka for a period of 9 months. Thus, there was a climate of fear and intimidation that imposed certain limitations on the programme. This was particularly worrying as abductions and enforced disappearances are widespread. The phenomenon of the 'white van' remains valid to date. It is said in the proposal that MRG would focus on international advocacy if national level advocacy fails due to declining political environment; as anticipated, MRG has had to shift its focus to international advocacy during project implementation.

The establishment of the national level network was complicated for two reasons: national level activists faced security issues which impeded joint action; the national network did not materialize due to the very nature of networks; networks are informal and 'loose' by nature and maintaining them can be challenging. Regional networks have functioned better in comparison to the national network envisaged by MRG. Thus, there has been little collaboration between minority activists (through their participation in national and district level networks) to condemn minority rights violations and advocate for protection of minority and human rights. (KRA 2)

A limited national dialogue on Human Rights issues and the absence of a policy dialogue meant working on rights issues without being able to link these up to an existing framework; as the LLRC report was put forward by GoSL in response to international pressure, the civil society had limited time to respond to it.

---

[64] Interview with Partner C staff
[65] These include information such as feedback of workshop participants, position of men/women in the plantation etc.
[66] Interview with Field Monitor

Moreover, the available space for rights-based work was shrinking as GoSL adopted a hostile stance towards rights-based work and peace-building issues. Not only was GoSL concerned about international advocacy on local minority rights issues but it also decided to support 'hardware' programmes where tangible outputs were available for its constituencies.

IX). Impact achieved

Assessing the quantifiable impact of projects with non-tangible outcomes is a challenge faced by civil society the world over. Listed below are some outcomes that the project has been able to achieve. Some of it can be directly linked to the project whereas some can only be linked indirectly.

1. Impact at organizational level

One key achievement that the project has made is the incorporation of rights issues into the organizational approaches of Partner C and Partner A, which are not rights-based organizations per se. It was evident that Partner A as an organisation had adopted a rights-based approach for its subsequent work[67] . Thus, Partner A's understanding of rights-based advocacy has been enhanced as a result of the project. Partner C on the other hand, may not have regarded its work as rights-based per se; however, during project implementation Partner C would have had the opportunity to present its work to an international audience as issues of human rights. Partner C has been able to easily integrate the minority rights approach into its work due to the similarity of issues addressed.

Partner A admits that prior to the project not much emphasis was given to gender; however, their involvement in the project and exposure to humanitarian standards has led to attitudinal change on their part; initially, not much enthusiasm was shown to include women due to cultural reasons and there was great reluctance on the part of women to participate in the workshops. Thus, it has been an organizational learning for Partner A to be more gender sensitive. Mainstreaming gender into their current programmes is a positive impact that the project has had on the partner organisation. Learning from the rights based approach, Partner A is continuing awareness creation workshops on minority rights beyond the project cycle to address the on-going violence against Muslims.

Both Partner A and Partner C have benefitted vastly from working with an international rights-based organisation; exposure to international standards and norms (both programmatic content and general humanitarian standards), exposure to various administrative and accounting systems, exposure to various donor policies have equipped these organizations with improved skills to design, implement and manage similar programmes in the future. For example, the organizational skills gained during the programme have assisted Partner C in organizing a regional conference on minority women's rights[68]. Furthermore, working with MRG has been able to raise the organizational profiles of both Partner A and Partner C in national and international arenas while introducing them to new international networks; partners have been introduced to new contacts and networks through their participation at events in Geneva, Nepal, London and Brussels.

2. International Advocacy

---

[67] Interview with head of Partner A.
[68] Interview with Partner C representative

As pointed out in the Executive Summary, MRG has been able to advocate on minority rights with various foreign missions with successful results; MRG's advocacy work has been focused on lobbying owing to its limited organizational and financial capacities. In 2012, MRG continued lobbying with international groups and supplied them with information ahead of important international fora. MRG has also lobbied with seven nations and supported its partner to lobby another nation ahead of an important international resolution. Three representatives working on the issue of disappearances in Sri Lanka attended an international session with support from MRG. Attempts at lobbying states have also been made, focusing on issues of religious freedom. A significant achievement of MRG's international advocacy work is how one prominent Western nation changed the wording of an important document.

