

# ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

*January 2015 – December 2015*

minority  
rights  
group  
international



*Working to secure the rights for ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities  
and indigenous peoples around the world.*

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## ABOUT US

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a London-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities.

Minorities of concern to MRG are disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups who are fewer in number than the rest of the population and who may wish to maintain and develop their identity. MRG also works with indigenous peoples. We work with minorities & indigenous groups as diverse as the Batwa in Central Africa, Roma in Europe, Christians in Iraq and Dalits in India and Nepal to name but a few.

MRG believes that minority and indigenous communities should be empowered to speak up for their own rights and therefore makes a point of always adopting participative and sustainable approaches in close relation with the concerned groups. As such, MRG has been campaigning worldwide for over 40 years, with more than 130 partners in over 60 countries, to ensure that these highly disadvantaged groups, often the poorest of the poor and the most marginalized, can make their voices heard.

Through activities such as capacity-building of minority and indigenous activists, empowerment of communities, strategic litigation, research & publications, we aim to support minorities and indigenous peoples as they strive to maintain their rights to access their ancestral land, send their children to school, speak their language or even their mere survival. Our work offers overwhelming evidence that the inclusion of minority communities leads to stronger, more cohesive societies. We therefore believe exclusion can only result in instability, conflict, and in the most extreme cases, genocide. We understand how discrimination based on age, class, gender and disability can have a multiple impact on disadvantaged minorities, and our campaigns target governments and communities to eradicate such attitudes.

MRG has a very positive reputation among minority communities, governments, and UN human rights bodies alike. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and observer status with the African Commission on Human & Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). MRG has also acquired a strong international reputation as a leader in the field thanks to its provision of sound information and advice in sensitive areas, as well as its capacity to deliver high-quality programme work, publications, and advocacy for and alongside minorities and indigenous peoples.

MRG is governed by an international council constituted of members of minority and indigenous communities themselves and experts on minority and indigenous issues. The governing council meets twice a year to ensure good financial management and cohesion amongst all international offices in their goals and programs. Its headquarters are in London and two overseas strategic offices exist: our African Office in Kampala, Uganda and our Eastern Europe Office in Budapest, Hungary. MRG also benefits from staff located in countries where we implement our work such as in Thailand, Botswana and Kenya.

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Cover picture: A woman in traditional clothing of Tamang Dunche, Nepal. Credits: Jared Ferrie.  
Pictures from left to right: Elder Dalit woman in Tamil Nadu, India; Batwa children playing in DRC, Maasai women in Tanzania, Roma children playing in Cserchat, Hungary; Hazzara women in Afghanistan. Credits: MRG & UNDP.

## OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Every four years, MRG adopts a new strategic plan building upon the feedback of minority and indigenous partners and activists, like-minded organizations and other stakeholders.

Our current strategic plan covering the 2013-2016 period is based on the following three core objectives:



## ACHIEVEMENTS & PERFORMANCE

### OBJECTIVE 1: COUNTERING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MINORITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ENSURING THEY BENEFIT EQUITABLY FROM DEVELOPMENT.

In agreement with our partners, the following areas of work were chosen for the 2013-2016 period: **land rights, education, mainstreaming minority rights** in the work of international agencies and **challenging discriminatory attitudes**.

#### *The Right to Peaceful Enjoyment of Land and Natural Resources*

Land continued to be a **major and successful focus of our work**. MRG’s reputation in this field has continued to grow: especially our Strategic Litigation Program which has played a key role in pushing for the recognition of the rights to land and natural resources of indigenous communities by regional bodies including the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR). As such, we are increasingly being sought out to speak at international events or advise communities facing **land encroachments or threats of dispossession**. For example, in 2015 we were approached by a Batwa community from DRC, evicted from their land when it became part of the Kahuzi-Biega national park. We agreed to support them, lodging initial proceedings with the ACHPR. See following three example of our on-going work:

#### **With The Ogiek**

We have continued to support the Ogiek community of Kenya, which has repeatedly faced eviction from their ancestral land. Delays related to their currently pending case before the ACHPR have not prevented us from supporting our Kenyan partner representing the community (**the Ogiek Peoples Development Programme**) in continuing gaining visibility both at national and international stages and engaging in advocacy.



