

Assessment of the Impact of NGO Activities supported by the Minority Rights Group (MRG) at the time of the World Conference Against Racism

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1. Objectives of this Evaluation

An external consultant was asked by MRG in March 2004 to assess the impact of the Minority Rights Group's (MRG's) programme linked to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), in particular the impact for the NGOs which MRG supported in participating at the WCAR and a series of linked activities.

Consequently, this report is an attempt to assess what changes have occurred, if any, in the behaviour of the individuals or organisations which MRG involved in its activities linked to the WCAR, or for the minorities and indigenous peoples whose rights they seek to uphold. To use the jargon developed by monitoring and evaluation specialists, this could be called a 'downstream impact assessment'. It is not an evaluation of MRG's work at the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in general.

At an initial meeting with two MRG staff on 11 March, the consultant understood that MRG would like to know whether NGO representatives who attended MRG training sessions or WCAR meetings felt that these had been useful, what changes they had made (temporarily or permanently) to the behaviour of these individuals or their organisations and what NGO representatives felt could have been done differently.

2. MRG programme objectives concerning the WCAR

Although an 'impact assessment' is not the same exercise as an evaluation, the goals which MRG started out with and proposed to two funders (DANIDA and the C S Mott Foundation) are an important part of the context, for they give an idea of what MRG's expectations were. These were:

1. To ensure the full and effective participation of minority communities from developing countries in the World Conference Against Racism;
2. Promoting a deeper and wider understanding of the effects of discrimination on the economic exclusion and poverty of minority and indigenous groups;
3. Raise awareness nationally and internationally of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and strengthen the implementation of this Convention nationally and internationally.

To achieve these goals, MRG arranged a series of activities linked directly and indirectly to the WCAR. The ones which this impact assessment looks at the effects of are:

- Support for NGO representatives to attend either the NGO Forum and intergovernmental WCAR in South Africa in August/September 2001 (both financial support to travel to and stay in Durban and advice and involvement in activities organised by MRG while in Durban);
- Similar support for NGO representatives to attend preparatory conferences and regional meetings prior to the WCAR;
- Support for NGO representatives to attend a training session about the WCAR and related UN processes in Dakar, immediately prior to the Africa Regional Conference in Dakar in June 2001;
- Support for a training meeting in Bangalore (India) for activists associated with India's national campaign for Dalit human rights, both about the WCAR and its relevance in the context of India;
- Support for some NGOs to hold pre-WCAR consultations with the community they represent;
- Support for two NGOs to research and publish 'micro-studies' about particular communities in their countries suffering from discrimination;
- Support for some NGOs to translate documents concerning racial discrimination into relevant national languages;
- Support for some NGOs to carry out projects after the WCAR;
- Support for NGOs and others to attend a two-day workshop in London in July 2001 on the economic exclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples ("Mainstreaming Minority Rights In Development Assistance");
- Support for representatives of some NGOs to attend meetings in Geneva of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to follow up on countries or topics raised at the WCAR which were the subject of CERD discussions during the following year (the country was Fiji and the topic was 'descent-based discrimination', a particular preoccupation for Dalit rights activities in India and other countries in South Asia);
- Support for some NGOs to purchase a computer and computer software.

MRG has prepared its own reports on the specific activities which the various NGOs carried out with MRG support.

3. The concepts of 'downstream impact assessment and 'outcome mapping'

While conventional evaluations aim to find out whether the general objectives of a project or programme have been achieved and planned activities have been carried out, this downstream assessment attempted to find out all the different effects of the support MRG gave to NGOs at the time of the WCAR, whether or not they were intended by MRG or the NGOs it supported. When questioning the representatives of NGOs, a special effort was made to ask if there had been any unintended side effects or any negative impacts, alongside the positive effects which they tended to mention fairly automatically and which they might be inclined to mention to the exclusion of all else. Consequently, respondents were asked what the effects (e.g. of their attending a meeting) had been for their organisation and for the community whose rights they advocated, and also what the effects had been for them personally (to investigate effects which were not institutional and which, once again, might go unremarked).

The idea that attempts to improve a human rights situation or to bring about development can be monitored in terms of pouring dye into a stream and observing where it eventually reaches and can be observed is the origin of the term ‘downstream assessment’. The concepts involved have now been developed into a methodology by one development agency.¹ Although this methodology has not been used here, the idea that initiatives (in this case advocacy initiatives) may have far wider impact than those initially envisaged is a useful one and allowed a range of very positive effects to be identified in this review, three years after the event.

4. Methodology for this Impact Assessment

MRG indicated that it would like a sample of the participants it had supported during the WCAR to be interviewed by telephone, along with several other people representing governments or the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), responsible for the organisation of the WCAR.² Most were NGO representatives who had attended meetings linked to the WCAR, while a few had organised other activities (collecting and publishing information, translating documents, acquiring a computer and using it). The consultant selected 15 individuals out of some 46 named, on the basis of their geographical location, gender, and the type of support provided by MRG; the characteristics of the 46 potential respondents were charted and this helped identify those who met several different criteria.

E-mails were sent to the respondents initially to establish contact and to explain the type of information which was being sort and the reasons for collecting it. The respondents were guaranteed anonymity as far as their specific observations were concerned.

The telephone interviews followed a common structure. They varied in length from about 25 minutes to 50 minutes. The telephone calls were backed up in several cases by reports which the NGO representatives had written about their participation in the WCAR (usually soon after the Conference, so saying little about the longer-term impact) and by documents such as annual reports which are available on their web-sites.

In a few initial cases the consultant sent a detailed list of questions in advance by telephone. This did not seem to help – and was possibly off-putting for respondents, so was stopped. However, it did seem to help to explain *what* the assessment was for as well as *who* it was for (one respondent said it was important to emphasise that “it was for MRG and not for the UN”).