One respondent stated that most rights violations are not reported in Sri Lanka and that the number of rapporteurs are limited. He also identified lack of follow-up as a common problem among local activists[69]. MRG on the other hand, prioritizes follow-up activities and documentation in the view of the respondent. MRG has had much success and visibility in international advocacy work and has been consulted on various issues pertaining to minority rights. Its expertise seems to be international advocacy as it has had continued success in this arena as shown above.

Activists who participated at the Geneva events with support from MRG, learned important techniques in relation to reporting of rights violations; how to make an intervention, how to write a petition, how to collect facts, etc. were some topics shared at a side event. A participant in the Minorities Forum in 2012[70] stated that skills gained in Geneva helped her to respond to women's issues, particularly in the Sampur and Uppukulapuddu areas.

Some of the activists[71] that MRG has supported in various ways were able to meet with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights during her visit to Sri Lanka. In addition, civil society organizations such as Partner B have also been able to meet with the High Commissioner; as the Executive Director of Partner B puts it, "the Sri Lankan civil society contributed not only to the High Commissioner's visit, but

> *"the Sri Lankan civil society contributed not only to the High Commissioner's visit but also to what she said".*
> - *Executive Director, Partner B*

also to what she said"[72]; though a direct link cannot be drawn, the programme would have supported some level of discussion on human rights through network meetings and RTs. Thus, the project has been able to add value to the national dialogue on rights issues.

MRG has assisted a working group of four (two Tamils, one Muslim and one Sinhalese) to participate at the Geneva events in 2013. The group was able to meet with 13 foreign missions in Geneva to inform them on the rights situation in Sri Lanka. One such participant was a woman who was able to talk about her case regarding the enforced disappearance of her journalist husband. What is important is that the group consists of all three main ethnicities voicing rights violations by GoSL. Moreover, MRG has supported women to voice their concerns. These participants whose loved ones have disappeared had limited access to financial resources to participate in the Geneva events to voice their grievances. With the support of MRG, they were granted an international platform to raise their issues and concerns.

---

[69] Interview with Field Monitor
[70] The participant did not want to engage in advocacy for security reasons.
[71] Names removed for security reasons.
[72] Interview with Executive Director of Partner B

On the other hand, the plantation campaign has been able to achieve limited successes during its short span; the plight of the plantation worker was revealed to the international community through the website http://www.priceoftea.com/ while initiating a discussion on 'ethical tea'. Launched in London, the campaign was also extended to the EU through an event held in Brussels. A Program C staffer was interviewed by BBC radio where he was able to throw light on the issues faced by the Sri Lankan plantation worker[73]. Partner C used an online petition urging the GoSL and the corporate sector to improve the living and working conditions of plantation workers to sign up 378 people by the end of the project. The informative video on youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE-fMuSWPP8 has had 719 views as at 08/10/13. The publication 'Land and Housing rights of plantation community in Sri Lanka' launched in Colombo further highlights the issues discussed in the campaign. Thus, given the time constraints, the plantation campaign has been able to take the rights issues of the Indian Origin Tamils to the international community to a certain degree.

3. Capacity building of activists

There were 26 participants at the national training in 2011, consisting of representatives of minority CBOs and individual activists from different regions and the plantation sector. The training included a discussion with the Executive Director from Partner B and training on 'Minority rights and human rights' and 'international human rights laws and mechanisms'. This also included sessions on identifying human rights violations and advocacy.

