

Independent evaluation of MRG's Disability/
Minority Intersectional Discrimination Project

BRIDGING DISABILITY ACTIVISTS WITH THE CIRCLE OF HUMAN AND MINORITY RIGHTS

Final evaluation report - Executive Summary
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Executive summary

“We have a connection with OPDs, and they also learned and assure to incorporate PWDs of minority issues in their program”

“It is now an issue of my organization”

This report presents the findings and recommendations from an independent evaluation of the two-year pilot phase of the *Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination Project* implemented by Minority Rights Group (MRG) and its partners. Overall, the pilot phase objectives were successfully delivered, and a wide range of results were achieved, as outlined in this report, alongside recommendations for the continuation of this work.

Persons with disabilities in minority or indigenous communities do not experience discrimination as members of a homogenous group but rather as individuals with multidimensional layers of factors, identities and circumstances. They may face multiple forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, caste, religion, language... While these factors may vary from one situation to another and should be analysed in context, PWDs belonging to minorities or indigenous communities may still face stigmas due to a lack of awareness and visibility and absence of meaningful actions that reach or include them.

MRG has a good track record of work on intersectional and/or multiple discrimination in general with many programs addressing these issues in the global south, such as a program on multiple discrimination affecting women within ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. MRG also publishes on the range of intersecting factors that can contribute to the exclusion of those who are most marginalized and who are at most risk of being left behind.

Following this work, MRG recently decided to begin substantive work addressing the intersection of discrimination affecting PWDs who are also members of indigenous or/and minority communities, as they remained largely invisible, including within the circle of Human and Minority Rights activists who are advocating for fulfilment of rights within these communities, as well as within organisations formed of people living with a disability.

In this regard, MRG developed a project aiming at bringing together minority and indigenous activists and PWDs within these communities, providing support to bring issues of intersectional discrimination to the circle of human and minority rights activists as well as Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs¹) and ensuring effective and meaningful participation of indigenous and/or minority PWDs by

¹ Disabled Persons’ Organizations or Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs or OPDs) are interchangeable terms and refer to the same thing. This evaluation uses the latter and both acronyms are not utilized each time for readability purposes.

In their General Comment No. 7, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines OPDs as follows:

“[O]rganizations of persons with disabilities should be rooted, committed to and fully respect the principles and rights recognized in the Convention [on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities]. They can only be those that are

applying the principle “nothing about us without us”. Drawing on Minority Rights Group expertise working on multiple discrimination experienced within ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous communities, producing authoritative research on minority rights and indigenous rights, and supporting partners to engage in targeted advocacy at various levels.

The scope of the Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination project covers a wide range of activities and initiatives, including:

- Submitting joint alternative reports to international Human Rights mechanisms,
- Organizing capacity building trainings/Coalition Building meetings, concluding observation follow-up meetings,
- Supporting activists to engage in international and Covid-19 and disability intersectionality advocacy,
- Increasing communications on the intersecting factors affecting disability and other minority groups as well as indigenous communities in terms of discrimination.

This report presents the findings and recommendations from an independent evaluation of the two first years of implementation of the Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination Project. The purpose of the evaluation is to both look at the extent to which the outcomes and outputs of the pilot phase of the project were fulfilled and to identify strengths and challenges to be considered when taking the project forward.

The evaluation drew from a realist evaluation approach to provide an analysis of the contexts and mechanisms that affect project performance and impacts. The evaluation also engaged with the project implementation partners and target groups as well as with MRG staff to co-create the key learning areas and suggest lessons for the next areas of work regarding this project.

The methods included:

- Document review,
- Interviews with a variety of key informants including provision of reasonable adjustments such as sign language interpretation,
- Email and phone questionnaires in accessible formats.

Key findings:

The activities and initiatives of the Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination pilot phase contributed to the broader capacity development of minority organizations and indigenous communities to understand how PWDs may experience intersectional discrimination, including:

- Creating bridges between organizations of PWDs and other minority groups and indigenous communities,
- Increased data on PWDs among minority groups and indigenous communities,
- Enhancing visibility of intersectional discrimination at local, national, regional and global level

Findings also indicate that there are several ways in which the Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination project supported activists with disabilities and from other minorities or indigenous communities to develop their network, gain confidence in, engage in advocacy work and enrich their

led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities. A clear majority of their membership should be recruited among persons with disabilities themselves.”

skill sets accordingly. In particular, across this pilot phase, 324 people participated in trainings and coalition building meetings. The majority of this number were PWDs, but participants also included personal assistants, policy makers or government representatives, or parents of children with disabilities and 164 (51%) of these participants identified as women or transgender.

Other project results include familiarizing different stakeholders and duty bearers with the concept of intersectional discrimination and the rights-based approach in any programs, activities or policies answering these issues. Overall, the activities planned for this pilot phase were successfully delivered and the aimed results met their purpose.

Key contextual factors:

The analysis of key contextual factors impacting the performance and outcomes of the Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination Project resonate with MRG's strategic framework on disability, consisting in switching to a rights-based approach across the whole organization.

The evaluation revealed the following key contextual factors surrounding the Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination Project:

- PWDs among minorities and indigenous communities are particularly far away from the disability rights movement due to a lack of capacity and resources,
- Mainstream programs and organizations are often not including the rights of minority PWDs in their work,
- Minorities and indigenous people are not always embodied in the work of OPDs,
- There is a lack of visibility and meaningful engagement of minority PWDs in local and national decision making, consultations and all forms of government.

Recommendations for MRG:

This evaluation affirms MRG's commitment to build a stronger cohesion among different minorities and indigenous groups including PWDs among them, aiming at cross-fertilizing their mutual work on discrimination.