¹ International Development Research Centre (Canada): Sarah Earl, Fred Carden and Terry Smutylo: Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs, IDRC, 2001.

² MRG asked for the following to be consulted: five individuals who had attended WCAR preparatory meetings; three who had attended a training session in Bangalore (India); three who attended a training session in Dakar (Senegal); four who had attended the WCAR in Durban; three who had implemented follow-up projects; two who had carried out translations; three who had received grants to purchase computers or software; two who had published ‘micro studies’; and a number of OHCHR or government representatives who had been at the receiving end of advocacy activities.

It was initially envisaged that a more detailed impact assessment would be carried out in three cases. In view of the impediments and delays that were experienced in securing responses, this was reduced to two cases (concerning Fiji and Colombia). In these cases, in addition to interviewing an NGO representative, the consultant spoke to two other individuals to obtain information which would supplement the views already given by an NGO representative from each country. The intention of talking to two other informants was to hear a different point of view and either confirm the accuracy of information already given by an NGO representative and supplement that information, or to acquire a different interpretation of events. In one other case (India), the consultant spoke to two separate NGO participants, giving some separate (but not entirely independent) views.

Responses were obtained from all but two. In just one case, no telephone conversation took place, as ample information was provided by e-mail. In several, telephone calls were supplemented by details in e-mails.

It was only possible to talk to a representative of one of the two NGOs involved in carrying out a micro-study. The difficulties in contacting the second were due to staff changes (which had also made it difficult to organise a community consultation concerning the micro-study prepared by the same NGO and published in February 2003).

In addition, one government delegate was interviewed, along with two UN organisers. While an attempt was made in these three interviews to focus their comments on the MRG's role and on the NGOs which MRG had supported, in practice two of the three made much more general comments. They were evidently still feeling frustrated by the WCAR process and what they felt to have been the negative role played by many NGOs. Talking to the consultant seems to be an opportunity to get this off their chest (in one case for the first time)!

The consultant also read reports sent to MRG by NGOs whose representatives had attended the WCAR or preparatory meetings (both NGOs who were interviewed and others). These were written shortly after the WCAR and presented a wide range of interpretations of the same events in Durban. However, they revealed little about how the NGO concerned might modify its activities as a result.

In the end slightly less people were consulted than planned as several did not respond or contact broke down after an initial response. This meant that only one of the two NGOs responsible for carrying out 'micro studies' provided comments, and only one government representative (instead of the two who were planned). Both some NGO activists who had been supported by MRG and some of the others contacted proved difficult to track down or to difficult to persuade to respond to messages so that a time could be fixed for a phone conversation.

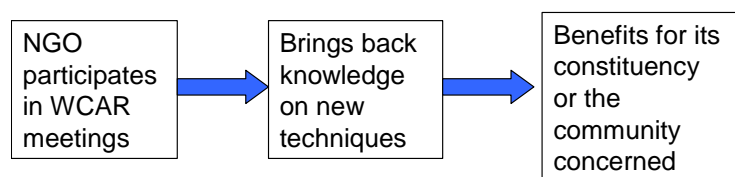
Despite these difficulties, a wealth of information was provided when contacts were made, suggesting that it is quite possible to track the effects over several years of support provided to NGOs. Most gave useful information: just a few seemed either reticent or could not understand what information the consultant was seeking (or, perhaps, why he was after it). Few seemed accustomed to responding to questions about impact or the 'consequences' of attending meetings and other activities,

suggesting that assessments of this sort are relatively rare (even though they appear to yield significant information).

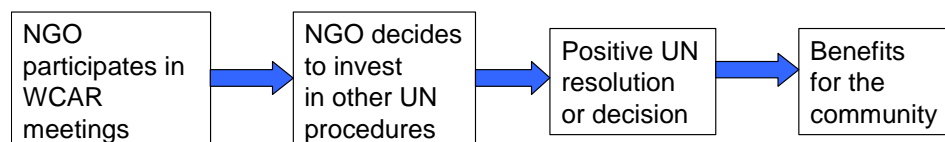
While the NGO delegates who were contacted during this assessment represent a significant proportion of those supported by MRG at the time of the WCAR and can be seen as a representative sample, they are evidently only a very small proportion of the total number of NGOs which attended the WCAR (approximately 3,000 at the NGO Forum in Durban and 3,700 NGO delegates from 777 NGOs accredited at the inter-governmental conference). It is not possible to estimate how many other NGOs received training and support of the sort which MRG offered. It seems reasonable on the basis of the findings below to guess that those which received training (and knew how to navigate the procedures and proceedings of UN conferences) brought home qualitatively different results to many of the others. However, this assumption has not been tested.

5. Assumptions: the Challenge of assessing cause and effect

In terms of measuring cause and effect and assessing the benefits to minority and other communities affected by discrimination or economic exclusion, a simple model of what happened after an NGO representatives attended one of the WCAR's meetings might be expected to reveal various results, which can be summarised in the following diagrams:



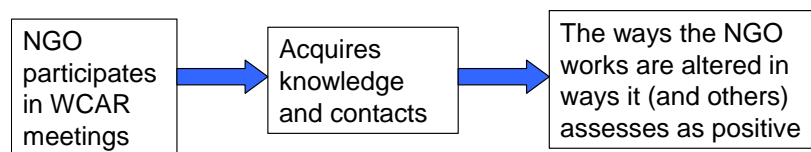
Or



In practice, in each case the last link (benefits for the community) has been difficult to demonstrate, except in rare cases. Furthermore, the 'benefits to a community' may consist of a *lack* of deterioration rather than actual *improvements*. Again, this was difficult to assess in interviews. Only one respondent reported that relations between his community and others in his country had got worse since the WCAR and he viewed this as a necessary development (a higher profile was necessary if the community was to secure benefits, but in the short term the high profile was likely to provoke a hostile reaction).

