

Minority Rights Group Europe

Evaluation report of the project *From Needs to Rights: Promoting More Effective Development Policies in Europe*

Jeremy Smith, May 2012

Executive summary

This project was designed to increase focus on the global South within the development policy of governments in new EU member states and to encourage the alignment of policy with a human rights-based approach (HRBA).

The basic approach by MRG Europe in this project has been to position itself as a partner of governments, providing resources to, and engaging in direct advocacy towards, government officials. The project follows on from a prior initiative which was designed to mobilise public awareness, build NGO capacities and increase political support for greater and better development cooperation. As such, this project is more focused in its strategy than the one which preceded it.

The geographic scope of the project was essentially limited to three new EU member states holding or coming to hold the Presidency of the EU Council. Using the EU Presidency as a hook was for MRG Europe the starting point of determining the project's reach, but for the Commission the central logic to it: the project became more tightly defined around 3 states – Hungary, Poland and Cyprus – holding the Presidency than MRG Europe had intended. This has limited continuity with the previous project, which had built the capacity of NGOs across a larger number of states. The Presidency rationale to the project has validity in that states under this spotlight have shown themselves more inclined to engage with NGOs, whether from a greater sense of reliance on NGOs' expertise or from feeling obliged to follow EU practice in consultation with civil society. But while as new member states, Hungary, Poland and Cyprus can all learn from each other in terms of development policy, the lessons which Hungary and Poland can absorb from Cyprus are limited and the logic of including this last state is less strong.

MRG Europe has played a controlling role in the project. The role of other partners was not well-articulated in the project proposal and the offer to partners was not especially attractive. The level of engagement of partners has impacted on the capacities and intelligence upon which the project could draw. It also raises concerns about project sustainability. However, the design of a new project involves greater consultation and effort to cultivate buy-in, suggesting that MRG Europe has already recognised the drawbacks of the approach to partnership which it employed in the current project.

Those running the project at MRG Europe inherited a proposal which was underdeveloped in terms of partnerships, country analysis and activity plans. Core staff responded well to the looseness of the project proposal's analysis and elaborated activity plans which exploited other opportunities to get project messages across.

Across its outputs, MRG Europe has given a prominent place to examples of (denial of) women's rights as part of its argumentation for the HRBA. Under a logic that there is no solution on gender outside of progress on the HRBA itself, the principled use of gender for illustrative purposes could be said to matter less than its effectiveness as an argument. On the issue of whether gender examples are likely to encourage movement on the HRBA, it does seem that these have resonated well with some actors in some states.

More generally, MRG Europe has got its messages right. Materials have been well-judged. In particular, the Guide on integrating the HRBA into development policies is recognised as a useful resource. The workshop convened by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 2012 is a sign of the acknowledged utility of the Guide, as well as of openness to the HRBA in itself.

MRG Europe has delivered direct advocacy in an expert and professional manner. It has been effective in insinuating itself into positions of influence with policy-makers and at taking advantage of emerging opportunities to promote its positions. The presence of Esther Somoire at many events has increased the potency of MRG Europe's arguments. Holding the concluding conference in the UK embassy made governments, especially that of Hungary, take the event more seriously. The conference received praise, though there were some comments that its political and technical purposes could have been better separated out in the agenda.

Media outcomes, though tangential to the project strategy, have been impressive. The difficulties of generating sophisticated coverage of international development remain significant, however, and pose a challenge for future work, given the greater emphasis on media in the new project being developed.

Policy-makers are not hostile to the HRBA, have gained in understanding of it and become more confident in debating its merits. There are question marks as to how deep this new understanding is and how committed policy-makers are to the HRBA. In Hungary, it is claimed that the limited scale of development budgets prevents the conversion of rhetorical support into change in policy and practice. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is open to dialogue with NGOs, an attitudinal change of value in itself. In both Hungary and Poland, there is a sense of MRG Europe having got itself in a position to apply influence when circumstances become more favourable. Prospects are perhaps better in Poland, where the Ministry has greater capacity and is receptive on gender. The HRBA did not make it into the new Multi-annual Plan, however. NGOs were stung by the limited returns on their investment in consultations on the Plan; progress in forging a closer and more cooperative relationship with the Ministry has been set back as a result. NGOs are now uncertain how seriously to take the notion that the HRBA will be applied at the operational level. But this does at least represent an opening for further advocacy and a commitment which MRG Europe can look to hold the Ministry to.

The government of Hungary is at least rhetorically open to engaging more with the global South, though MRG Europe and its allies are sceptical how much difference this will make in practice. In Poland, the

Ministry is resistant to greater engagement with the South. The strategy to foster support for the HRBA without tying this to a need to engage more with the South appears sound and to have done otherwise would have made MRG Europe likely to meet closed doors earlier.

The Cypriot model of delegated cooperation has presented a challenge to advocacy on the HRBA in that it seems to demand a change from this basic model towards the adoption of Cyprus' own policies and programmes. The project has argued for the development of better tools for selecting the projects which Cyprus co-funds, but targets reduce its arguments to having pushed for an overhaul of the whole system. Whether as a matter of content or presentation, MRG Europe's advocacy in Cyprus has been less well-received than in the other two states, though it has nonetheless benefited from a general trend towards greater contact between the government and civil society organisations.

Closer ties between Poland, Hungary and Cyprus have not been particularly fostered by this project, in that such ties either existed already (e.g. between Hungary and Cyprus) or are not deemed a priority. This is not to say that participants did not appreciate the opportunity for exchange at the closing conference, however.

NGO capacities have been built across the three states. In Cyprus, from a low starting point, increased knowledge and understanding is directly attributable to MRG Europe. In Poland and Hungary, project materials and training have deepened NGOs' knowledge and boosted their confidence and inclination to advocate on the HRBA. This is not yet converting into changes in the design of NGOs' own programmes, an inconsistency which leaves them vulnerable to criticism from government officials. There is a challenge for NGOs running development programmes to ensure that their advocacy and their programmes are joined up.

Minority Rights Group Europe

Evaluation report of the project *From Needs to Rights: Promoting More Effective Development Policies in Europe*

Jeremy Smith, May 2012

Purpose and methodology

This evaluation has the purpose of assessing the results and impacts of a project designed to encourage the alignment of development policy of governments in new EU member states with a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and to increase focus on the global South within that policy. The evaluation is intended to generate lessons of relevance to future projects with similar objectives or approaches. It is also an obligation of funding received from the European Commission.

The scope of the evaluation includes the stages of delivery of activities and outputs; achievement of immediate results; and actual or anticipated outcomes and impacts. Conclusions at the latter stages of outcomes and impacts are necessarily tentative, as there are both limits to the outcomes that could reasonably be expected after a two-year project of this scale and complexities in attributing signs of impact to MRG Europe and its partners¹.

The evaluation draws on two main sources of information:

1. a review of documentation, including the project proposal, project reports, outputs and minutes of the MRG Board (DPME).
2. a total of 30 interviews with stakeholders involved in, or targeted by, the project. A list of interviewees is annexed to this report; a summary is given below:

	Cyprus	Hungary	Poland	Lithuania	International
MRG and its experts	0	2	0	0	2
Partners and NGOs	3	3	4	1	2
Government	2	5	4	0	2
Total	5	10	8	1	6

Respondents from Cyprus and from the 'international' category were spoken to by phone / skype. The majority of respondents in Hungary and Poland were interviewed in person during a visit to Central Europe between 16 and 20 April. A number of Hungarian and Polish contacts were not available during this period, however; they were instead interviewed by phone.

A draft report was discussed with MRG during a debriefing phone conference on 9 May. This final report

¹ The term 'partner' is used for those organisations which had a formal stake in the project, that is, who received funding to deliver activities as part of it. Other NGOs which may have participated in events, even spoken on MRG panels, are not considered partners if they did not receive funding from the project. This distinction is made clear in the use of quotes, with 'NGO respondent' or 'NGO representative' referring to individuals not working for partner organisations.

reflects additional input received on that call, as well as comments relayed by email. The draft was also shared with partners in each of the three project countries, with their comments incorporated in this final version.