#### **With The Endorois**

Also in Kenya, we kept pushing for the implementation of **the ACHPR’s 2009 decision** in favour of the Endorois after their forced eviction from their land: despite the creation of the Task Force in 2014 and the compensation payment made, enforcement remains difficult. Yet, progress can be seen in some land legislation currently being developed (like the Community Land Bill) with the support of MRG.



#### **With the Maasai**

In Tanzania, great steps forward have been reached with several more hearings taking place for the **Maasai Sukenya Farm case**, following their very violent forced eviction from their ancestral land in Loliondo (reports mention burned houses, beatings, shootings & detentions). The eviction was launched by a US-based Safari Company and a partly state-owned agency to transform the land into a touristic park.



#### *Mainstreaming Minorities in the Work of International Development Agencies*

Our efforts towards mainstreaming minority and indigenous peoples’ rights in international agencies have mainly concentrated on the adoption of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**: indeed we have continued to fight for the inclusion of an **ethnic, religious and linguistic minority focus** within the entire SDG process, from their design to their implementation. At the design stage, we ensured some useful language was retained, notably with the participation of MRG’s Chair, Gay McDougall, (former UN Independent Expert on Minorities) as a CSO speaker in the SDG Working Group in April 2015. We also focused our efforts on mainstreaming minorities in SDG implementation. As such, we put together a toolkit focusing on minority inclusion and organised to cover many of the proposed SDG topics. It was launched to coincide with the September 2015 Sustainable Development Summit, and two partner representatives – Batwa women from Uganda and Rwanda – were supported to attend a negotiation session. After September, a new phase of work started around influencing the detailed indicators for each goal.



**Countering Discriminatory Attitudes in Society and Improving Government Action to Address Discrimination**

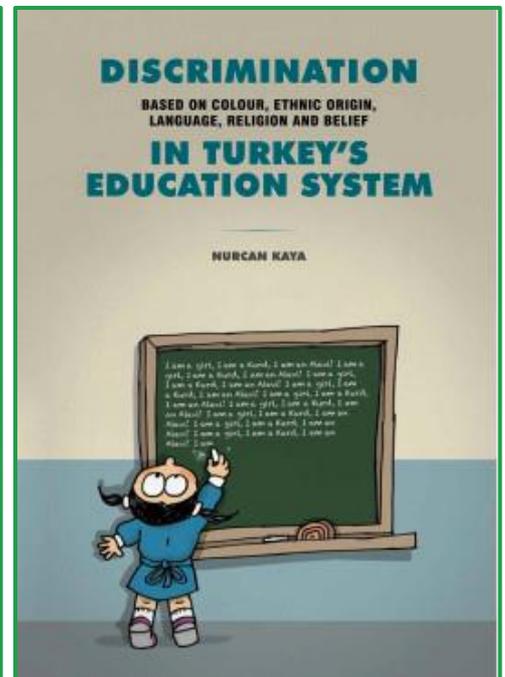
MRG continued work to challenge discriminatory attitudes in society, mainly via our programme of grant making in the Middle East and North Africa region: this on-going programme enables arts organisations and human rights organisations to work together to highlight and to **challenge discrimination and racism, using culture and the arts**. Under this programme, in 2015, we supported **7 small-scale projects** implemented in highly volatile political environments, such as the *Artistic Camps Zamakan* organized in June and July 2015 by Fanni Raghman Anni, a Tunisian partner organization aiming to train young artists in defending Human rights and the Amazigh of Tunisia (a small ethnic indigenous group, also called the Berbers, living in very marginalized conditions, spread across Northern Africa) while using artistic tools and means of expression, such as theatrical dancing or slam poetry (see picture on the left).

**Removing Inequalities in Education for Minority and Indigenous Children**

Our work on education was mostly carried out in Turkey and in Uganda where all our initiatives have been very successful.