Only one respondent remarked that the link was completely absent (commenting that members of her community were still as poor as ever). However, a significant number reported progress towards bringing specific benefits; one respondent

remarked that he did not yet know how to measure this. Consequently, in general we can observe:



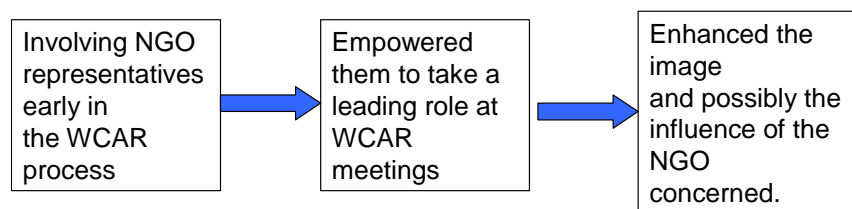
In general, it was individuals attending a UN meeting for the first time (or who were not old timers) who reported the most positive effects, while those who were habitual participants did not report so much progress. This suggests that it was not the substance or focus of the WCAR which proved especially valuable for NGOs, but an opportunity to meet like-minded people and to learn about the procedures of UN conferences and mechanisms. The fact that there were a series of meetings leading up to the WCAR increased the range and usefulness of the contacts made by those who attended more than one session. No respondent complained that the cost of attending several meetings had not justified the benefits.

It would be wrong to conclude that support should *only* be given to new groups participating for the first time on the grounds that this gives the greatest benefits. It is reasonable to expect such participation to have a more tangible impact than in the case of more experienced groups. However, the cost of *not* attending might be high for more experienced groups (i.e. being perceived to be not interested or unable to participate), and the benefits, while less tangible, might also be important (for example, members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues felt they were moving a small step towards their long-term objectives).

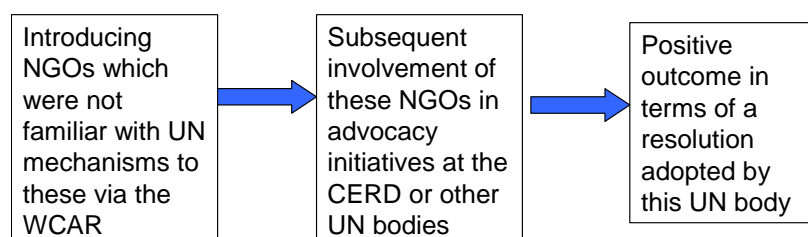
6. Summary of the achievements linked to MRG's WCAR programme

The following six examples of the positive impact of MRG's support were cited by NGO representatives.

6.1 Increasing the influence of an NGO with other NGOs

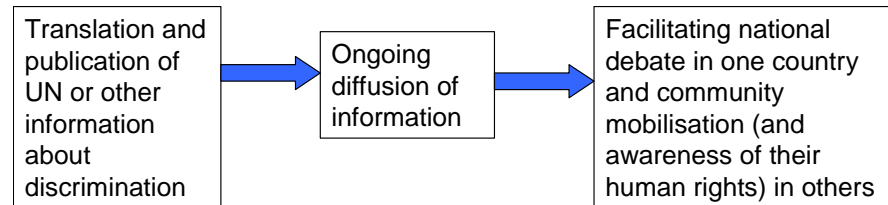


6.2 An NGO gets involved in a UN (human rights) procedure

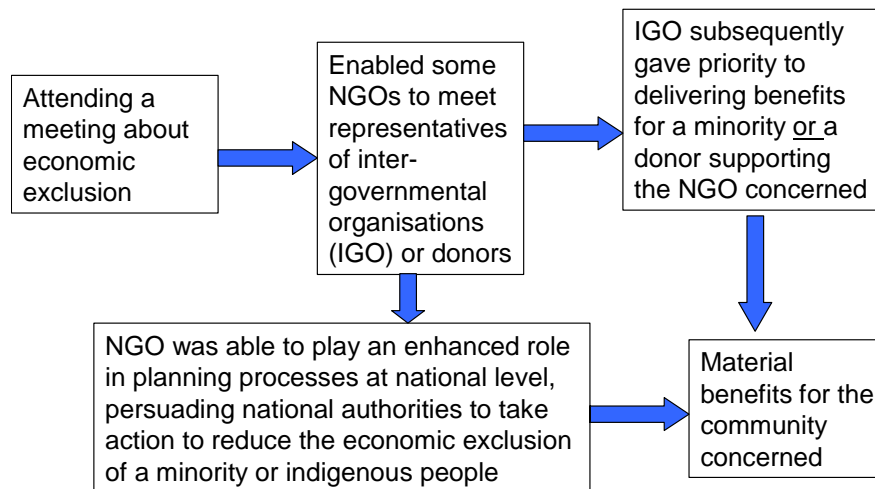


Of course, the resolution by a UN body may or may not have benefits for the community concerned, varying from country to country. In both the examples examined (Fiji and India) there did seem to have been notable benefits.