Project genesis and design

The project's purpose or 'specific objective' has been “*to increase the awareness of key development actors and decision makers in target countries of the relationship between human rights and development, and of the importance and benefits of the rights-based approach to development in designing and implementing effective development policies*”². The formulation of the project's expected results serves to clarify that MRG Europe is specifically interested in development policy in the global south and (implicitly) not in states in the western Balkans and former Soviet Union which are often the focus of development support from Central and Eastern European (CEE) member states:

1. *Greater awareness of development issues and difficulties the developing countries of the South and their peoples are facing and implementation of the rights-based approach to tackle these issues amongst development decision-makers in the new member states.*
2. *Strengthened capacity of development NGOs to advocate for a greater involvement of their government and society to tackle development issues in the South, using effective approaches.*
3. *Enhanced discourse and better cooperation between governments and NGOs on the national level leading to an improvement of national development policies*
4. *Increased cooperation among governments of new EU member states in coordinating their development activities*³.

The four expected results indicate that the project has two main audiences: a primary audience of government officials (expected results 1, 3 and 4) and a secondary audience of development NGOs (expected results 2 and 3). In describing its primary audience, the project proposal tends to refer to 'decision-makers'; in practice, the predominant target of activities has been civil servants. Politicians have been mobilised only in a limited way in Hungary, as project champions, but without this being a major strand to influencing strategies.

The current project is founded on an earlier initiative focused on building NGOs' understanding of, and capacity to work on, the HRBA and on the fostering of public awareness⁴. This project is designed as a logical *continuation* of the prior project in taking the HRBA out to policy-makers once NGOs had been primed. Here the project was perhaps rather optimistic in its reading of how far NGO capacities had been developed and their strategies aligned to a position centred on the HRBA. It may be that the project was affected by a need to show to the funder an agenda gathering momentum and progress

² Project proposal, *From Needs to Rights: Promoting More Effective Development Policies in Europe*, page 13.

³ Project proposal, *From Needs to Rights: Promoting More Effective Development Policies in Europe*, page 17-18.

⁴ This earlier project sought “*to build the capacity of development NGOs and other [civil society] stakeholders in new member states in order to (1) raise public awareness in their countries of development issues in developing countries and the benefit of adopting rights-based approaches to tackle these issues; and (2) incorporate and / or campaign for the implementation of rights-based approaches in [their] development work*”; <http://www.minorityrights.org/9324/homepage/promoting-development-home.html>.

being made.

The focus on policy-makers also represents a *correction* of the basic strategy employed in the earlier project. That project had sought to influence the wider political context in which policy is formed through mobilising public opinion. While partially successful, this project is felt to have been too small in scale to have had a significant effect, with other NGOs not in a position to engage in widespread public-facing activities. As a response, the current project switched to a more low-key, 'insider' role, focused on providing resources to, and direct engagement of, government officials.

This positioning is felt internally to have had the benefit of matching MRG's strength in professional advocacy and its less oppositional stance, allowing it to be seen as a partner of governments. This is something which officials, often in weak positions within their institutions, appreciate: as one puts it, "*it is reassuring to have the support of an NGO for our policy*". But this endorsement of MRG Europe's positioning depends on the returns in terms of policy proving sufficient. NGO respondents within and beyond the project argue for putting greater emphasis on influencing the context in which officials shape policy. A new project – a concept note has been accepted and a full proposal is now being drafted – takes on board these arguments. It represents a third iteration of the balance to be struck between engaging at the level of policy detail and influencing the political context in which decisions on policy are taken. By retaining a support function to government officials, but adding the element of mobilising the media (and thereby public opinion), the new project is a synthesis of the preceding two, at least in the first tier of target states, that is, those states already most receptive to the HRBA5:

	Preceding project	Current project	Project-in-development
Primary audience	NGOs	'Decision-makers' (government officials)	'Decision-makers' (government officials)
Secondary audience	Journalists, teachers, academics, coordinators of youth groups	'National implementing partners' and other NGOs	Journalists, NGOs
Essential project logic	Develop NGOs' confidence in the HRBA and equip them to raise public support for (the HRBA to) development	Direct advocacy and support to policy-makers	Pressure on policy-makers through catalysing media coverage and through encouraging examples by NGOs of HRBA in practice
Geographic reach	"[All] new EU member states", but in practice 6	3-5 new member states, but in practice 3	"all EU states (with a particular focus in the EU12 states)"

The Presidency logic

Tying the project to new EU member states holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union did give it "*a good hook to engage Ministries of Foreign Affairs and to get issues on the agenda which would not otherwise get attention*". Holding the Presidency made new member states look to the example of old member states and acted as a pressure towards a 'higher common denominator' in

⁵ As detailed in the Concept Note, the overall objective of the new project would be: "*Through increased public awareness and education and support to decision makers, achieve increased and improved use of human rights based approaches to development*".

terms both of development policy and of practice in engaging with NGOs⁶. Obligated to follow certain agenda during the Presidency period, new member state governments are more likely to rely on NGOs' input and to appreciate them more⁷.

It is arguable that there is a logic to formulating projects around any number of combinations of new member states, that is, that a new member state logic is as important to the project as a specific Presidency logic. All new member states are bound by common EU policy and goals on international development; all therefore are looking for ways to meet these obligations.

The Presidency logic has the drawback of limiting continuity with the previous project because it narrows the project's scope to three states. Engagement in Cyprus was entirely new; Hungary and Poland had been involved in the earlier project, but the core partners – Demnet and Polish Humanitarian Action (PHA) respectively – were unable or unwilling to join the current project – or in the case of PHA, to join the project for its entirety. This had the effect of obliging MRG Europe to identify new partners.

MRG Europe had wanted to retain the flexibility to draw in partners in other countries beyond those imminently holding the EU Presidency. This would have limited the loss of continuity. However, the Commission Task Manager overseeing the grant was keen to enforce an interpretation of '3-5 states' that was limited to the three states holding the Presidency. A tight application of the Presidency logic is not wholly of MRG Europe's making, therefore.

The difference in interpretation of '3-5' also played itself out in confusion over whether Lithuania, which holds the EU Presidency in 2013, was included. Some investment was made in scoping activities, an investment with limited return in terms of this project, though MRG Europe has kept channels open – through inviting Lithuanian officials and NGOs to the concluding conference, for example – which minimise this loss. A small base has been provided for the inclusion of Lithuania in the new project currently being drafted. From the side of the intended Lithuanian partner, this is no sense of having been misled and the volume of other projects which it was involved with meant that the impact of inclusion in the MRG project being withdrawn has been limited.

The Presidency logic is not without foundation – other NGOs, including both Demnet and PAH are using it to underpin other projects in which they are involved. It is possible that different NGOs seeking European Commission funds are playing to this funder's 'prejudices' by building projects around Presidencies. But the Presidency logic may increase coherence in the eyes of the funder more than it increases the actual coherence of a project. The effect was to build a project around three states (plus

⁶ One official described holding the Presidency as akin to sitting an exam, with the other member states as adjudicators.

⁷ The extent to which the common experience of holding the Presidency has affected relations between states and between governments and NGOs is considered in the sections on *Relationships between governments and development NGOs* and *Increased cooperation among governments of new member states*.

Lithuania) of variable capacity and inclination to engage with MRG Europe's aims⁸:

	Hungary	Poland	Cyprus	Lithuania
Presidency period	First half 2011	Second half 2011	Second half 2012	Second half 2013
Institutional capacity	xx	xxx	x	xx
Favourability of political context	x	xx	x	xxx
Openness to focus on global south	xx	x	xx	x

Notwithstanding the point that all new member states have issues and challenges in common and can legitimately be brought together in a project of this nature, it is apparent that Cyprus has felt a little marginal compared to the other two states. In part, this is a consequence of the Hungarian and Polish Presidencies falling within the project, while that of Cyprus commences four months after the project has finished: the Presidency was not driving the project as much in Cyprus as it was in the other states. It also reflects that Hungary and Poland have a similar history and current capacity, while Cyprus has a different history of development cooperation. The effect has been that while Cyprus can learn from Poland and Hungary (including from the simple fact of these states undergoing the EU Presidency first), NGOs and officials in Poland and Hungary receive less back in the way of relevant knowledge and experience because the Cypriot context is too specific. Including Cyprus in the project has not brought as much in the way of synergies as may be fostered in projects organised around states of a closer common situation.