**In Turkey**, the work completed in 2014 to monitor and collect evidence concerning discrimination in education culminated in 2015 with the publication and launch of a **major report** produced both in English and in Turkish and entitled “*Discrimination Based on Colour, Ethnic, Origin, Language, Religion and Belief in Turkey’s Education System*”. The report and its launch press conference attracted a lot of attention from the media, civil society, members of the parliament and network members. Advocacy based on this report is on-going with a view to ensure that minority children in Turkey have the same right to education as any other children.

Meanwhile, **in Uganda**, we ran a small programme to support highly discriminated and marginalized Batwa children to attend schools in 20 schools in the districts of Kabale, Kisoro and Kanungu. The project included training teachers on combating discrimination and advocating for the **long term inclusion of all Batwa children in schools** (targeting both Batwa parents and decision makers). This programme had a tangible impact, leading for example to an important reduction in absenteeism of Batwa children.



**Pictures p3 from left to right:** An Ogiek teacher in Kenya waiting for the pupils to arrive – they often have to walk for a long time before getting to school; a group of Maasai women performing traditional dances in the village of Mondorosi in Tanzania; an elder Endorois woman resting in the Lake Bogoria region, Kenya – the eviction was especially tough on women, forcing them and their children to live in even more difficult situations. **Credits:** MRG and Rebecca Marlin.

**Pictures p4 from the top left to right:** Final Performance after the theatrical & physical expression workshop in Halk el Wed, July 2015; group of school-children from the Kisoro District in Uganda – the Batwa children can easily be singled out as they don't have school uniforms; Cover Page of our 2015 report on discriminations in the Turkish Education System. **Credits:** MRG and Fanni Raghman Anni.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROTECTING THE EXISTENCE OF COMMUNITIES UNDER THREAT AND THOSE PERSECUTED FOR THEIR MINORITY OR INDIGENOUS IDENTITY.**

This much needed work has continued with a focus on the Middle East although some work has also taken place in Asia and Russia. We made a point of mainstreaming gender into all our programmes; with women attending and participating in all our activities and acting as spokespersons.

**In the Middle East**

Our work was focused in Iraq but we pursued our advocacy & support efforts to minority groups in Yemen and across the region, despite difficult contexts.

**In Iraq**, we continued to develop our ground-breaking system of **civilian led monitoring to report human rights abuses**, alongside training & supporting activists. This system has allowed citizens to directly report any abuses as they happen. Efforts are now focused on improving it by adding new features to it, such as report submission via twitter and an automated incident mapping facility. So far, the data collected has been broadly analysed and used in diverse bulletins and submissions to UN Human Rights mechanisms.

**In Yemen**, we were forced to partially suspend our on-going work as the war broke out, but we carried on **documenting and supporting the situation of the highly marginalised Muhamasheem community**. Our findings were used for advocacy and by humanitarian agencies operating on the ground (i.e. MSF, Oxfam, OCHA).

**Across the region**, we pursued our efforts of **building the capacity of activists defending rights of religious minorities**. This program encompassed regular online trainings, a regional face-to-face training event in Beirut and participation at the UN Forum on Minority Issues. As part of this work, we also released a film entitled “*Noun*” on the situation faced by Iraqi Christians filled with powerful testimonies (trailer available [HERE](#)), and published a briefing on the Shia community of Saudi Arabia entitled “*Still Invisible, the situation of Shi’a and other religious minorities in Saudi Arabia*” (See briefing [HERE](#)<sup>2</sup>).



**In South Asia**

Our work focused on the **construction and consolidation of a network** of leaders/ activists from different religious minorities working together to jointly document & advocate on religious freedom & minority rights violations. This network covers countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India.

One online multimedia resource on minority women’s views of reconciliation and war in Sri Lanka emerged from this work: by using artistic methods (drawing and poetry), these affected minority women were able to reflect on their situation and personal stories (view story [HERE](#)<sup>3</sup>).

**In Russia**

2015 was the final year of our **capacity building programme** in the country. The programme achieved great results despite the hostile political environment and restrictions on fund movements to CSOs in the country: it allowed activists to not only strengthen their capacities, gain knowledge and acquire more confidence, but also led them to develop **joint campaigning work**.