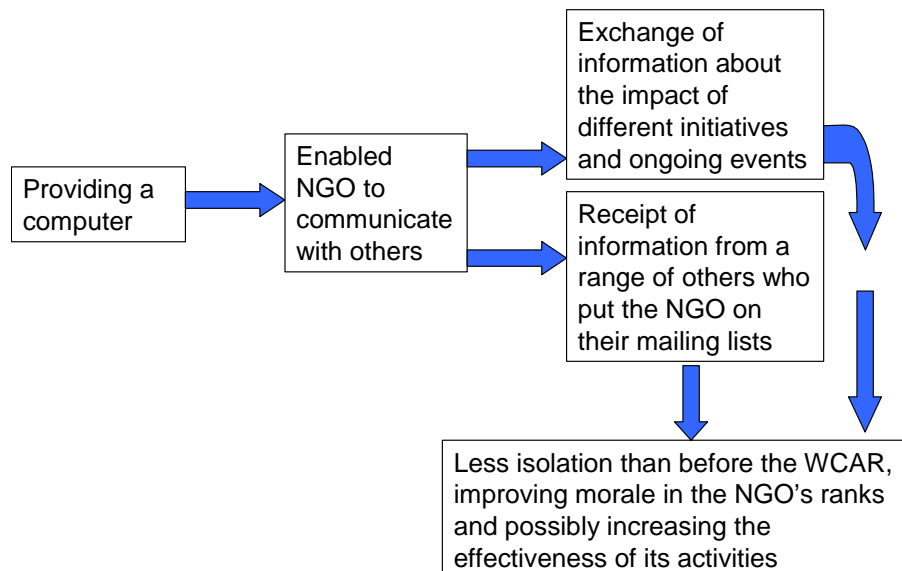
6.3 Encouraging public debate on discrimination issues



6.4 Getting involved in economic development initiatives



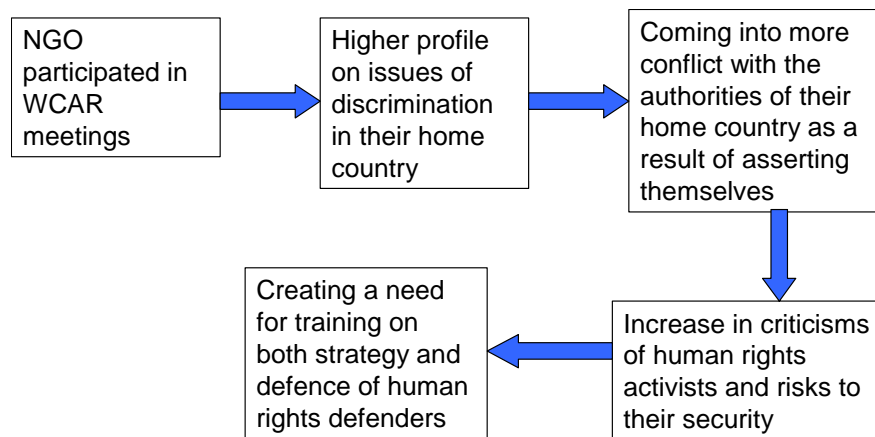
6.5 Improving an NGO's external communications



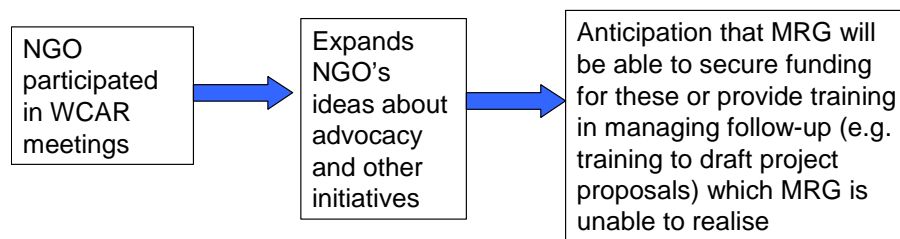
7. Summary of downstream difficulties experienced

There were also several examples of negative consequences, the first of which was virtually welcomed by the NGOs concerned as a sign of progress, despite its negative implications.

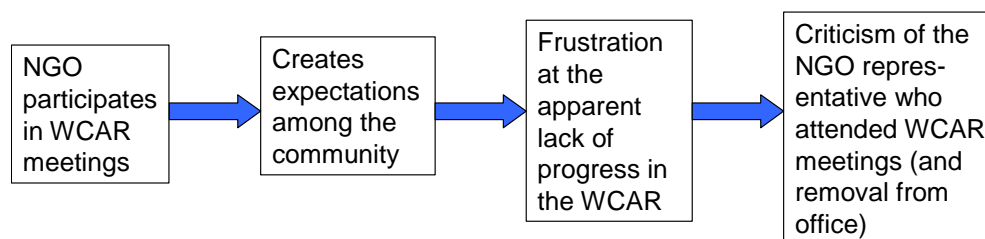
7.1 Provoking a negative reaction



7.2 Unfulfilled expectations



7.3 Frustration taken out on representative who attended WCAR



The consultant only heard one negative comment suggesting that rivalries (between NGOs) during the WCAR process had caused a person supported by MRG prejudice subsequently.

In several cases, the higher public profile which activists achieved after attending trainings or WCAR meetings brought them into conflict of some sort with their own governments or with others linked to the establishment in their countries. This was reported in Costa Rica and India. The fact that conflict occurred was not considered surprising (and was viewed in both countries as a measure of their success). However, it precipitated a new state of affairs in which activists needed better knowledge on how to defend themselves and how to access international solidarity and support.

One respondent reported that his government had learned during the WCAR that NGOs in its country were better connected to others around the world than the

government had previously assumed. This was viewed as a benefit in terms of defending NGOs against possible harassment.

8. Findings of ‘in-depth’ cases

The two cases which were looked at in further depth, Colombia and Fiji, involved quite different sorts of impact. In Colombia an NGO representing the African-American community was able to participate in national planning activities and to begin addressing the economic exclusion of the community. In Fiji a national human rights organisation which does not represent a minority but which has been a strong advocate of minority rights was able to follow up its presence at the WCAR by attending CERD sessions in Geneva and securing criticisms of discrimination in Fiji. These criticisms have been fed back to grass roots communities with a reportedly significant impact.

Attempts to consult independent sources were frustrating in the cases of Colombia (where only one independent source, based outside Colombia, responded to requests for information) and successful in the case of Fiji. In the case of Colombia, government officials who were suggested as independent sources did not respond to requests for comment from them. In the case of Fiji, information provided by one of the independent sources suggested that the impact of the NGO’s activities was even more significant than the NGO itself had suggested.