Summary of findings: the focus on new member states holding the EU Presidency, hardened under Commission pressure only after the proposal was accepted, has limited continuity with the preceding project. Cyprus has been relatively marginal to project activities, in part due to the timing of its Presidency and in part because of the lower starting point of NGOs and the government. The challenges inherent to the Presidency logic have all been manageable, however, and have not had a decisive impact on the project's delivery and outcomes.

Approach to partnership

MRG Europe is the lead partner in the project and has played a controlling role in the project. In part, this is a question of positioning and of MRG Europe seeing a niche in acting as a professional resource outside broader civil society. But it is also a deliberate policy of taking an interventionist approach to advocacy, that is, to conduct direct advocacy while building up local capacities, rather than restricting its role to building up the capacities of local groups to deliver advocacy themselves.

The notion – raised by one advisor to the project – that “*instead of using newly-trained NGOs as advocates, it was MRG doing it all itself*” highlights the impact of the lack of continuity with the previous

⁸ Scores are used here to compare the four states as much as to grade capacity, context and openness themselves; that is, it illustrates that Poland's institutional capacity is greater than the other states as much as it asserts that its capacity is especially high, for example.

project. But it also raises questions about the approach to partnership employed in this project. If MRG preferred to do the work itself than delegate to local partners, there is some legitimacy in the rationale of wanting to avoid carrying the administrative burden of complex multi-partner projects. (It could be argued though that project administrative costs should be borne by those most able to bear them). But savings in terms of administrative efficiency are offset by the costs of an *ad hoc* approach to partnership. The project was designed with little in the way of partner input. In Cyprus, MRG Europe “*chose partners after the project was approved, so there was no opportunity for collaboration in project design*”. Potential partners were approached in Hungary and Poland while the project was being developed, but without this ever amounting to a participatory process. The offer to partners was fairly unattractive and compared unfavourably to other funding opportunities. For one potential partner, the sums available did not make participation worthwhile, while another was willing to join out of support for the project's goals, but without ever losing the sense that “*we were just doing what they told us without feeling any ownership*”.

It is not necessary for all partners in a project to feel equal ownership of it. If there is clarity of roles and if the expectations made of partners in an *ad hoc* collaboration are in line with the 'return' that they derive from the project, then equality of ownership should not be an issue and delivery of activities is likely to be efficient. This has broadly been the case with this project, though from both Poland and Cyprus there was some concern that the demands made upon partners were a little stretched beyond a reasonable interpretation of the input due from them for their given role in the project.

The risk with the approach to partnership employed in this project is that there may be a loss of subtlety and country-specificity in project strategies. There was an extensive effort to identify the right partners in Cyprus after the project had started, but this could not entirely make up for the lack of involvement in design, with the effect that, for one partner, “*objectives had already been set which did not suit [our] context. We were asked to deliver activities to fulfil the project*”, that is, activities which were not always relevant for that context.

The key issue too about the spat with the Cypriot Ministry [described later in this report] is less the rights and wrongs of the issue at stake and more the apparent passivity of local partners. While it was not the intention of MRG Europe that Cypriot NGOs would see their role in advocacy as a passive one, that they did so had the effect of an insufficient harvesting of local political intelligence which made MRG Europe more vulnerable to this sort of dispute arising.

In the other two countries, the risk is also recognised that MRG Europe imposed itself too much. Some NGOs accept that there is a period where MRG Europe has a relative monopoly in terms of content knowledge, but even among these groups, the feeling tends to be that “*MRG needed to do more to promote the HRBA among other NGOs*”. The approach to partnership used in this project – as well as the thinness of the project budget and the consequent small scale of the offer to NGOs – militates against sustainability of project results and outcomes. A point in favour of this argument is that the organisation which seems most committed to the issue – the Institute for Global Responsibility – is that

which has been given greatest autonomy in the project to develop a specific, project-endorsed output.

During the project itself, the dominant role of MRG Europe played out in a tight hub-and-spoke model of communication and coordination which limited the opportunities for forging links between partners which might be expected to last beyond the project. Partners appear to have had little contact with each other until meeting at the concluding conference.

It is noted that the new project includes more time and space for needs assessment, scoping and meeting with partners, suggesting that the drawbacks of how this project was designed are being responded to.

Summary of findings: decisions on what form partnerships should take balance the costs of negotiating the terms of the partnership with the extent of the benefits of working with others rather than alone. With the approach to partnership used in this project, costs have been low, but so too have benefits. The intent of the new project to redress the balance – towards greater inclusion of partners in project design and decision-making – seems correct in the light of this experience.

Project management

Those running the project at MRG Europe inherited a proposal which was taking some risks in terms of the Presidency logic and which was underdeveloped in terms of partnerships and country analysis. The Commission evaluation in December 2010 noted that the project was not well-founded on country analysis and that objectives and activities were not tailored to national context⁹. One outsider observer argues, for example, that many of the issues affecting project delivery in Cyprus – NGO capacity, government attitude to NGOs, policy obstacles – “*should have been known in advance [and] should not have been a surprise to MRG*”.

With little involvement of partners in project design, MRG Europe has itself had to invest in building up political intelligence and contacts, mapping influence channels and scanning the positions of other civil society actors. Scoping missions to Cyprus and Lithuania were a means to identify potential partners while the early round-table events in Hungary and Poland served as “*needs assessment and consultation about the topics of the policy papers*” as much as advocacy opportunities themselves. It is admitted within MRG Europe that the pace of project activities and also their results have been affected by the way that partners have been identified and involved.

In Cyprus, where partners were identified late, much more was needed in the way of support and capacity-building than was anticipated. Knowledge and understanding of Cypriot development policy and Cypriot civil society active on development “*has come through the project [and did] not [exist] before*”. Here MRG Europe risked engaging in advocacy activities without sufficient preparation to

⁹ “*An analysis of the needs per country has not been carried out by the project team; all target countries are tackled in a uniform way and, as a result, common targets are set, not appropriate in all cases in all countries*”. Results-Oriented Monitoring summary report; page 1.

insure itself against unexpected reactions. In the end, the timing of Cyprus' Presidency meant that the pressure upon MRG Europe to deliver was not as acute as it was in the other two countries – that the need to do ground work before core project activities could commence made for a slow start, but this mattered less since the Presidency was further in the future.

As well as deepening the country analysis upon which the project has been built, it was also incumbent upon those coordinating and managing the project to further elaborate activity plans¹⁰. This led to identifying additional opportunities to promote the project's messages, including at the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) in Budapest in May 2011 and the European Development Days (EDD) in Warsaw in December 2011. The effect was to introduce a greater element of flexibility and of reacting to external opportunities, on top of trying to create interest in its own activities as laid out in the proposal. Reasoning that it should not rely on policy-makers coming to its events, but should itself go to where policy-makers were anyway congregating, MRG Europe was bettering the odds of its messages hitting home.

In filling the gaps in terms of country analysis and activity plans, core staff have coped well with the challenges of implementing a loose project proposal. Credit is due too for the manner in which the project has been coordinated between the partners. Relations between MRG Europe and partners have been smooth. Partners have a positive impression of how the project has been run. The Project Coordinator is praised for her responsiveness and efficiency. In part too this may reflect also that an aim and consequence of the approach taken to partnership was to minimise coordination costs. The simplicity of the project – in the sense of the predominant role of MRG Europe and the limited need for negotiating the input of partners – has kept friction between groups at a low level.

Project outputs

The project proposal specifies a number of activities and outputs to be delivered as part of advocacy campaigns in each country: round-tables with policy-makers; policy and training materials; and a concluding conference. In its delivery of these and other activities, MRG Europe is recognised as being “*at another level of preparation and knowledge*” by the representative of one allied organisation, while officials in more than one country praise MRG Europe for being “*conspicuously well-informed*”, for providing “*recipes and know-how*” tailored to officials' needs and for showing “*passion [and] expertise... They are crucial*”. These positive attributes seem to be a function both of the specific skills and experience of the Project Coordinator and of the organisational resources and clout which MRG Europe has behind it.

The basic arguments which MRG Europe has employed resonate with target audiences. CEE policy-makers are sympathetic to discourses rooted in human rights – and to advocacy of women's rights as part of that. The notion that the HRBA is especially suited to new member states with limited

¹⁰ This was also a response to the Commission ROM report which recommended including additional activities relating in particular to expected result 4; Background conclusion report, European Commission Results-oriented Monitoring; page 10, December 2010.

development budgets – because participation of beneficiaries improves the quality and cost-effectiveness of programmes, meaning that a little goes a long way – confronts policy-makers' defensive positions around the resources available to them and is acknowledged as an effective message.