To sustain the efforts undertaken in the region, MRG published and broadly disseminated a CD-ROM toolkit for activists working in minority rights (in Russian).



<sup>1</sup> Trailer available of our website and Youtube Channel. Direct link: <http://minorityrights.org/2015/04/17/noun-a-film-about-the-current-challenges-facing-iraqi-christians/>.

<sup>2</sup> Briefing available on our website. Direct link: [http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MRG\\_Brief\\_Saudi\\_Nov15\\_v1.pdf](http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MRG_Brief_Saudi_Nov15_v1.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Story available on [minoritystories.org](http://minoritystories.org); direct link: <http://minoritystories.org/>.

**Pictures:** Pastor Gil in front of his Church in Islamabad Pakistan; Migrants from Central Asia, living in extremely marginalised conditions in Russia. **Credits:** MRG and Fred S.

**OBJECTIVE 3: STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF MINORITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.**

Our work in 2015 included initiatives to **build leadership** amongst activists and **develop the capacities of partner organisations**, to **implement media and outreach work**, across different regions of the world, tailored to local needs and contexts, and to **foster political participation** of communities.

**Our Work in Capacity Building**

Strengthening the voices of minority and indigenous peoples is an important focus of our work. Here are the most significant examples:

**In the Eastern Partnership region**, we have worked hard to build and maintain a **network of minority organisations and activists** using EU’s influence to trigger changes and bring attention to minority rights. The network, established in 2014, continued to function well, in spite of the tensions linked to the events in Ukraine. This network has now become a **major support and vector** for activities increasing the visibility of minorities in society, such as public information campaigns on minority rights, local awareness campaigns, national campaigns on minority rights and pilot projects involving minority communities working closely with local authorities in each country. The network supported minority activists to attend human rights events to lobby and raise issues. As a result, two shadow reports were submitted to UN Treaty Bodies and an Advocacy Guide for minority organisations, entitled “*Minority Rights Advocacy in the EU: a Guide for NGOs in the Eastern Partnership Countries*” (See guide [HERE](#)<sup>4</sup>) was published

**In East and Central Africa**, we pursued our work on **building the capacities of 13 organisations** representing minorities across the region. In each case, the offered support and supplementing activities have allowed these organisations to engage in various advocacy and development campaigns calling for more visibility, recognition, inclusion & access to rights and services for their communities. In addition to direct support, **country-based network** events have been organised, to bring organisations together and offer them multilateral support, stronger capacities and mentoring opportunities.

**In the Dominican Republic (DR)**, we have worked with the **Dominican-Haitian community**, to build the capacity of young leaders so that they can challenge racism and assert their own rights. While retaining capacity building at its heart, this programme shifted its focus to the burning issue of **statelessness**, which severely affected the community after a 2014 governmental decision on nationality law that retroactively deprived approximately 200,000 Dominican-Haitians of their nationality. As a result, our 12 trained young leaders adopted a **mentoring role** to support and provide advice for people left stateless. They held surgeries for their communities and continued to denounce discrimination. MRG even produced a film about the situation on the ground, a documentary entitled “*Our Lives in Transit*” (see trailer [HERE](#)<sup>5</sup>) which was largely used for advocacy efforts in addition to the support given to activists and the regular public statements made about the situation in the DR.



**Outreach, Advocacy & Media Work**

Minority issues must continue to be raised in international organisations and the media. To ensure this, we have worked closely with the UN and the media.

**At UN level**, MRG led **minority advocacy efforts**, resulting in a number of statements and recommendations concerning minorities. Target countries were selected for intensive international advocacy efforts, for example working with Iraqi minority activists we were able to submit two statements at Human Rights Council meetings, pre-UPR & reports to CAT, CESCR and CRC. We were also able to work on priority issues outside of our funded work, as when we raised issues facing minorities in West Papua or Sudan. We regularly intervened on many thematic issues.