Although the consultant made no attempt to conduct an ‘in-depth’ investigation in the case of India, two different people were interviewed, given slightly different perspectives on the impact of an MRG-supported training exercise there: the results are mentioned in this section.

Colombia

MRG supported one of the leaders of an African-Colombian (African-American) NGO, CIMARRON, who attended a workshop in London about the economic exclusion of minorities. At the workshop he met a representative of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) based in Washington DC. Attendance at the workshop, together with this contact in the IDB, subsequently helped CIMARRON play an enhanced role in the process of drafting a new national development plan in Colombia (a five-year plan entitled "Hacia un Estado Comunitario", adopted in June 2003³).

While the WCAR was an important opportunity for African-Americans in Latin America in general to assert their common identity and to seek a greater voice at national level, the knock-on effects in the Colombian case were made possible by a combination of events.

The support which MRG gave to this NGO seems to have had a significant impact because members of CIMARRON learnt both that they could make a contribution to

³ The Plan contains a number of references to providing African-Colombian communities with adequate resources for development. CIMARRON’s representative reported that it was useful to be consulted subsequently for the first time on the specific actions which would to be undertaken to meet the Plan’s objectives.

the national planning process and how. It was partly fortuitous that their interest in doing so occurred at an ideal time: a national commission was consulting different communities in the country in 2001 and 2002,⁴ while the IDB was in the process of developing policies specifically focused on African-Americans throughout Latin America.

The IDB developed policies concerning indigenous peoples in Latin America almost two decades before it turned its attention to African-Americans. In 2000, the Bank set up a working group to focus on African-Americans and adopted its first Action Plan on African-Americans in June 2001, just before the WCAR (and immediately prior to MRG's workshop in London). A second 12-month plan was adopted by the IDB at the end of 2002. Part of the Bank's concern was to ensure that members of individual communities were actually identified as such (the number of African-Americans in Colombia had been seriously under-estimated), while another aim was to promote leadership in the communities concerned; it organised a specific training session in Washington in 2002 and provided 35 individuals with training, including African-Colombians.

Attending the London workshop was just part of a series of opportunities which enabled this particular Colombian NGO to get to know other organisations established by Latin American African-Americans and to develop a network which is now having significant more impact than before 2001. Like many international meetings, the London workshop had the disadvantage of being conducted primarily in English (making it difficult for Spanish mother-tongue speakers who have not learnt English to take part). However, one of its leaders had the necessary level of English to take advantage of it and duly did so.

Fiji

MRG supported the head of a national human rights NGO, the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF), in attending the WCAR in Durban and (the following year) a CERD session in Geneva at which a member of the CERD reported on Fiji's failure to submit any periodic reports to the CERD over 18 years (despite having had ratified the ICERD). The impact can be summarised as follows.

MRG support allowed the head of an NGO to acquire knowledge in Durban of ways of holding a government accountable for its discriminatory practices.

After his return home, the NGO was motivated to make use of UN procedures for the first time. The following year (2002) it participated (with MRG's support) at an informal CERD discussion on Fiji. The CERD formally noted its concern that the Government of Fiji had failed to submit its periodic reports and also expressed concern that the Government was attempting to prohibit the NGO concerned. The NGO's presence at the CERD informal discussion evidently had an important impact on the decisions made.

⁴ The consultant's attempts to find out from planning and other officials in Colombia whether they thought CIMARRON members had played a greater role after July 2001 than before, and whether their participation had been particularly significant in the context of contributions by African-American organisations in general, were unsuccessful.

As a result of this CERD informal discussion about Fiji, the Government of Fiji agreed to submit a formal report. The CCF participated in the both preparation of an NGO alternative report and in government-hosted discussions about its official report. In 2003 the CERD examined Fiji's report. The NGO participated (this time without MRG's financial support). The CERD made significant criticisms about discrimination in Fiji. While the Government might have been inclined to do nothing about these criticisms (or the various 'home' ministries might well have decided not to react to calls by the Foreign Ministry to modify their actions in the light of CERD's criticisms), the NGO publicised the CERD's criticisms at both national level (in the media) and at grass roots level within the community responsible for discrimination, challenging discriminatory practices and successfully invoking the authority of the UN. One independent commentator observed that informing grass roots communities about the CERD's criticisms was particularly important in Fiji, as the UN has high status and comments by any of its bodies are taken relatively seriously. The feedback to grass roots communities was believed to have attenuated some discriminatory practices.

In the Fiji case, the initial support provided by MRG appears to have had a important impact. There are some particular circumstances which made this possible. These are:

- a. The personality of the head of the NGO concerned, who is a distinguished member of the main community responsible for discrimination in Fiji. Others attributed his influence to the fact that he was not only distinguished (he has high status because he is a minister in a dominant religious denomination), but belongs to the dominant community which is practising discrimination. He is regarded as having much more influence in this community than any member or representative of communities that are the subject of discrimination. At a time when priority is often given to 'empowerment' of victims of discrimination and supporting NGOs which represent oppressed communities, this is a timely reminder of the power dynamics involved in discrimination – and the importance of ensuring that the messenger who delivers a message to those responsible for discrimination is someone whom they take seriously.
- b. The culture of the community responsible for discrimination and oppression, many of whose members regard criticism from significant bodies abroad as a 'shame' and a stain on its 'honour'. The UN is regarded as particularly significant because soldiers from Fiji (recruited almost uniquely from the community which has been responsible for oppression and discrimination) have played a prominent role in UN military operations. Evidently, if the UN could 'shame' communities into positive responses elsewhere in the world, it would have immensely more significance!
- c. Even before sending its head to attend the WCAR, the NGO in question was evidently extremely competent and being regarded as a leader within the Pacific region. Its regional influence has expanded significantly since 2001.