With both human rights as a whole and gender in particular, the project has needed to move policy-makers swiftly on from support for broad concepts to understanding and acceptance of the HRBA itself. The project proposal does not help much in terms of gender, which is mentioned only in a generic way, with no articulation of how it is to be treated. The Commission's own review judged that “*the project has not been planned on a gender-differentiated beneficiaries' analysis*”¹¹. It is felt within the project that “*it was conceptually difficult to incorporate gender into the general work, as there is no agreement if it should be mainstreamed into the HRBA (fully integrated but possibly less visible) or a stand-alone criteria to be incorporated into the HRBA*”. In practice, MRG Europe has worked to ensure that gender is prominent across all outputs. The 'mainstreaming dilemma' is resolved by putting gender to the fore in the analysis of the problem, while it is the HRBA which is presented as the solution. This has the implication that positive outcomes on gender are a condition of positive outcomes on the HRBA.

The **policy paper**¹² was a key element to the effort of moving from support for human rights to support for the HRBA. For one policy analyst, the paper presents “*too optimistic a perspective... it does not show the full complexities and recognize that new members states are really keen on civil and political rights more than economic and social rights*”. But the general impression is that the paper served as a useful introduction and overview; the inference is that MRG Europe judged well the limits of depth and nuance which a first major output should keep within. One NGO representative considered that it was “*basic, but necessarily so for us*”; from the side of government, there is no corresponding sense of it having been 'beneath them': the paper seems to have worked for both governmental and NGO audiences.

The feedback of one government official that the paper was regularly consulted to “*ensure that no aspects of the HRBA were missed in [our] planning*” is testament both to the authority of the document and to a desire to pre-empt NGO criticism which in turn is a signal that NGO opinion is being taken into account.

A respondent from outside the three project states felt that the document was affected by the Presidency rationale underlying the project, judging that the paper was “*forced to look for something to say on each state. Cyprus was the old one out and tended to be stuck in at the end... it did not fit*”. In Cyprus itself, impressions are more positive, perhaps from the simple fact of the country being included at all, given feedback that it is relatively rare for Cyprus to be made the subject of such analysis.

¹¹ Background conclusion report, European Commission Results-oriented Monitoring; page 29 , December 2010.

¹² *The Human Rights-based Approach: A More Effective Framework for International Development Policies in New EU Member States* , May 2011.

In Poland, MRG Europe has, together with its local partner the Institute for Global Responsibility, developed a further policy paper advocating the adoption of country strategies, centred on the HRBA¹³. The rationale for the paper is to insert the HRBA into a layer of planning beneath Poland's new Multi-annual development plan. At one level, this rationale is validated: from the side of both NGOs and government, it is agreed that there is a layer of possible influence beneath the Multi-annual Plan.

But while there are analyses for countries which receive significant Polish Aid funding, the Ministry does not intend to introduce country strategies *per se* and argues that to do so would go against the tide of European policy-making, which points towards greater joint programming, removing the need for individual donors to employ their own country strategies. The call for country strategies is aspirational and is currently deflected as such, with an official commenting that "*the country strategy paper is interesting intellectually, but it requires too much, it wants to see an ambitious development program*". The crux is the use made of the paper. MRG Europe and its partners ought to be careful about how a call for the adoption of country strategies is employed, given that the issue is less the structure that planning takes and more the content and implementation of plans. This suggests the need for pragmatism with a goal of the development of country strategies.

The **Guide**¹⁴ for decision-makers is the perhaps project's key output. It is certainly the most recognised output and one which is generally viewed positively. Some do feel, however, that the Guide is slightly caught between two audiences – governmental and NGO – which have different needs. It is not felt to reward a quick read – NGO and government respondents report that "*you really have to work on it*" or that "*you have to be committed to read it... It's so technical that it is for only people who are dedicated*". This begins to be a problem if targets feel that they have to use the English version alongside that in their first language.

The assumption is that the Guide has a specialist audience which should cope with complexity. The same respondents who highlighted the commitment demanded by the Guide recognise that it is "*comprehensive*" and "*absolutely unique*". It is specifically praised for elucidating "*what you can expect from the HRBA... it really explains what the HRBA is and what it is not [which] is something which it adds compared to other tools*".

The test is what use is made of the Guide by policy-makers. That the Guide will be sent to embassies of Poland and Sweden in developing countries is a sign of intent and, in the case of Sweden, an unintended, additional outcome. Other government respondents indicate that they expect to rely on the Guide in future policy development and in assessing funding proposals for development projects. Without comparable advocacy from other groups, practical advances towards the HRBA appear dependent on MRG Europe outputs: as one government official put it: "*we would be lacking tools*

– ¹³ *Country Strategy Papers: A Policy Tool to Increase Effectiveness of Polish Development Cooperation*; April 2012.

– ¹⁴ *Integration of the human-rights-based approach into development policies: A guide for the new EU Member States*, September 2011

without NGOs like MRG".

The content of the Guide has drawn some criticism, however. The Cypriot Ministry reacted against it for showing the government of Cyprus in a bad light. MRG's criticism may have been well-founded in itself, though partners admit now that "*maybe we could have softened the blow a bit by meeting them beforehand*". [See p.21, Cyprus section of the analysis of outcomes in terms of New member states' development policy].

In Poland too, there is some concern at the relevance and accuracy of the Guide's recommendations. However, this was balanced out by other, more positive feedback from within the same Ministry and so does not appear reflective of any institutional opposition to the messages laid out. That the Ministry initiated a workshop in February 2012 based around the Guide is a strong sign of its utility and of openness to the HRBA. There is some feedback that the workshop was not animated enough and that the Guide was insufficiently 'translated' into a workshop format. But there was positive feedback too, especially for the case studies and other elements which serve to 'make the HRBA real'.

MRG Europe's other **training** interventions targeted NGOs in Cyprus which needed to be armed with greater knowledge of the HRBA before they could be expected to engage in external activities. For most respondents, the workshop in January 2011 was their first contact with the HRBA and, for some, with the concept of development itself. The training does seem to have been pitched at the right level, though positive feedback may also reflect a sense of appreciation that particular attention was being paid to them, perhaps especially from Turkish Cypriot organisations.

A training toolkit has been developed, its content having evolved to reflect impressions of how the different training events have gone. As with other outputs, MRG Europe's careful approach to engage policy-makers before finalising materials is likely to ensure positive take-up.

MRG Europe's policy outputs have formed the basis of direct advocacy both at events which it has convened itself and at those organised by others. Feedback from the first **round-table** in Hungary in October 2010 was positive¹⁵, but that held in Poland a month later was less well-attended and the debate was felt to be correspondingly "*shallow*". The lesson was learned that greater preparation was needed to mobilise support within the Ministry among those whose signal to other staff would ensure attendance. The fruit of this relationship-building came in the Ministry convening the February 2012 workshop.

At round-tables or other events, MRG Europe's advocates have flanked themselves with champions – at least in Hungary – as well as experts and practitioners from the global South. Zita Gurmai, a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and Virág Kaufer, an opposition Member of Parliament until

¹⁵ "*Informal feedback from the Head of the [Department of Development Cooperation, DDC] positively assessed the round-table and expressed that the round-table addressed a real need of the DDC to further learn and discuss these issues*"; Interim Narrative Report to the European Commission, May 2011, page 5.

February 2012, have served as useful proponents of project messages, with the former also enabling access at the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) in Budapest in May 2011.

The presence of Esther Somoire at MRG Europe events was repeatedly highlighted by respondents as bringing key insight and for providing analysis as to how the HRBA works in practice. It is important to note too the value which Esther Somoire's role in the project has had for her own advocacy, both in allowing her to engage directly with European policy-makers and through her presence at the JPA serving to open doors with Kenyan officials, a development which was for her organisation "*a very big thing*".

The JPA was a key focus for activities in Hungary with a media briefing seven weeks prior to the event and a capacity-building seminar and cultural events in the days immediately before it. The policy paper was launched at a lunch time event held during the JPA and attended by Secretary-General of the ACP Group, Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas. Zita Gurmai spoke forcefully in favour of MRG Europe's positions.