According to the Human Rights Monitoring Training Evaluation conducted by MRG,[74] where out of the 26 participants, 25 filled in evaluation forms, the following feedback has been received: 69.5% of participants reported that their skills have been very significantly improved by the training received while another 21.7% stated that their skills have been significantly improved[75]. Around 54%[76] of the participants stated that their knowledge of Human Rights has been very significantly improved while 16.6% opined that their knowledge has been significantly improved. 54.5% responded that their knowledge of Minority Rights has been very significantly improved by the training and 41% stated that their knowledge has been significantly improved. The activists opined that the training is useful as a guide in fulfilling the aspirations of the target groups and helpful in leading and advising people on the ground. They were of the view that the training provided would be useful in voicing the needs of oppressed minority groups such as women and plantation workers. Around 57% (on a scale of 4) stated that the training provided a good knowledge base on conducting advocacy programmes. A separate training session was conducted for the pre-selected field monitors in October for six selected human rights monitors. Training included sessions on human rights, minority rights and human rights monitoring skills. The five participants who responded reported that their knowledge of human rights and minority rights improved with three participants stating that their knowledge significantly improved while one felt that his knowledge very significantly improved. The training had to take into account the fact that the monitors had limited knowledge of Human Rights issues and had to be kept at a basic level catering to their capacities. On the whole, the capacities of the monitors have seen an increase as per the evaluations. Thus, it could be said that the training contributed to strengthening the capacities of minority activists to monitor, report and conduct national and international advocacy on human rights violations.

---

[73] Interview with Partner C representative
[74] Evaluation analysis, 17-18th October 2011, MRG
[75] Out of 23 respondents who answered the question
[76] On a scale of 1-4

Further support has been extended to Partner A to conduct monitoring and support visits to three areas following the national training. The purpose of the monitoring visits was to assess how knowledge gained was used on the ground. Some participants did not possess previous knowledge of minority rights and it was critical that additional support was provided to them to effectively carry out their work. Some participants had conducted confidential trainings on minority rights at village level in the North[77].

Text Box 1: The ripple effects of capacity building: snippets from the field

The following examples demonstrate how CBOs have incorporated a minority rights approach to their work:

- An organisation previously worked on livelihood issues affecting Muslims. Following the training organised by Partner C and MRG, the organisation started incorporating the minority rights approach into its work and promoted collaborations between Muslim and Tamil Fisher folk to assert their rights. The organisation also worked with Partner C to establish a network of fisheries to advocate for their rights (e.g. ensuring land rights to construct restrooms /shelters near the beaches for particularly Muslim and Tamil Fishermen). The Department of Fisheries agreed to provide a plot of land for the fishermen for the above purposes.

- A women's centre previously worked on women and workers rights issues. Subsequent to their leader's participation at the minority rights training organised by Partner C and MRG, the centre initiated a women's rights program in, bringing Sinhalese and Tamil women together to advocate for the rights of Tamil women who have been affected by the war in the past 25 years.

- A women's forum works with war and tsunami affected women, focusing on women rights and livelihood issues. The forum previously worked with Tamil women only; however, following their participation at the minority rights training organised by Partner C and MRG, the forum started working with Muslim women. In 2012, the organization initiated a women's rights programme involving Muslim and Tamil women to advocate for the rights of women affected by the conflict and tsunami.

(Source: report by Partner C)

---

4. Monitoring and reporting of rights violations

Five field monitors were appointed by project partners and MRG from six districts in the North and East and the plantation sector. One district did not constitute a part of this mechanism as the implementers could not find a trustworthy and suitable person for the task owing to the security situation; A training on identifying, investigating and reporting on Human Rights violations was conducted by MRG and Partner B. A reporting template was developed to ensure consistency and quality of reporting. The monitors sent their reports to a special Google account managed by MRG to ensure safety of information. A total of 140 reports were received from the field monitors during the reporting period. The quality and the consistency

---

[77] Interview with Partner A representative

of the reports varied as each monitor compiled information based on individual understanding while the level of commitment also varied. For instance, the field monitor from one district in the North has been exceptionally good whereas the monitor from another in the East was unable to meet the required specifications[78]. It must also be stated that out of the four field monitors interviewed, one had not received the training; the monitor covering the plantations had not received the specific training given to the other monitors; they had been exposed to the subject of minority rights through their involvement in the previous project and had joined the project under review in 2012[79]. With no training and no journalistic experience their reports may not have met the expected standards. Though they demonstrated a good understanding of minority rights in general, the evaluators felt that they had not internalized the purpose of monitoring and reporting.