India (*Dalit* rights training)

A reference to the impact in India is included here as the consultant spoke to two people who had attended a training meeting about *dalit* rights and also received

comments about the impact of the *dalit* rights lobby at the WCAR from both government and UN officials. Although the lobby did not succeed in securing the wording it was seeking in the WCAR's various final documents, it was widely perceived as having been successful in ensuring its presence was noted and its messages heard.

The training session in 2001 in Bangalore was described as the first training for *dalit* rights activists in relation to the UN's work. It was seen as key in order to allow activists in India's campaign for an end to discrimination and abuse against *dalits* to understand what the results of engaging in advocacy at the UN might be and what to do to achieve these results.

The respondents both observed that the training in Bangalore was helpful because the potential initiatives at the UN were presented in the context of India's own procedures and law (rather than talking about the UN in a vacuum). It consequently enabled the participants to move away from seeing 'community mobilisation' (among *dalits*) as their main activity, giving more priority to advocacy in general. The training in Bangalore also enabled participants to have a *discussion of their own about strategy* and to assess together in Bangalore whether they should deliberately target UN processes. It was agreed they should be. This led to attendance at the WCAR and at a CERD discussion about 'descent-based discrimination' the following year. The materials which were prepared for the training in Bangalore (not just by MRG) were considered to be high quality and were subsequently distributed to the media as part of an initiative to launch a public debate in India about whether discrimination against *dalits* in India constituted a form of racism. Although initially they were only in English, they have been translated into Hindi and some other national languages.

The training in Bangalore seems to have been an important step – which helped lead to several subsequent successes. One of these was to influence India's (government-appointed) National Human Rights Commission into taking abuses committed against *dalits* more seriously. The second was to persuade the CERD to adopt (in August 2002) a General Recommendation (no. 29) on the issue of descent-based discrimination. Although this is a wider issue than caste-based discrimination (or 'castism', as it is called in India), it clearly applies to the forms of discrimination associated with South Asia's caste system. Several of the activists who had participated in the Bangalore training session attended the CERD meeting and spoke at an NGO event organised alongside the CERD session.

The Bangalore training was just one of a series of preparatory events which led to successes for this well-organised campaign (which certainly deserves a more general evaluation and assessment of its impact so that others can learn from its successes).

A wide range of other people involved in the WCAR who were not personally related to the pro-*dalit* rights campaign, such as the government representative and UN officials who were interviewed, saw the WCAR as a victory for the campaign. The fact that the Government of India had to mobilise widely to prevent the campaign's recommendations being incorporated into WCAR documents was widely perceived as part of that success. The WCAR experience is viewed by many as having been an essential step towards achieving CERD General Recommendation 29 the following year.

9. Short-comings perceived in the support provided by MRG

Four issues were the main questions raised: the legitimacy (of NGO representatives given financial support to attend UN meetings); questions about meetings to consult with and report back to communities; a lack of follow-up projects (more specifically comments that MRG did not facilitate any strategic planning about what an NGO was to do after the WCAR); and comments on the MRG's lack of involvement in (and lack of support for NGOs to attend) UN conferences concerned with the environment.

It was difficult for an NGO such as MRG, based in London, to ensure that the delegates selected by them to attend the WCAR and its preparatory meetings were perceived as legitimate within their own community. While the MRG seems to have been aware that this issue was more sensitive in some communities than others, and made an allowance for consultations to occur at grass roots level in a few countries in advance of the WCAR, insufficient resources were available to organise formal consultations, yet alone elections. Some support was made available by MRG for feed-back meetings after the WCAR.

In the cases where there were subsequently divisions in a community and concern was voiced that someone who had attended WCAR meetings was not a legitimate representative of the community concerned, it is far from clear that even the most expensive sort of consultations in advance of the WCAR could have avoided splits and personal attacks. However, in the communities where these are reported relatively frequently, it is evidently important to take the fact that they may occur into account when selecting individuals or considering how individuals might be selected. NGOs which make decisions of their own about which representatives of minorities or indigenous peoples to help attend international meetings have played an important role in promoting the rights of such communities. At the same time they need to be conscious of the limitations of a process by which they make decisions and remain in a patron-client relationship with community representatives, so that they also foster political processes in the communities concerned, which will eventually allow the communities to make their own decisions about who attends international meetings.

Several respondents commented that they did not have the resources themselves to organise feed-back meetings at community level. In one case, a respondent felt that the question of legitimacy and who could represent a community needed tackling explicitly at an early stage (although it was not suggested that this would have prevented subsequent divisions which occurred in the community concerned).

Several respondents criticised the lack of support for follow-up (to WCAR activities) by MRG in terms of advice or support for NGOs. With the benefit of hindsight a significant proportion of respondents observed that they had not known what to do next or needed MRG's support in acquiring resources for follow-up action. In the case of the publication of a micro-study, a respondent noted the need to follow up the recommendations published in a study (for example with a series of advocacy activities).

In these cases it is clear that MRG's support had enabled organisations to carry out some strategic planning in the run-up to the WCAR and to observe the usefulness of such planning. MRG also appears to have been transparent in telling other NGOs

what the limitations on the assistance it could provide were: but in itself this does not greatly reduce expectations. Community-based NGOs said they did not have the resources or internal communications to conduct planning sessions along the lines of those financed by MRG before the WCAR, without acquiring special finance from abroad from organisations such as MRG. The consultant was not able to check whether this assertion was accurate (or whether NGOs simply invested the resources available to them in other ways).