At both the JPA and the EDD held in Warsaw in December 2011, the impression is of an organisation with clout and nous, mobilising its arguments and champions and getting its messages across effectively. The panel discussion organised with Amnesty International at the EDD – again involving Esther Somoire – draws praise from outside observers in terms of the quality of the debate. For MRG Europe, securing a high level panel on the HRBA at the first EDD in a new member state is evidence of having "*convinced both the European Commission and the Polish Presidency of the HRBA's importance*", making it "*one of the biggest achievements of the project*". That one senior official concurs with this view – citing that "*it is important to highlight the HRBA at such an event where the whole development community is present*" – is a sign of how far knowledge and confidence has come.

Polish NGOs' perceptions of the effects of the panel illustrate the central strategic issue of how to reach those with power and how influence can be brought to bear: one partner is "*pessimistic of the impact [of the EDD event] in Poland. Attendees were already converted [and] the lack of media coverage diminished the pressure on the government*". But another considers that the EDD did have a positive impact in reaching Polish officials, comparing it favourably to MRG's Budapest conference for its influence in Poland for the simple fact of being literally and politically closer to home.

It was noted in the December 2010 monitoring report that the project's **concluding conference**¹⁶ was the only activity designed to foster cooperation among new member states. Measured against this purpose *alone*, the conference cannot be counted a success: policy-makers either had contact with their counterparts in other new members states already or did not form such contacts at the conference. Where the conference did succeed was as a high-profile event which boosted the position of at least Hungarian policy-makers within their Ministry. As one international observer put it, "*Hungarian decision-makers were reassured about the importance of development when they see the UK giving it*

¹⁶ *Reflections on the Presidency experiences and the future of development policy*, Budapest, September 2011.

importance”.

That the event was hosted at the UK embassy was a factor here: this raised the event's status and elevated it above other NGO events in the eyes of government officials. If the location of the conference was critical to the attendance of State Secretary Németh and other 'high-rankers', MRG Europe also deserves credit for securing the venue and for its marketing of the event.

For NGO delegates – especially those from Cyprus – the conference was a useful opportunity to meet peers from other countries and to share experience. One participant not unused to attending conferences of this nature views it as having been an “*eye-opener*” due to the range of experience – policy-maker and practitioner, new and old member state – represented. There was some concern that the government of Cyprus was represented by a less experienced official, but one observer was nevertheless confident that “*at the conference, Cyprus was not on the margins. They had a visible and active presence. Development issues were discussed not only from a CEE angle... the conference was not dominated by Hungary and Poland*”.

Some respondents found the speeches on the first day a little too much; this may be an unavoidable consequence of having secured senior attendees likely to articulate positions perhaps already known to those present rather than enter into dialogue or debate. If it is not possible for the conference to have been both high-level and technical on its first day, there were some comments that the format of the second day could have been more tailored to what became a less political and more technical audience.

MRG Europe's core strategy has meant that **media work** has been tangential to the project: focusing on government officials puts less onus on influencing the wider environment of public discourse through the media than would be the case when politicians are the primary target. Media coverage has nonetheless been an important part of the project, including for example through the briefing for journalists in Budapest in the run-up to the JPA designed to warm up interest in the event and through making Esther Somoire available for interview at this and other events.

The proposal set a target of “*at least 30 articles / mentions of development issues in the media in at least 3 to 5 of the new EU member states*”¹⁷. As the table summarising MRG Europe's own data below indicates, coverage has been concentrated in Hungary and Poland. This is not surprising given the relative size of the media market in these states compared with Cyprus, the greater number of media-worthy events and activities in the two CEE states and also MRG Europe's own location.

Priority level ¹⁸	Poland	Hungary	Cyprus	Global	Total
------------------------------	--------	---------	--------	--------	-------

¹⁷ Project proposal, *From Needs to Rights: Promoting More Effective Development Policies in Europe*, page 17.

¹⁸ Priority level indicates MRG Europe's own assessment of how important are the media outlets in which coverage is achieved. The final category of 'priority' is distinguished from 'high' in that coverage here represents those outlets which were particularly targeted, on top of the 'quality' of the outlet itself.

Low	1	9	1	0	11
Medium	5	14	1	1	21
High	24	15	6	0	45
Priority	2	8	0	0	10
Total	32	46	8	1	87

Assessment of how directly media coverage can be linked to project activities points to some variance between Hungary and Poland, with stronger links to the project seeming to prove more possible in Hungary:

Relation to project activities ¹⁹	Poland	Hungary	Cyprus	Global	Total
Directly linked	14	29	8	1	52
Indirectly linked	0	16	0	0	16
Unconnected	18	1	0	0	19
Total	32	46	8	1	87

Media coverage has value in that policy-makers are happy to see their issues covered and it provides proof that there is more to the project than a few skilled lobbyists. But the impression remains that media coverage on international development typically lacks sophistication and is marked more by interest in the exotic than depth of analysis. Journalists who attended events organised around the JPA, for example, were “*very young and non-expert... they did not get it. It was important to get [the Hungarian News Agency] to pick it up, but their article missed the essence of our message*”. In Poland too, it is said to be the case that “*only a few journalists are engaged and those that are, are not good at alarming [getting the attention of] politicians*”. This will remain a challenge in future work, given the greater emphasis placed on media engagement in the proposed follow-up project.

Summary of findings: MRG Europe has been effective in insinuating itself into positions of influence with policy-makers and at taking advantage of emerging opportunities to promote its positions. Its professionalism and expertise are recognised by representatives of other NGOs and government ministries alike. Its support role has contributed to senior officials adopting public positions in favour of the HRBA at the EDD. Of its core outputs, the policy paper is less memorable than the Guide which is the most recognised and well-received output of the project. The proof of its utility is that the Polish Ministry organised a training event around the Guide – one of the most striking outcomes of the

¹⁹ 'Directly linked' coverage refers to that which is a direct consequence of an activity, such as the March 2011 media briefing in Budapest. 'Indirect' coverage refers to events which do not fall under the project, but which MRG has spoken at and been referenced in the media as a result. Coverage due to activities at the Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the European Development Days are counted as directly linked (these activities were not explicit in the project proposal, but added in the light of the Commission monitoring report in December 2010). 'Unconnected' coverage involves reporting on development without any apparent link to MRG activities or messages. In some cases, the categorisation of articles is arguable – and indeed is based only on raw data not a review of the articles themselves. Assumptions are made that, for example, coverage of the secession of South Sudan in Poland is unconnected to the project. The evaluator cannot know whether reference to MRG Europe and its goals has been levered into such coverage, which would be cast in a different light if it had.

projects. The concluding conference was an impressive event, though its direct impact – at least in terms of fostering closer cooperation among new member state governments – was limited.

Project outcomes and impact

New member states' development policy

Serving more or less as a baseline of policy positions among the three states, the Commission's own monitoring report judged that “*willingness, interest and enhanced knowledge of the [decision-makers] are not sufficient to lead to policy formulation inclusive of the HRBA*”²⁰. Prospects for impact at the policy level were considered low, especially in Hungary and Cyprus. Since that point, there has not been a policy breakthrough, but a gradual building of support for the HRBA. In each case, as MRG Europe itself acknowledges, the key issue is that “*decision-makers support the HRBA in principle, but refuse to commit to it in their strategies*”.

Hungary

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserts that its recently concluded Foreign Policy Strategy is 'values-based'; among these values are human rights, specifically civil and political rights²¹. It is a relatively easy step for officials to express “*certain[ty] that human rights will be the guiding principle of the new development strategy*” and for the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, speaking at MRG Europe's concluding conference to argue that “*linking up human rights and development is essential to achieving efficient, inclusive and sustainable development*”²². Gender is part of the package of core values, though the issue is said to receive less sophisticated attention than in Poland. The Department of Development Cooperation welcomes the profile which MRG Europe has given to women's rights in its advocacy.

Some officials talk of the HRBA as “*a new dimension in our way of thinking of international development cooperation*”, but others contend that the HRBA is not new to the Ministry. This suggests that it is not clear how far nuanced understanding of the HRBA, as opposed to generalised support for human rights, has permeated official discourse. MRG Europe itself admits that “*it is questionable whether they understand how it works in practice and how they can implement it*”.