The reports fed into international advocacy attempts by MRG contributing to successes in this arena. (see section on International Advocacy). In addition, utilising the timely information provided by the monitors, MRG has been able to issue Urgent Actions regarding rights violations.[80]

1. MRG has issued an Urgent Action to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or belief and the UN Independent Expert on Minority Rights on the attack and relocation of a mosque in Dambulla, Sri Lanka.
2. Another Urgent Action was issued to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, the UN Independent Expert on Minority Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on torture on the rape and killing of a 13 year old girl by a paramilitary leader in Jaffna.

The success of the monitoring mechanism is that it equipped MRG with a constant supply of detailed verified information including photo evidence on minority rights violations from the ground enabling it to continuously engage in international advocacy. As per one field monitor, pictures confirming the 'Sinhalization' of the North and military encroachment of land were supplied to MRG for its advocacy work. According to the respondent, the use of pictures as solid evidence of violations of minority rights gave rise to 'turbulence' in the South and generated inquiries from Colombo-based media[81].

Text Box 2: Advocacy efforts

According to the field monitor from one of the districts, the following advocacy efforts have been successfully carried out.

- Working with the Government Agent (G.A.) to expedite the delayed resettlement of 115 families within a week. The monitor has been able to change the attitude of the G.A. through continued tactful negotiations. The resettlement of the above families had been put on hold due to opposition by a prominent group. However, as a result of successful advocacy the request for resettlement of the families was taken on board on humanitarian grounds.

- In two districts, around 100 families were faced with land issues, and problems with access to fishing and access to places of worship. The monitor was able to raise these issues with the relevant Provincial Council and the authorities were

---

[78] The main specifications were the ability to do continuous research on minority issues and the ability to write reports to meet international standards
[79] Interview with Field Monitor
[80] Further details to the evaluation report have been removed due to security concerns.
[81] Interview with Field Monitor

only able to grant access to fishing as there was opposition from the higher authorities to implement other requests.

- The monitor has been able to advocate for the distribution of food rations to a refugee camp after the GoSL unexpectedly ceased the hand-out. An NGO came forward to supply the food rations for a period of 6 months.

- Utilizing the training received, a respondent has been able to report a case in a village where land had not been given to people with deeds[82]. They further stated that prior to the training received, they used to report on rights violations to local media whereas now they are able to directly take up the issue with the relevant authority.

The above examples are a clear indication of the strengthened capacities of minority activists to monitor, report and conduct national advocacy on human rights violations against minorities. (KRA 1).

5. Post-conflict work

The programme has not been able to reduce ethnic tensions between ethnic communities at local level through targeted mediatory interventions of community leaders and local level actions as stated in project proposal (KRA 6). Over the last two years, the tensions have unfortunately increased and have resulted in deeper divides. A respondent was of the opinion that there are attempts by the military forces to instigate clashes between Sinhalese and Muslims in Mutur[83].

---

[82] Interview with respondent.
[83] Around 50 Sinhalese families live in Mutur, a predominantly Muslim area.

MRG offered one small grant to a citizens committee in the North to engage in inter-community reconciliation work, with which the grantee set up several reconciliation commissions. It is difficult to assess whether reconciliation committees were successful according to the grantee. MPs, minority political party leaders, academics and policy makers (who can't be quoted here for security reasons) made references to partner publications produced through the programme and content that came out of the RTs.

X). Lessons learnt and recommendations

Prominent scholars and civil society activists have found the briefs to be 'useful' and 'excellent'.