1. Providing an introduction session for the new partners with some background information on MRG, its work and strategies:

New partners may not always be very familiar with MRG's work at the beginning. They may get this understanding by checking at the website and through having conversations, but this may not be the most effective way. Briefing partners on this matter would help them to get an understanding of how MRG operates and what its strategies are.

This may be complemented with a short and easy to understand resource kit for new partners. This can be a guide with MRG's values, principles, operational strategies as well as some information on how MRG identifies project countries and target groups.

2. Training the partners at the beginning of the project even in case there was an existing collaboration:

It may be relevant to check the skill sets of the partners to help MRG to understand which kind of training they may need and prevent some misunderstandings on expected activities. Partners may not have a full understanding of what is a civil society report, the level of quality required and the content on the one hand, and on the other hand they may need to gain conceptual knowledge on intersectionality. Training the partners on these aspects may help ensuring that the activities carried out by partners are in line with the objectives of the project. The training costs should be incorporated in the overall budget.

3. Having an access envelop for reasonable adjustments² on top of the regular project costs:

When preparing a budget for any project, event or program, some PWDs may ask for reasonable adjustments requiring additional costs (transportation, sign language interpretation, PA). This shall be taken into consideration not only for projects related to disability but in any mainstream activities.

For example, the International Disability Alliance (IDA) always sets a 10 % access envelop on top of all costs in all projects and so this tends to be generalized within other organizations as well. MRG's fundraising team should outline the access envelop in all costs and negotiate with the funder about it.

4. Ensuring that sign language using minorities are included in MRG's outreach and programs (addressed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues):

Sign language users often identify as a linguistic minority in their countries. As such, they may be potentially disadvantaged and excluded depending on the context while this may intersect with other minorities. When possible MRG shall make sure its approaches and programmes including linguistic minorities involve sign language users of the implementation area.

5. Foreseeing sufficient time between the grant approval from the donor and the start of the project activities in order to increase participation:

The process to go through for getting a grant approval may take longer than expected and when it happens, more time is needed for MRG to dispatch it to local partners. When this happened for India and Bangladesh, there were very few weeks left to carry out the data collection process as the deadlines for the CRPD alternative reports were very close. Leaving more time between the overall grant approval and the start of the first activities could prevent this from happening. Ultimately, sufficient and reasonable time should be given to the partners to operate after the grant was approved. What is sufficient and reasonable may vary and shall be decided together with the partner. This will also give more opportunities for meaningful participation of PWDs across the project implementation.

6. Continue to build on existing methods of specific outreach in virtual activities:

² In Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reasonable adjustments/accommodation are defined as follows:

“‘Reasonable accommodation’ means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”

When taking its work forward, MRG may still need to organize an increasing number of virtual activities (FFMs, Coalition Building meetings and trainings) that would normally happen face to face may still be held online. MRG should reinforce its strategies to reach marginalized people who do not have access to network and/or technological devices. This should be adapted for participation of persons with disabilities among minorities or indigenous communities not necessarily having access to internet and/or assistive devices while safeguarding their privacy. This means that for them relying on a third person for participation cannot always be a suitable solution. Indeed, one person who was invited to the virtual webinar on CRPD Concluding Observations in India but could not make it said: *“I am in a rural area and did not get scope and opportunity for participation”*.

7. Training all MRG’s staff on disability on a regular basis and supporting them to adopt a twin track approach³:

This project allowed MRG staff to get a primary understanding of disability, but more trainings are needed to complement and consolidate the lessons learnt during this project. The interviews showed that there is still room for learning and need for more commitments of all MRG staff to make their daily work inclusive for PWDs. In addition to being considered on related specific projects, disability should also be mainstreamed in all MRG activities, programmes and strategies.

In this regard, MRG staff should be aware that women, men, girls, boys and LGBTIQ individuals with all types of impairments (being hearing, visual, physical or cognitive impairments as well as intellectual or psychosocial disabilities) should have full access to all MRG’s projects, activities and programs while being embodied in all its strategies.

The Disability/Minority Intersectional Discrimination Project highlights MRG’s commitment to build bridges between different minorities and indigenous groups in order to better determine and address forms of discrimination faced by PWDs among them. Since this was a pilot project, greater impacts are yet to be realized. Beneficiaries will be empowered to be on the first line when planning and sharing next steps of the project.

Visual Description of the graphic below:

Depicted is an infographic showing the most important data about the project.

At the top is a blue circle that contains white writing that says: “2 years of activities & advocacy in 11 countries in which 35 OPDs were involved”. Outside of this circle with general information the main achievements of the project are shown. On the right it says: “Training of 324 participants, 164 of which identified as women or transgender, 250-300 of which identified as having a disability”. The text on the left of the circle states: “11 coalition building meetings, 18 communication outputs, 8 alternative human rights reports supported, 33 mentions of intersectional discrimination in UN committee”. Each

³ In their factsheet on influencing the UN common country strategy the International Disability Alliance (IDA) defines a twin-track approach as follows:

“The CRPD emphasises the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies of sustainable development, while, at the same time, recognises that disability-specific projects are needed. Governments and UNCTs should improve disability-specific actions (such as capacity building actions for DPOs) and disability-inclusive practice by mainstreaming disability rights in all development policies, in order to empower persons with disabilities.”

of these statements inside and outside the circle is accompanied by an illustration (for example a group of women with disabilities protesting or 3 people around a table discussing something).

Underneath this part of the graphic, it says: “more specifically” and an arrow is pointing downwards to a blue box that contains information about the three countries Rwanda, Bangladesh and Iraq.

The box is organised like a table. The flag of each country is pictured below its name. It is shown that in Rwanda 38 and in Bangladesh 30 people were trained. In Iraq 24 people participated in a coalition building meeting. Below that is stated how many OPDs were involved in each country (2 in Rwanda, 4 in Bangladesh and 1 in Iraq).