Several respondents commented on the MRG's lack of involvement (both before and after the WCAR, but particularly afterwards) in UN conferences dealing with environmental issues. They thought such meetings were useful opportunities to defend their communities against various forms of environmental degradation and interference by their governments, dominant communities or private companies. Intriguingly, a government delegate who said he disliked attending meetings about indigenous peoples' rights nevertheless thought that significant progress could be made in discussions with representatives of indigenous peoples at international meetings concerned with environmental issues (because the meetings were less confrontational – they did not require his government to recognise certain rights before supporting indigenous peoples' claims).

Many NGO respondents commented that their activities had reached a qualitatively different level after the WCAR and noted specific needs as a result which they had not found the resources to meet: e.g. training in monitoring and reporting on violations of their community's rights.

One respondent noted that money for tickets had been dispatched by MRG too slowly, leading to cash-flow difficulties in his NGO.

10. Comments from individuals supported by MRG on the support from MRG

All the NGO representatives who had attended training sessions organised by MRG or others early on in the WCAR process commented that this was extremely useful for them. In part this was because it enabled them to take leadership positions among other NGOs; however, it was also because they observed the relative lack of influence and impact of NGOs who became involved late on (and who usually did not understand the WCAR's procedures well enough to take advantage of them).

MRG provided a *timely* introduction to processes concerning the WCAR (and the UN more generally), meaning an introduction that occurred months or even years ahead of any final meeting. This enabled participants to prepare properly and engage in preparatory meetings, rather than turning up at the last moment (for example at the WCAR in Durban) and finding out that it was too late to influence the outcomes. Putting them 'ahead of the game' like this was crucial to enabling them to perform a useful role – although it potentially creates some tensions between NGOs who have been trained, and are performing a leadership role, and the others who only become involved later on. The benefit of getting involved in the WCAR process early on and being informed sufficiently well to influence the WCAR's decisions (mainly the wording of outcome documents) was the benefit most frequently mentioned by members of NGOs supported by MRG.

This key advantage given to certain NGO representatives early on made the *selection* of participants by MRG even more critical.

Individuals who had not attended training about UN systems prior to the WCAR were very positive. They commented that the training session by MRG had given them a much better understanding that their Government could be held accountable at international level for acts of discrimination against minorities or indigenous peoples. In several cases this was the first step towards getting involved in activities which would enable them to hold their government accountable (such as hearings at CERD or the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Several commented that a training session about minority rights organised in 1998 had been a very helpful first step.

Similarly, they commented that participation in the WCAR had taught them a lot about how many other minorities/indigenous peoples were subjected to similar or different forms of discrimination to themselves, and how they could learn from the experience of others.

The presence of MRG staff at the main WCAR meetings (particularly in Durban) was commented on positively, both because of the introductions MRG staff were able to arrange for the NGOs they were supporting, and because of the explanations they received about what was going on! It was judged useful to stay at the same hotel at MRG staff to have good access to their advice. These comments imply that it would not be sufficient for MRG to arrange training for other NGOs or to supply them with a high quality training package: NGO representatives felt they benefited from the physical presence of MRG staff, the expertise they have and their personal contacts.

Support by MRG provided for *consultations* with a wider community and *feed-back meetings* to the community after delegates returned from WCAR meetings was judged to be useful and desirable. One or two comments suggested that there should have been more *feed-back meetings* after the WCAR.

The focus on economic exclusion / livelihood issues was judged useful by many. In particular the opportunity to meet representatives of UN agencies (and sometimes other donors) was said to have led to useful subsequent contacts, often for the first time with agencies such as UNDP and the World Bank. In one case (Colombia) the issue has had a high profile since WCAR and attendance at meetings on economic exclusion was itself an important training for an activist who has subsequently been asked to talk to a Parliamentary commission on the issue (of economic exclusion of African-Americans and the remedial measures needed).

The focus on strengthening CERD was judged to be timely (i.e. the result of a good strategic analysis by MRG) by the one respondent who had an overview of how CERD's work has been developing. The facts that CERD followed up the WCAR with a focus on descent-based discrimination (an issue raised by *dalit* rights activists) and on discrimination in Fiji seem to have been linked to NGO activity at the WCAR, including activities by NGOs assisted by MRG.

Virtually none of those interviewed talked blandly about the benefits of '*networking*' with other NGO representatives: while they were aware that conferences are 'talking

shops' they saw the meetings attended as important opportunities to obtain specific information and measured the usefulness of travelling to a meeting in terms of the benefits which flowed afterwards. Some referred to specific links and transfers of knowledge/experience which have been occurring since the WCAR (e.g. an East European Roma group learning from indigenous peoples' organisations in Latin America about how to assert the right to self-determination). The specific benefits depended on the age and experience of the NGO (and NGO worker) involved, with the newest and least experienced NGOs apparently benefiting most. One Eastern European commented that the Vienna Conference on Human Rights had occurred too soon after 1989 for new human rights groups to have both emerged and developed to a level where they could benefit a lot from a world conference on human rights issues; in contrast, WCAR, he thought, was a more important opportunity for Eastern Europeans.

One respondent representing an indigenous peoples' organisation mentioned that his participation at the WCAR had helped indigenous peoples organisations from South Asia develop their links with *dalit* organisations in the region, building an alliance against forms of abuse and discrimination which are broadly similar for both indigenous peoples and *dalits* in India and Nepal.

The computer hardware and software and translations of texts financed by MRG were reported to be used for various purposes. All but one of the computers was reported to be used for e-mail and access to the internet. The one exception was due to the reportedly high cost of an Internet connection (which seems to have undermined the usefulness of the computer).

In one case the communication links which a new computer and e-mail have brought about were said to be crucial in facilitating participation in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as a member of the NGO was the Vice President in a regional grouping of the Forum. In the others it was now regarded as an important means of communication, not least to receive e-mails sent to all NGOs which had attended one or more of the WCAR meetings.