1. Enhanced capacity building: There should be greater follow-up with the participants from training workshops; most of the respondents who had participated in trainings felt that the knowledge gained from the workshops were inadequate to respond to issues in their environments; this could be attributed to the rapidly changing political environment and worsening security situation[84]. They, particularly the field monitors, expressed the need for advanced workshops delivered regularly[85]. This throws light on a common issue faced by the civil society sector – the 'abandonment' of the participant after the completion of activity/project; this however, this should be understood in the context of time-bound donor-funded projects; managing beneficiary expectations after the completion of a project thus often proves challenging to most organizations. Similarly, the beneficiaries of the project under review felt that their capacities could be enhanced further. The monitors in particular felt the need for an advanced training as most of them were exposed to the basics of reporting through their journalistic experience. Given that some monitors did not meet the expected standards, 'refreshers' could have been delivered. To overcome limitations imposed by donor-funded projects, perhaps periodic on-line trainings could be delivered to address identified gaps. It would also be beneficial for the minority rights defenders if they were kept informed on latest reports/research and developments in the minority rights sector by MRG. For example, the participants could receive electronic versions of reports published by MRG subsequent to the training. These could also include success stories from other countries where MRG is present.

2. Extended dialogue at international level: A respondent felt that the number of days allocated for the Minority Forum should exceed the allotted two-day period[86]; if this is a widely-felt need, MRG should advocate to extend the duration of this discussion as a representative of the minorities. MRG states that they have in fact, called for this on numerous occasions but has not been successful in persuading sufficient member states on this point. Following up on recommendations made in the previous year is also crucial to ensure that action is taken on issues flagged. Perhaps, rather than trying to mitigate the challenges of managing priorities in Geneva, a continuous engagement could be sought. As suggested by the respondent, a minority rights forum at the Asian level should perhaps be formed as a follow-up

---

[84] Also, the training was delivered in October of 2011 and since then the political environment has been changing quite rapidly.
[85] MRG, on the request of Partner A funded some follow up trainings in three areas (see section on Impact, IX.3)
[86] Interview with respondent.

mechanism to Geneva events. However, whether MRG could build a consensus with the Asian states on the matter is not certain. Currently, MRG engages on minority rights issues four times a year through the UN Council and UPR process.

3. Political reality check: There should an element of flexibility factored in when framing proposals; drastic changes in political climate were not taken into account at the design stage assuming that the there would be space for reconciliation and dialogue[87]. Hostilities may have been expected but perhaps not at the current level of intensity. Restructuring of the State (e.g. centralization and militarization) need to be counted in; for instance, it is pointless lobbying with a ministry without real power as this would only 'tick boxes' for donors. Although difficult, a wider range of predictions about how political and security situations may change in the future (including some less optimistic scenarios) needs to be built into proposal writing. The political environment in a given context could deteriorate quite unexpectedly as in the case of Sri Lanka after the end of conflict.

4. Evidence-based advocacy: As an organisation focusing both on research and advocacy at various levels, MRG has much to gain from its dual approach; wherever possible, MRG has employed research to support its advocacy efforts. The trained monitors as well as researches commissioned to external authors have provided MRG with verified information that could be used with confidence when advocating for minority rights issues. Thus, advocacy should be used in conjunction with verified evidence to achieve the desired objectives.

5. National vs. International advocacy: MRG has had to shift its focus from Sri Lanka to the international arena where local advocacy attempts could have endangered the programme and partners, e.g. the plantation campaign. Instead, MRG has been able to deliver well-focused advocacy component internationally with successes. Moreover, international advocacy constitutes MRG's core strength. Thus, programmes should be flexible to make amendments without undermining the original objective or the expected results as seen in the case of MRG in Sri Lanka.

6. Working in deteriorating political settings: As seen in the report, MRG and the partners have had challenges in working in an increasingly hostile political environment. Based, out of the Sri Lanka, MRG has had the advantage over its partners to be more vociferous about rights violations and pressurize the GoSL. MRG has taken the lead role in international advocacy while the project partners worked at the national and grassroots levels to support MRG's advocacy efforts. This mechanism has worked well and can be replicated in similar settings. However, attempts must be made to constructively engage with the GoSL in the form of technical support as pointed out by a national activist.[88] These could include support given to the Ministry of Justice on adhering to international standards and mechanisms on Human rights. The evaluators feel that though this may not be possible in the current circumstances, MRG could lobby with minority politicians in the GoSL by recognizing them as 'champions' of minority rights.