At one level, it may not matter whether officials have the degree of understanding that MRG Europe would ultimately need from them if they remain engaged and open to further exchange likely to deepen their knowledge and experience. That the State Secretary came to the concluding conference is itself a good sign, a suggestion of more backing and potentially more space for exploration of how Hungary can employ the HRBA.

However, officials have a get-out clause in their responses to MRG Europe's advocacy in the level of

²⁰ Results-Oriented Monitoring summary report, page 1.

²¹ *Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*; pages 3-4.

– ²² Zsolt Németh, speech to the conference, *Reflections on the Presidency experiences and the future of development policy*, September 2011; transcribed from MRG Europe video-recording of the event.

funding assigned to international development, with one official claiming that “*Hungary cannot have a serious development policy. We learned of the HRBA which MRG is suggesting, we completely agree with it, but objective circumstances do not allow us to implement it in our daily policy-making*”. NGO respondents agree that “*the basic political context is very difficult... As individuals, [Ministry officials] may believe in what is in the strategy, but they cannot implement it. They are hamstrung by the limits of what they can do themselves... it is not obvious yet that [advocacy on the HRBA] will convert into concrete change in policy*”.

In terms of the openness of the Ministry to focus more on the global South, the picture is similar: there is no particular hostility, but there are question marks about the depth of rhetorical commitments. The Foreign Policy Strategy asserts that Hungary “*must acknowledge the dynamics of growing appreciation in international life of regions which enjoyed less prominence in our diplomatic relations*” in spite of continued financial constraints²³. It is possible that an intent to build a new development strategy around a higher proportion of aid spent bilaterally may act as a motor for increased links with the South, while the new strategy itself would (presumably) go some way to addressing the concern that “*the Ministry does not understand what its role could be in Africa*”. But there is scepticism as to how committed – or how able – the Ministry is to focus more on Africa and the wider South, with one politically-connected ally claiming that “*the government does not believe that the South is very important*”.

This gap between rhetoric and reality in Hungarian policy is a reflection of the wider context more than the project. The crucial point is made by a partner, for whom, “*by Hungarian standards, the MRG project was successful*” in catalysing or deepening support for the HRBA, reiterating the importance of measuring results against a reasonable assessment of what is possible. In a political context which is not progressive, signs of movement towards greater understanding of, and support for, MRG Europe's positions become more laudable than in a situation where the tide of political opinion flows in favour of those positions. The questions now are whether more substantive policy advances are dependent on influencing the wider political context which currently places a ceiling on the extent to which policy can evolve in line with MRG Europe's goals and hence on what role MRG Europe should play to that end.

Poland

In comparison with Hungary and Cyprus, Poland offers the most favourable grounds for policy influence and movement towards MRG's objectives. Its development policy is more advanced and coherent and there is openness to human rights and gender. The comments of representatives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate a high degree of rhetorical support for the HRBA²⁴. The Ministry's new Multi-

²³ *Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*; 2011, page 38. There is acknowledgement of the valuable role played by Hungarian NGOs in the admission that ties between Hungary and Africa fell away after 1989 due to the concentration of foreign policy on other priorities: “*Although it could not entirely substitute governmental or diplomatic activism, Hungarian civil society did counterbalance the shortcomings to some degree through its uninterrupted activity and interest in the values, problems and inherent potentials of Africa*”; *ibid*, page 48.

²⁴ For example, Marek Ziolkowski, then-Head of the Department of Development Cooperation “*recognized the importance of human rights in development cooperation and acknowledged that the MDGs could be better achieved*”

annual Plan does not reference the HRBA explicitly, but officials argue that it is recognised as an underlying or cross-cutting principle which will be worked into annual plans and used as a criterion for assessing funding proposals²⁵. That MRG Europe's Guide will be sent to embassies in states where Poland runs development projects is at least a gesture of interest and potentially a signal to field staff to refine delivery and oversight of projects.

On gender as well, there is support in principle. The Ministry is said to be considering a specific call for proposals on gender, which is already an aspect of work in some countries. Again though, NGOs are disappointed that references to gender in the Multi-annual Plan are limited. MRG Europe itself is content that there is commitment at the policy level and so argues for the next step of situating an approach to gender within a wider HRBA framework.

The crux again is how to measure the seriousness of the Ministry's intentions. As in Hungary, there is, from the NGO side, some uncertainty as to whether the Ministry quite understands the HRBA or quite means what it says in support of it. One NGO lobbyist "*believes in the Ministry's sincerity when it says that the HRBA is coming in, but they lack understanding and conflate the HRBA with human rights... [However,] we cannot expect them to change overnight, it needs time*". Others are less inclined to give the Ministry the benefit of the doubt, given the way that the consultation process on the Multi-annual Plan was concluded [see the following section on *Relationships between governments and development NGOs*].

At least one Ministry official has reacted against NGOs' reaction to the consultation process, arguing that "*it is quite optimistic to have thought that [NGOs' engagement in discussion on the Plan] would have [more of] an effect*". This may endorse the notion, accepted by only some NGOs, that more time is needed for NGO advocacy to filter through into policy. But the suggestion too is that influence is more decisive when it comes via the Commission or other donors, raising the challenge to MRG Europe as to whether it has a grip on wider influencing processes and whether it can apply other indirect pressure on targeted new member state governments. There is support for this view in the comment that, as well as examples of how the HRBA can be applied in practice, the Ministry would benefit from a clear expression of the political reasons for applying it, that is, the positions and example of other donors which Poland looks towards.

There is agreement among NGOs that introducing a cycle of multi-annual planning is itself a good thing. While the Ministry may need to be looked upon with an attitude of 'healthy scepticism' until there are more tangible signs of actual application of the HRBA, its verbal commitment to employing the HRBA at the operational level represents an opening for MRG Europe and its partners to follow through.

by the HRBA"; Interim Narrative Report to the European Commission, May 2011, page 12.

²⁵ The project was described by one official as being "*very useful and timely*" in relation to the period when the Plan was being developed. However, this seems a fortunate coincidence more than anything else: the project was linked to the Polish Presidency, which was not a trigger for, or connected to, the development of the Plan.

The likelihood of Poland focusing its development cooperation on the global South is limited. It is apparent that the country is intent on preserving its specific comparative advantage on the 'eastern neighbourhood' states and is quite forceful in asserting the rationale and legitimacy of doing so. Recent interest in North Africa is an extension of Poland's prioritisation of states undergoing some form of democratic transition, rather than a first step in geographic realignment. Excluding resources provided via the European Development Fund and thinking only of the funds which Poland controls directly, neither NGOs nor the Ministry would seem to disagree with the analysis that money for the global South is capped at the level of the necessary minimum to meet Poland's obligations.

The project is not perceived by targets as having made much of the importance of directing aid to the global South. This chimes with MRG Europe's soft approach in Poland of talking of the HRBA with examples from the global South, but without making this a prominent part of advocacy. There is no sense that the project's focus on 'the developing countries of the South' has undermined its aims around the HRBA: the Ministry does not see the HRBA as a Trojan Horse attacking the eastern orientation of its development cooperation.

The premise remains sound that illustrating the case for the HRBA with examples from the South and facilitating contact with practitioners and development experts from the South can gradually open the Ministry to the possibility of altering the proportion of aid directed beyond the eastern neighbours. In the short-term, any expansion of Polish aid to the global South is likely to be limited and piecemeal, perhaps the result of new, emerging transition processes in countries like Zimbabwe or Malawi.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the scope for policy impact is limited. Few staff are dedicated to development cooperation in the government of Cyprus and there is little evidence to contest MRG Europe's own assertion that "*the level of knowledge about the HRBA was very low among decision makers*"²⁶. That Cypriot development cooperation is delegated to other EU donors has had the effect, however, of focusing advocacy on the legitimacy of this approach itself, rather than on the merits of the HRBA. For one line of thinking, there is no Cypriot policy for NGOs to influence, with the effect that, for one partner, "*the HRBA is very difficult to sell in Cyprus*". Taking the introduction of the HRBA to depend on Cyprus developing its own programmes and more clearly articulating a development strategy is making demands of a different nature than the policy changes sought in Poland and Hungary (even if the HRBA is treated nowhere as a 'simple' policy change, but as an overarching framework). The Cypriot Ministry is, by consequence, more uncomfortable with MRG Europe's position, arguing that it is "*blaming Cyprus for not having its own programmes*". This may be MRG Europe's position and it may be what is necessary to achieve its goals, but there could be more that MRG Europe could have done to engage with the issue of how the HRBA can be used as a criterion in Cyprus' choice of other donors' projects to fund, given the Ministry's claim that it applies the HRBA already through funding of SIDA and Irish Aid projects²⁷. Getting the

²⁶ *Interim Narrative Report to the European Commission*, May 2011, page 17.