**At the media level**, we acted carefully to give visibility to the issues faced by minorities & indigenous peoples around the globe. We offered training (online and face to face) for European journalists on **reporting sensitively about minority issues**, to secure greater coverage of these issues. The trainings were very successful: more journalists completed the online training, and 3 new regional training visits were organised in Tanzania, Kenya and Thailand, to deepen knowledge on techniques (interview, security, confidentiality) and content (gender and history). Furthermore, the 2015 edition of our annual flagship publication **State of the World’s Minorities**, focusing on cities, received a good media coverage (54 items) including from major media outlets such as the Guardian (UK), Al Jazeera (Global), Times of India and all Africa (Africa-wide). Our new **Peoples Under Threat** interactive online map was also successfully launched, also receiving good media coverage (52 media items), including Radio France International (France), The News (Pakistan), the Jerusalem Post (Israel) and Reuters.com (USA).



<sup>4</sup> Guide available on our website at: <http://www.enpi-info.eu/files/publications/MRGE-EAP-Advocacy-Guide-to-EU-2015.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Trailer available of our website and YouTube Channel. Direct link: <http://minorityrights.org/2016/05/10/our-lives-in-transit-new-documentary-sheds-light-on-harsh-realities-faced-by-legal-ghosts-in-dominican-republic/>

**Pictures:** Our 12 young leaders’ performance for TeleAntillas, DR; Capacity Building Workshop in Kenya; Our 2015 PUT map. **Credits:** MRG, MUDHA.



**Our Work to Strengthen Political Participation**

We continued to advocate for **minority & indigenous formal representation in constitutions and electoral systems**. In 2015, this work focused greatly on the case of Bosnia Herzegovina where we advocated for the effective implementation of the European Court of Human Rights’ Sejdic and Finci judgement. MRG played a leading role in this steppingstone judgement of 2009, ruling against discrimination in the country at the upper national parliament level (violating thus article 14 of the ECHR), we now aim to take our efforts to the next level by **ensuring effective inclusion of religious and ethnic minorities in the political life of the country**. Our advocacy campaign on the **exclusion of non-Tswana communities** in the House of Chiefs in Botswana was expanded as we secured extra EU funding for this work. And

we are glad to announce that in May 2016, after more than 7 years of struggle, we heard that our efforts, and those of others had paid off as the **Wayeyi, a small and marginalized community living mainly along the Okavango Delta, was finally officially recognized**. A decision of great importance not only for the community, but also for the whole country with the recognition of its rich cultural diversity (cumulating more than 38 tribes on the territory) and a new perspective of integration and litigation for the other communities not yet recognised, currently living in precarious situations, experiencing culture and language loss, disproportionate poverty, and invisibility on the national scene.

**CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS**



Reflecting on our achievements so far, we feel that **we are on a good track to deliver against all our set objectives** for the 2013-2016 period: All our underlying key targets on land rights, capacity building, education and participation rights have remained an important part of our work and we have achieved **significant progress**. We have nearly met all our targets under objectives 1 and 3 and are now focusing on our second objective, an important one in such a troubled international context. As the context in most of the Middle East and North Africa continues to be very challenging, it forces us to work even harder to ensure that human rights violations and abuses of the communities we work with don’t go unnoticed and are addressed as they should be.

The context in which we have operated over the last year has been particularly difficult in a number of countries, forcing us to adapt quickly and sometimes leading directly to the partial suspension of our work (in Yemen for example). In addition, we had to make significant changes to existing programmes such as in the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia to better respond to the national contexts and evolving situations.