The consultant asked NGO representatives about the gender dimension of their involvement in the WCAR, but insufficient information was acquired to reach clear conclusions. In part this was because the two NGO representatives who did not respond to the consultant were both women; although the original sample was well balanced between men and women, the final sample who responded contained proportionally too many men.

One NGO observed that it was precisely over the period of the WCAR that women within the NGO had taken over leadership positions. This seemed to be because the NGO was going through an important period of growth, which was linked to the WCAR's focus on African-Americans, but not obviously to the assistance provided by MRG.

11. Examples of other consequences mentioned by NGOs

The WCAR in Durban was perceived to have a specifically counter-productive impact for some minorities (the Arab minority in Israel was cited as an example), but this was

not seen as a reason for not participating. Participating from early on was seen as a way of being able to anticipate that the impact would be counter-productive and to start dealing with this.

One NGO decided early in the WCAR process to desist from signing joint documents and statements with other NGOs from their country, on the grounds that these were unduly politicised and were considered by the NGO to reduce the chances of their specific recommendations being listened to by their own government: the NGO in question has continued this policy since 2001. While this was a specific strategy in response to what was seen to have been over 'politicisation' of the WCAR, the response was not unique: others took action to find ways of pursuing measures they wanted to see implemented and commented that taking part in the WCAR from early on had both enabled them to be realistic about how little would change as a result of such a conference and how, nevertheless, they could pursue quite specific achievements with success, partly within the WCAR and partly elsewhere.

Numerous respondents concluded from their experience at the WCAR (and from information acquired) that it was worth participating in other UN procedures and cited achievements at these from late 2001 onwards.

One attributed to the WCAR experience a greatly enhanced sense of international solidarity and reported much increased participation in international campaigns for victims of abuse in other countries and regions since the WCAR.

One reported seeking and acquiring ECOSOC consultative status as a result.

12. Comments from others (one government delegate / two UN organisers of the WCAR)

12.1 General comments on the role played by international NGOs

The supportive role played by MRG was compared (favourably) to the roles pursued by some other international NGOs, who appeared to place their own organisational interest first and to do relatively little to enable the WCAR or NGOs representing groups affected by discrimination to reach their goals.

These commentators felt that international NGOs such as the MRG can virtually play a management role concerning NGO input into a world conference (or at least have a vital role play in facilitating and channelling NGO input). They felt that some international NGOs, including MRG, lived up to their expectations, while others focused too narrowly on topics of particular interest to them and in effect had allowed smaller NGOs which were less experienced and less orientated to human rights principles to influence the WCAR and the NGO Forum in Durban in an unhelpful way.

Along with MRG, they praised as positive the role played by organisations such as the International Human Rights Law Group, which organised the 'Voices of Victims' panels and thereby ensured that the subject of the WCAR got media attention, rather than only the bickering which went on over the wording of texts.

The MRG's specific focus on the role of CERD and the issue of the economic exclusion of minorities and indigenous peoples had been noticed and was praised, as was its way of facilitating participation by newcomers and smaller NGOs.

The focus on CERD was judged to be particularly helpful by members of the OHCHR, not least because members of the CERD itself had been putting pressure on the OHCHR to promote the role of the CERD during WCAR meetings.

The focus on economic exclusion was said to be a helpful stepping stone in the progress that has been made over the past decade to ensuring a more integrated approach to some human rights issues (i.e. linking a series of related issues, instead of treating discrimination in isolation to other human rights and economic issues).

With the benefits of hindsight, these commentators noted that international NGOs as a whole could have taken some pre-emptive action to prevent discussions about Israel/Palestine dominating so much of the NGO Forum, for example by promoting a platform for dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian NGOs. This may well be wishful thinking, and it is outside the scope of this impact assessment to evaluate the extent to which international NGOs consulted together adequately in the preparations they made before the Conference about this or other issues. In MRG's case, it was indeed supporting the presence at WCAR meetings of an NGO which was in some ways situated in the middle (an NGO in Israel rather than the Occupied Territories, and representing the interests of Palestinians living in Israel itself).

The high level of focus which developed at the NGO Forum in Durban on the predicament of Palestinians in the territories occupied by Israel and the UN High Commissioner's decision not to endorse the NGOs' final document because of her perception that it was anti-semitic resulted in comments by all three commentators on the internal organisation of the Forum.

The specific comments by a government delegate were made against a background impression that the WCAR had been an unpleasant experience and that this was due in part to the activities of NGOs, some of which were perceived to make statements which were themselves racist. This delegate did distinguish between what he saw as the positive facilitating role played by MRG (and various others) and the 'rants' of other NGOs. Representing a government which has not in general supported indigenous rights issues, he felt positively about contacts with NGOs which were willing to discuss issues or negotiate on text, as long as their contacts were a government delegation were not misrepresented subsequently; however, he felt that indigenous peoples' representatives generally took an inflexible approach.

12.2 Comments on communities which it was particularly helpful to support

These commentators noted that the WCAR had been particularly significant for three particular communities, as they had organised themselves and participated in this world conference for the first time. The communities were:

1. the Roma;
2. the Dalits;

3. Latin American African-Americans.

Some of them also underlined the importance of the WCAR for:

4. Tibetans (for whom it was the first international conference at which Tibetans took part in their own right, rather than as members of someone else's delegation);
5. the BaTwa;
6. Indigenous women;
7. and Eastern Europeans in general (for whom the Vienna Conference in 1993 had occurred possibly too soon after 1989 for them to take full advantage of its opportunities).

The fact that MRG supported and facilitated the participation of all three in the first category of key communities and all but one in the second category is certainly significant. While support from other NGOs and donors was undoubtedly very important, the MRG contributed to bringing about a break through for the first three groups in terms of their international profile, which seems likely to go on being important. It has already brought some tangible benefits to each community.

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