7. Introducing international standards: The introduction of international humanitarian standards to the programme by way of reporting techniques is a critical step in building the capacities of local activists; as a result of the project, the monitors have been able to deliver reports meeting the expectations of MRG. The monitors have in turn disseminated this knowledge among local rights activists. Consequently, the capacities of local rights activists to investigate, document and advocate on rights violations have increased. Thus, introducing local beneficiaries to international humanitarian standards and practices are important for project sustainability.

---

[87] Interview with MRG representative
[88] Interview with national activist – name omitted due to security concerns.

8, Enhanced training and monitoring: In order to overcome the limitations imposed by trainings, the trainings can be designed taking into consideration the dynamics of each area. As each area has its own specificities, the training could be designed with prior input on regional context from the monitors. Similarly, adjustments to the monitoring and reporting mechanism could be made to suit the regional context while maintaining the overall principles and procedures.

9. Support to field monitors: As pointed out in the previous parts of the report, the field monitors are required to travel extensively to gather information. It is learned that they were entitled to a sum of LKR 15,000 per month as travelling costs. However, as per MRG none of the monitors have claimed this during the project period perhaps due to the rigidity of documentation involved. Maintaining and retaining supporting documents could also constitute serious security risks for the monitors as such documents would be direct evidence of visits made. Therefore, relaxing of strict donor policies in recognition of the difficult and often dangerous circumstances that the monitors are required to work in would be helpful.

10. Using safer technology: Some monitors felt that Gmail accounts were not safe; the account of one Jaffna monitor was hacked[89]. Password protected encoding of information using *txt* format was suggested by a respondent as a potentially effective mechanism to ensure the safety of the monitors and information as third party access would be strictly limited. In addition, the use of proxy servers to conceal the IP address could also be done to further ensure the safety of information and staff[90].

11. Planning well ahead: It is important to plan ahead to source out partners and beneficiaries; the Reconciliation Committees had limited success as the grants were handed out at the latter stages of the project. Thus, the expected outcome could not be achieved. Hence the significance of proper planning to ensure expected results. On the same note, the reconciliation committees could be reactivated in the next programme phase with proper monitoring and adequate funding to do justice to those involved taking into account the limited impact the mechanism has achieved in a very short span of time.

12. Challenging ideologies: It is important to devise strategies to appeal to a segment of the population who would otherwise be left out. Partner A's strategy to focus on child and women's rights enabled them to ensure participation from Muslim women to discuss rights issues at large; the incorporation of a session on women's and children's rights into the regular programme on Human Rights in order to appeal to women is a tactful way of bypassing cultural norms. On the other hand, Partner A as an organisation working on Muslim issues, were compelled to look closely at gender issues; MRG has been successful at challenging Partner A's ideology and views on gender to a considerable extent through constant pressurizing. Thus, partners with counter-productive ideologies must be challenged to improve the effectiveness of the programme.

13. Promoting cross-learning: The interviews revealed that awareness on other project activities and components (other than their own) among partners was limited. One partner did not exhibit knowledge of what the other partner did in terms of programme implementation. For example, a respondent from Partner B who emphasized that gender has not been adequately addressed did not show any awareness of the plantation campaign which was entirely focused on women. Managing multiple partners and directing them towards the same goals can often be challenging. Thus, exchanges and interactions between project partners should be built into the programme to promote cross learning while maintaining confidentiality of information.

---

[89] Interview with Field Monitor
[90] This was suggested by a field monitor who mentioned that the suggestion was shared at the training for monitors. However, it has not been taken on board.

14. Referring of victims: Develop a campaign to support the families of those disappeared or forced to disappear by governments[91]; the governments will need to support the families until the issue is resolved. Perhaps, MRG can adopt this as a global campaign. If this does not fit into the mandate of MRG, perhaps MRG could act as a referral point where such families are directed to organizations working on disappearances.