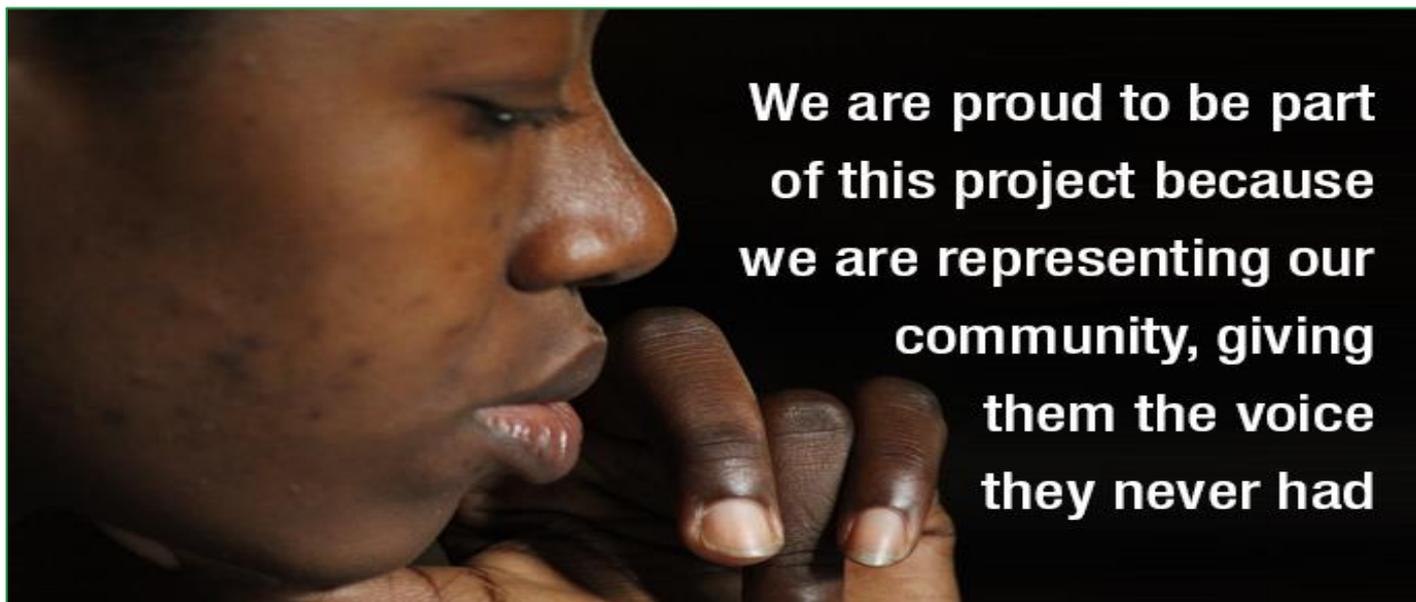
Throughout, our **expertise has continued to grow**, enabling us to confront the new challenges posed by increasing uncertainty in many of our target countries, and promote minority rights in new processes, such as our efforts to ensure that minority rights language is included in the SDGs.

Concluding this report, we cannot *not* mention the fact that 2015 also saw us starting to prepare for our new 4-year strategy that will be launched in early 2017. We have consulted extensively with our partners and their communities, decision-makers, international agencies and like-minded organizations to gather their views and feedback on where we should work and what issues we should focus on. We have analysed needs, scrutinized the current environment to start elaborating a new strategy which we hope will, building on the current one, enable us to achieve much needed and long term changes for the minority and indigenous communities we strive to support.



Picture from the top: Wayeyi women performing their traditional dances, Botswana; a Haratine Woman in Mauritania; A group of children from the Dominican-Haitian community, DR. Credits: MRG, ASI and MUDHA.

## THEIR VOICES, TESTIMONIES



**We are proud to be part of this project because we are representing our community, giving them the voice they never had**

*“Due to this project we had a chance to meet the MPs from the Commission of Human Rights and National Minorities [in Moldova] and to voice up our concerns, to learn how they promote minority rights in policy making etc. This project allowed us to our surprise to figure out that Ministry of Internal Affairs is also dealing with minority issues. We managed to set up productive cooperation with them”*

**Staff member of Ukrainian Youth of Moldova on work to build the capacity of minority organisations to promote minority rights – in particular leveraging European Association Agreement and EU- Moldova relations.**

*“Due to the intervention of this project, Batwa children do attend school regularly because they are assured of a meal they would probably not have if they remained at home... Batwa children now ‘fit in’ as they look smart and not any different from the other children”*