²⁷ The Guide does argue that "*there is an urgent need for the development of formal and effective tools for project and programme selection. The development of such project and programme appraisal tools would provide an excellent*

government to overhaul its basic approach of delegated cooperation, even to adopt a more coherent policy framework, can be assumed to demand a long-term process of engagement which MRG Europe and its partners will need to be confident that they are ready for.

Summary of findings: there are signs of changes in understanding among policy-makers, such as greater realisation that the HRBA is something deeper and more involved than a general support for human rights in development policy. Outside experts feel that “at first, new member state policy-makers were not so into [the HRBA], but on sharing examples, they came to understand what it is about”. By the end of the project, officials have become more confident about talking of the HRBA publicly. Some are said to be “speaking the language of the HRBA”²⁸. Demand has been created for MRG Europe resources.

The test is how significant and self-sustaining these indications of interest and support prove to be. Prospects vary in each country. Across all three, there are limits as to what can be expected in the way of achievements from a project of this length. There is a strong onus on what happens next. Assessing the project now is one thing, but its full value will be determined by how it is followed up and whether signs of progress made to date are steps towards something more substantial or gestures which do not convert into significant change.

Relationships between governments and development NGOs

The impression of MRG Europe and its partners is that holding the Presidency encourages governments to seek out NGOs and to show themselves to their European Union peers to be more open to civil society. In Hungary, one NGO contact reports that “during the Presidency period, the government [was] more open for discourse and collaboration”, noting that “this [was] the first time when actually the government initiate[d] collaboration (mainly joint events, or organization of civil side event during the official presidency events)”²⁹. In Cyprus too, a public sector which had been essentially closed to NGOs has opened itself to discussion on the priorities of the upcoming Presidency.

The issue becomes whether increased engagement before and during a Presidency is sustained. In the case of Hungary, interpretations vary and it is perhaps too soon to say whether a definitive change in attitude has occurred. It is apparent that the Ministry is at least rhetorically committed to consulting with NGOs, with one official claiming to have an “open-door policy” and another clear that “consultation with NGOs is regular, ongoing, vital... it allows us to be in touch with the field. Civil society has sensibilisation [knowledge] that an institution cannot have, so there is mutual benefit from the

opportunity for the integration of HRBA principles. This, in turn, would allow Cyprus’s aid to be coherent, transparent and effective”; page 38, *Integration of the human-rights-based approach into development policies: A guide for the new EU Member States*; September 2011.

²⁸ Witness Lilla Makkay, Head of the Department for International Development, Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speaking at the EDD: “it is of crucial importance to promote the capacity of rights-holders to identify, claim and exercise their HR and to promote capacity of duty-bearers to fulfil rights”; transcribed from MRG Europe video-recording of the event.

²⁹ *Interim Narrative Report to the European Commission*, May 2011, page 21.

*relationship*³⁰. Some civil society representatives respond positively to this rhetoric and MRG Europe also believes that a threshold has been passed by which policy-makers have accepted the value of talking to NGOs. Others retain a degree of scepticism and want to see more in the way of outcomes from engaging with policy-makers before they would concur that the Ministry really has changed.

The situation is similar in Cyprus, albeit from a starting point of minimal contact between the government and NGOs; in this context, any process to involve NGOs is a step in the right direction. For an outside observer, increased interaction between the government and NGOs is the key result in Cyprus: under a logic that *“the process was as important as the outcome”*, advances in process represent a signal that positive outcomes may be won in the future. Cypriot partners agree that *“the project made the link between NGOs and government, it gave us the opportunity to meet and discuss with the government”*. The same respondent is explicit about the role of MRG Europe: *“MRG as a partner made the government talk to us”*. Again, there is not unanimity about how seriously any shift in attitude and access is to be considered. Other NGO representatives argue that there is further to go to institutionalise dialogue. As with Hungary, these differences in interpretation reflect that the situation is fluid; more time is needed to show how decisive a change has been made. NGOs have their role to play in continuing to show themselves useful in the inputs that they make.

In commenting that *“we sometimes get meetings, but that’s where influence ends”*, a Cypriot ally puts her finger on the central challenge in engaging in dialogue with government: do the results in terms of policy change justify the investment of time and energy in a formal or informal consultation process. This challenge is most acute in Poland, where *“rich consultations”* on a new Multi-annual Plan bore few fruit in terms of the Plan’s final content. Positive links were forged, but the final stage of consultation – when a draft was presented with little opportunity for comment – served to sour these relationships. That the approval of the Plan was linked to the release of Ministry funds for development projects is interpreted by some NGOs as effective blackmail³¹; the effect has been to cast an even darker shadow on the consultation than the limited results in terms of policy would alone have engendered. The Ministry itself still uses positive language about NGOs, with one official adamant that it remains the position that *“NGOs play a key role in shaping the development priorities of the MFA”*. Another argues that *“the MFA’s intent to engage and consult is definitely there”*.

NGOs’ reaction to this consultation process may be to retreat to purely formal dialogue, cutting their losses on wider lobbying felt to bring insufficient returns. This may be appropriate if NGOs are confident that their disgruntlement is based on a realistic view as to what can be expected from consultations of this sort. There is a risk of wasting time in dialogue which leads nowhere in terms of policy outcome, but also of disengaging because expectations of outcomes are out of line with political realities. The

³⁰ The government’s new foreign policy strategy paper also asserts that *“the MFA intends to intensify cooperation and dialogue with the non-governmental public actors... The common foreign policy goals of governmental and non-governmental actors form the Hungarian foreign policy consensus. Mapping out this consensus through dialogue as well as cooperation along those lines could improve the efficiency of realising the common goals”*; *Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*; page 55.

³¹ This may have been a cock-up rather than a conspiracy, a case of not having foreseen all of the impacts of applying the new Development Law.

question is how much truth there is in the government official's assertion that “NGOs hoped for more than could have been done. The Ministry has many restraints. The Development Department proposes something, but those higher-up decide. NGOs need to realise that”. The key would be to ensure that the recent experience with the Multi-annual Plan does not cloud NGOs' decision-making in this regard. For MRG Europe and its Polish partners, that the Ministry initiated the February 2012 workshop on the HRBA represented a new, more positive signal. Such events in which NGOs are invited to provide training to officials are rare, so for one ally, the fact of the workshop being held is “a big success”, one which was testament to MRG Europe's persistence and clout.

That the Ministry is itself a little embarrassed by the process of consulting on the Multi-annual Plan represents an opportunity for cool-headed NGOs to exploit, a case of matching the spirit shown by one official: “the last process was less than ideal, but both sides need to learn from it”.

Increased cooperation among governments of new member states

Representatives of the target governments are open to greater exchange with their counterparts in other new member states, but the project has not succeeded in deepening these sorts of relationship to any great extent. Hungarian officials are said to have regular contact with their Cypriot peers, including to discuss the process of formulating and the content of Presidency agenda. Contact between Poland and Hungary on development cooperation is said to be conducted by the states' respective Permanent Representations in Brussels. Differences in political perspective may limit the scope for cooperation between the two CEE states, although as part of the Visegrad 4, there is some common programming relating to Eastern Partnership aid.

Holding the EU Presidency does not seem to have been a decisive driver for closer cooperation. The project has enabled some contacts across new member states and also allowed for sharing experiences from old member states. The hope that target governments will “initiate joint working practices with other governments of the new EU member states in order to coordinate their activities in the developing countries”³² remains an aspiration, however. Even from within the project it is acknowledged that “among [new member state] decision-makers there is less exchange... they say that they know everyone, but there is no meaningful exchange”.