15. Enhancing networks: One way of overcoming the challenges posed by networks would be to have a few organizations working on issues to form the network while others join based on the issue at hand. This would avoid the complications of large networks to some extent and contribute to accepting ground realities at conception stage.

16. Greater understanding from donors: In a context like 2011-2103 in Sri Lanka, donors could perhaps be more understanding of the need for swift and unbureaucratic flexibility in terms of the need to make fundamental amendments to programmes including potential partners, activities and their design in response to security concerns. It would be unrealistic to adhere to the same project partners or activities if the prevailing context no longer relate to what was stated in the original project documents. Thus, donors should demonstrate greater understanding of volatility of political-economic contexts of post-conflict countries.

17. Greater clarity by donors, better practices by NGOs: There needs to be greater clarity from donors on what a grant would and would not cover from the outset. Partner C informed the evaluators that the donor agreed to cover the cost of rent in the previous project but had retained the relevant amount from the budget of the project under review stating that rent could not be accommodated as per donor regulations. Unaware and uninformed of the donor's decision, Partner C on the other hand 'borrowed' funds from another donor project to implement the activities under current project. While it must be stated that the evaluators do not have sufficient information to establish a conclusive opinion on the issue and as the matter remains unresolved, two things must be highlighted: firstly, clarity on donor policies with regard to financials is crucial in that items/activities not funded must be clearly stated; secondly, 'borrowing' from different project budgets must be considered as a 'bad' practice and should be discouraged to avoid unnecessary complications and risks. At the same time, donors must realize that NGOs are not-for-profit organizations and cannot be expected to complete project activities with 'other' funds as technically such funds should not exist after project expenditure. As the principal applicant of the grant, perhaps MRG should have looked closely into the matter from the onset of the project to ensure a speedy and just resolution of the matter.

18. Minorities are not homogenous: While attempts at bringing together Tamil and Muslim minorities are admirable, it must be emphasized that these two groups are not homogenous. Each has its own political history and grievances and one may tend to believe that bringing together these two groups could challenge the majority. Care should thus be taken to avoid such wrongful impressions in programme design.

XI). Conclusion

In conclusion, the project has been relevant and has addressed the needs of the target communities. The delivery mechanism has been effective in delivering certain outputs while the evaluators can agree that

---

[91] Suggested by a respondent – name omitted due to security concerns.

the partners have efficiently implemented the project. Whilst it is true that some activities were not completed to the full extent planned and some planned results did not materialize, in the evaluators' opinion considering the deteriorating security situation, this was not surprising (and may even have been inevitable and unavoidable). Beyond the strict assessment of the logframe, it seems to the evaluators that this project has been a very useful intervention and has been relevant and timely.

The importance of MRG's work in Sri Lanka is that, as a front-liner in the field of minority rights, it can provide support to local rights defenders and activists; having the advantage of being based outside of Sri Lanka, MRG is in a strong position to challenge GoSL unlike its local counterparts. Its numerous links to other international organizations and access to UN mechanisms render MRG a strong candidate to uphold local minority issues in the international arena. Local rights defenders and human rights organizations are struggling to make their voices heard in an environment where the voice of the State overrides everything else. It is important that organizations such as MRG continue its work in deteriorating political settings so that the 'counter-narrative' of local activists can be taken forward.

ANNEX 1: Key Interview Questions

The evaluation questionnaire will include but will not be limited to the Key evaluation questions and additional questions outlined in the TOR of this assignment.

The key interview questions will attempt to assess:

- Relevance
- Efficiency of implementation
- Effectiveness
- Impact and sustainability of the programme

The interview questions will be open-ended and will generate qualitative information which will be supplemented by statistics wherever possible. Around 50 KIIs will be conducted. FGDs with beneficiaries may not be conducted due to the sensitive nature of information.

Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1:

For partners:

1. Were you a part of the planning process? Were you consulted?
2. Were all the activities implemented in line with the project plan/timeline?
3. What were the reasons for any significant delays?
4. What problems were encountered in implementation? How were they overcome?
5. Were there external limitations/challenges? How did they impact the project? How were they overcome?
6. Were there external enablers that contributed to the project implementation? How did they support the project?
7. Did you receive sufficient and timely technical support from MRG?
8. How did technical support received from MRG help you to assist the communities?
9. Did you receive similar technical support from other organizations? How was MRG training different?
10. How was your relationship with MRG?
11. What challenges did you encounter in working on HR issues?
12. In your opinion, were you able to achieve the expected results? Explain.
13. Have you made any changes to your organization's structure as a result of the project?
14. In what way do the skills and knowledge obtained from the programme help in implementing other programmes?
15. Are your current or planned projects influenced by the programme?
16. What are the lessons learnt?
17. What measures did you take to ensure gender and ethnic balance in beneficiaries?
18. How were the CBOs chosen for Human Rights training? What were the selection criteria? Did they have prior knowledge of the subject?
19. How was quality maintained within the changing context?
20. What was the transformative impact of the project on the staff and the organization? What did you learn from the ground?
21. Was MRG responsive to needs on the ground? Were they sufficiently flexible?

22. Was it helpful in advocacy that MRG was an international organization? Has working with MRG raised your organizational profile? Has it introduced you to new networks/connections?

Questionnaire 2

For beneficiaries (minority CBOs, individual activists, field monitors, target communities):

1. Was technical support given useful? How did it enable you to address problems at ground level?
2. How could the training be improved?
3. Prior to project, what were the minority rights issues prevalent in your area? In your opinion, did the project tackle them successfully?
4. Has there been an improvement in minority rights situation in your area? Examples?
5. Has the project reduced ethnic tensions in your area? Were any such situations tackled by the project?
6. Have ethnic relations improved as a result of the project? Examples?
7. In what way/s have the project made changes in your life?
8. What were the challenges faced when reporting violations? How were they overcome?
9. In what way were the networking meetings useful? How has it assisted your work?
10. How has the monitoring and reporting of violations improved the minority rights situation in your community? Example?
11. Has reporting worsened the minority rights situation? Examples?
12. In your opinion, did MRG make good use of monitoring information? What else could they have done?
13. In your opinion, how successful was MRG in taking your community rights issues to the international audience?
14. Did MRG show sufficient concern for security implications in using information?
15. Were the project publications helpful and if so in what way? Did they reach you on time?
16. Have men and women equally benefitted from the project?

Questionnaire 3

For other respondents on the general impact of MRG's work/international advocacy:

1. What are some of the achievements that MRG has made in the last two years?
2. In your opinion, what are MRG's strengths? Weaknesses?
3. What challenges has MRG faced in the last two years?
4. Does MRG have a good relationship with GoSL in your opinion?
5. To what extent has MRG been successful in bringing together minority rights activists to defend Human Rights?
6. Has MRG been effective in taking minority rights issues of Sri Lanka to the international community? How could its work be improved?
7. In taking local minority rights issues global, has MRG been sensitive to security concerns of local partners?
8. What strategies, approaches could MRG adopt to improve its impact?
9. What other Sri Lankan minority rights issues could MRG as an international actor take up in the future?
10. In your opinion, what other international organizations work on minority rights issues of Sri Lanka? Are they successful?

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Omitted for security reasons.

ANNEX 3: Documents reviewed for desk research

	Document
1	Concept note
2	Full application
3	Approved changes
4	6 month narrative report 2011
5	Interim report September 2012
6	Final narrative report
7	Report on plantation campaign.
8	Copy of the plantation campaign briefing and some other literature published for the campaign
9	Report on international advocacy work done by MRG
10	A selection of reports by partners on the activities conducted in the last six months – narrative reports by Partner A, B, and C.
11	Reports by a local organization on activity 4.1
12	Partner contacts
13	Field visit reports
14	Reports for Results 1-6
15	Reports from Round table discussions
16	Specific objectives 1-5
17	Summary for evaluator

ANNEX 4: List of respondents

Omitted for security reasons.