**Hatega Paul, Headmaster Kaburasaza Primary School (Kisoro District), where we have worked with the Batwa children, Uganda.**

*“I have been participated in several workshop and program regarding peace building and livelihood improvement they all called and forced sometime to forget the past and walk ahead. It is the only program called us to memorialize and accept the past. We had the chance to share the real pain and get free a bit”*

**One participant to the workshop on rights and reconciliation in Sri Lanka 2015.**

*“Today more than ever I raise my voice so the needs of my community are heard. I work for the Basima community thus; their struggle for rights becomes stronger. I want my children to grow with the opportunities I never had”.*

**Ana Iris Catillo, one of the 12 young leaders trained in the DR**

*“In this show, I have not seen a negative point, because even when it negatively related the behaviours of some people in this society, it does it in a real atmosphere, the result is positive. There were shocking sequences, but the messages were very clear and nourished my spirit”.*

**Audience Member seeing the street theatre performance on the issue of migrants in Morocco, 2015.**



**Pictures:** screenshot & quote from our film on the situation in the DR; Batwa kids in DRC coming to a village meeting a Nepalese woman of the mountains of Tamang Dunche, Nepal. **Credits:** MRG & Jared Ferrie

## FINANCE AND SUPPORT

MRG’s funding comes from a number of **donations and fundraising activities**. Most funds are given by organisations, bodies and individuals, either from the private sector (trusts and foundations), or the public sector (statutory and governments).

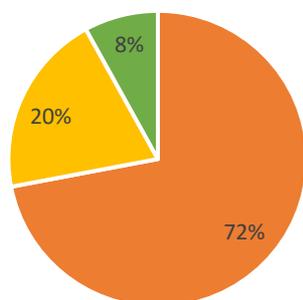
2015 saw, as part of the current 2013-2016 strategy, a number of new programmes start and a continued consolidation in other regional and thematic areas. External factors have sometimes affected our work and that of our partners in different ways (delays of payment, funds no longer available, programme that had to be paused, etc.). Nevertheless, despite instability, conflicts and difficulty of working in some areas like the Middle East and Russia, we have **successfully raised funds for all our programmes** and continue to develop good and trusting relations with our donors. Overall, in 2015, MRG achieved an **income of £3.22m**, that is to say an increase of 16.4% compared to the previous year (2014), and an **expenditure of £3.08m** (an increase of 14% of expenditure compared to 2014).

MRG is very grateful to all the **partners** who have worked with us in 2015, to the **decision makers** who have listened and taken points on board, to the **journalists** and editors who have reported news, and last but not least, all those **donors** – individuals and institutions- who have provided financial support without which none of this important work could have taken place. For 2015, we wish to give a warm thank you to the following donors who have continued to support us strongly:

- Allen and Nesta Ferguson Trust;
- Anna & Michael Wix Charitable Trust;
- Anti-Slavery International;
- Blanes Trust;
- CAFOD;
- Eleanor Rathbone;
- Ericson Trust;
- European Cultural Foundation;
- Freedom Fund;
- Garden Court Barristers Chambers;
- Grundvig;
- Lee Foundation;
- OHCHR;
- Open Society Foundation;
- Pilkington Trust;
- Prince Claus Foundation;
- Swedish Postcode Lottery;
- Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust;
- The Tides Center;
- T.H. Brunner Charitable Trust;
- UNHCR;
- VISEGRAD;
- And the Governments of **Canada, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland**, the **UK** and the **EU Commission**.

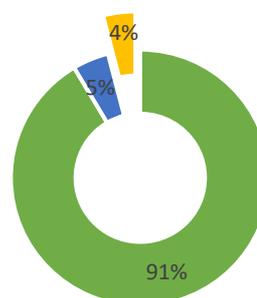
### 2015 DONORS

- Statutory & Governments
- Trusts and Foundations
- Other (incl. individuals)



### 2015 EXPENDITURE

- Advocacy & Projects
- Fundraising Activities
- Other Expenditures (incl. Publications)



**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ ABOUT US**

**TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT US & SUPPORT MRG BY DONATING,  
PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE:**

[www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org)

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