Strengthened NGO capacity to advocate on southern development issues

From a low starting point of understanding, the proportional advances made by Cypriot NGOs in terms of capacity are likely to have been correspondingly great and are directly attributable to MRG Europe. MRG Europe has facilitated Cypriot NGOs' access to policy papers produced as inputs to Presidency agenda in other new member states – a role which long-standing European networks such as Concord and Trialog had not provided. MRG Europe also claims that its advisory and capacity-building role has covered the tone as much as the content of advocacy, encouraging a less oppositional tone. In addition

³² Project proposal, *From Needs to Rights: Promoting More Effective Development Policies in Europe*, page 19.

to direct inputs to advocacy, involvement in the project is said to have helped expand project management experience through observation of how MRG Europe went about things.

There is less that MRG Europe can do to affect the politicised nature of interaction between NGOs and the government, rooted in attitudes towards the division of the country. The project has enabled contact between NGOs in the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot community, but usually between groups already connected. For one NGO representative, collaboration may also remain fairly superficial: *“as is common in Cyprus, there are some meetings and trainings [between groups from the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot community], but nothing more than that... but that is not a problem of the project”*.

Engagement with MRG Europe on the HRBA has meant that some Cypriot NGOs work on development when they did not do so before. Others have refined their existing approaches. One NGO which attended MRG Europe's training event additionally talks of applying the HRBA to other, non-development programmes.

For outside commentators, however, the knowledge of Cypriot NGOs remains less than that of their CEE colleagues, with one considering that Cypriot campaigners seemed *“nervous about talking of some issues for fear of being shown up”*. And while Cypriot NGOs aspire to continued engagement on development, this remains dependent on further changes in government attitude towards the role of NGOs in policy formulation and, in the case of the Turkish Cypriot groups, changes in the political dispensation such that they have a stake in Republic of Cyprus policy.

In CEE – and also in Lithuania – NGOs anyway seem comfortable with human rights discourse. For one project partner, *“the intuitive feeling of NGOs is that they use the HRBA already so there is not much need to be advocating [towards NGOs]”*. The same respondent does highlight how the project has broadened and deepened knowledge through providing *“tools and methods so that the HRBA can be applied in the right and complete way”*.

Other views of NGO capacities are inclined to put more emphasis on these gaps in practical experience and understanding of the full scope and complexity of the HRBA. In Poland, it is felt that *“the concept is still not well understood, it is not yet mainstream among NGOs”*. But here too the project has made a difference, increasing NGOs' knowledge, confidence and inclination to advocate on the HRBA.

While the project has as its intended result increased NGO advocacy capacity, it is logical that NGOs which themselves deliver development projects would come to reflect the HRBA in their own programming. This is important in its own right, while the failure of NGOs to synchronise their advocacy messages on the HRBA with their own practice lays them open to a charge of inconsistency and weakens the case they are putting to policy-makers. Policy-makers certainly notice whether NGO proposals for government development funds are centred on the HRBA and it is an easy – and essentially legitimate – argument for governments to highlight situations where NGOs do not 'practice

what they preach'.

Among NGOs involved in the project, there is an acknowledgement that “*people working in education, and communications are disconnected from the field. If you win over staff from the former, there is still more to do to win over [people from] the latter. Advocacy people do not address the minutiae of applying the HRBA in practice, so field staff can see the HRBA as something which is too abstract*”. In smaller Cypriot NGOs, it appears easier to 'join the dots' between advocacy and programmes; here one NGO talks of the effect of the project's training interventions on their own programmes: “*when writing proposals, we try to think of the HRBA, especially the concepts of rights-holders and duty-bearers*”. In at least one Hungarian NGO, development projects have become fewer in number and shorter-term in scope. The HRBA is not being considered in decisions on funding because “*project panels are not at the level of incorporating the HRBA in the type of project currently being focused on*”. This may raise the question of whether current guidance on the HRBA is flexible enough to suit even small-scale interventions.

Summary of findings: among Cypriot NGOs, MRG Europe has contributed to building knowledge and understanding of development in general and the HRBA in particular almost from scratch. In Hungary and Poland, it has helped nuance NGOs' understanding. There is further to go before the HRBA and a southern focus to development advocacy is mainstreamed among concerned NGOs across the three states. An indicator of this will be if NGOs with development programmes bring these into line with the HRBA.

Conclusions and recommendations

This project has delivered a series of well-received outputs as the raw materials for effective, professional advocacy. The project has acted as a resource to policy-makers, with MRG Europe positioning itself as a partner of governments. But success depends on policy-makers having the authority to instigate and implement changes in policy and practice. The conclusion from this project – which MRG Europe has itself largely reached already – is that insider engagement of policy-makers is a necessary, but not sufficient step to achieving MRG Europe's goals.

Tied to the hook of the EU Presidency, the project has benefited from the greater inclination of governments to look for NGO input while taking on this role. But the focus on three states holding or coming to hold the Presidency has reduced continuity with the preceding project and obliged MRG Europe to itself re-do preparatory tasks of intelligence-gathering and relationship-building.

The *ad hoc* approach to partnership employed in this project has meant that national organisations' knowledge has arguably been under-used. Without partners being involved in project design and with limited funding to give them a strong stake in the project, MRG Europe has done much itself to deliver activities directly. But the effect has been to reduce partners' buy-in and the likelihood of them remaining committed to future advocacy.

Outcomes across the three states have been capped by the limits of what is possible, whether as a consequence of budget constraints (Hungary) or a policy of delegated cooperation which avoids responsibility for content of programmes (Cyprus). Policy-makers are receptive to the HRBA, but how committed they are to it is still open to question. There is little progress, especially in Poland, on the issue of greater prioritisation of the global South in development programming.

NGOs in Poland were somewhat wrong-footed by extensive consultations on a Multi-annual Plan reaping few returns in terms of the Plan's content. This experience has, among Polish development NGOs, acted as a brake on the trend applying across new member states towards greater interaction between government and civil society.

The project has boosted NGO knowledge and understanding across the three states. Its capacity-building interventions in Cyprus have been especially important. In this regard, as well as in terms of progress on policy, the value of this project is dependent on what comes next. The benefits accruing will diminish if they are not capitalised upon.

Summary of impact and attribution / contribution³³

	Hungary	Poland	Cyprus
Policy outcomes	x	xx	x
NGO capacity-building impact	x	x	xx
Contribution of MRG Europe	xx	xx	xxx

The project proposal works on the basis that sustainability will be derived from the new relationships formed between new member states' governments and between governments and NGOs; the enhanced capacities of partner NGOs; and the shelf-life of project materials. MRG Europe argues that it has put itself (and its partners) in a strong position to apply influence if / when the political context becomes more favourable in the targeted states. The new project, if awarded funds, would seek to address this wider context as well as to continue to engage with policy-makers. Government officials in more than one country endorse the notion of stepping up the mobilisation of Parliamentarians. It will be important that MRG Europe is not spread too thinly in following-up this project, but is able to target its interventions efficiently at actors with an influence on the overall direction which key Ministries take. In turn, this puts an onus on the quality of political intelligence, as well as on links into the media³⁴.

The intent to found the new project on a more equal partnership should allow partners to feel more empowered and give them a greater stake in the project. The total capacity – intelligence, clout, contacts etc. – available would be correspondingly greater. In order that the seeds effectively planted in

³³ Where x = a limited degree of progress or a limited contribution of MRG Europe, xxx = important progress or clear contribution of MRG Europe and xx falls in between.

³⁴ A second new project – also at the concept note stage – would, if funded, play a complementary role in influencing the wider context by “*increas[ing] awareness among development policy-makers of the specific needs of minority and indigenous communities in developing countries via increased & improved media coverage*”; Concept note, *Minority Realities in the News*, page 13.

this project can come to bear fruit, it is important that continuity between this current project and any future project is stronger than between this project and that which preceded it.

Recommendations

Project design and approach to partnership

- In projects of this nature, MRG Europe (or whichever part of MRG is leading on design) should review the balance of roles which it itself performs and those which it devolves to partners. Aspects to this should include:
 - involving partners more in project conception and design;
 - accepting MRG (Europe)'s role as less controlling and more facilitating / coordinating.
- as an extension of this, ensure greater clarity in the design of projects as to what the role of partners equates to in terms of the level of input and investment of resources expected.
- to cope with variations in national context, establish specific goals for different countries to reflect what is realistic and achievable in each and, as part of this, draw up key indicators to allow for closer monitoring during a project and later evaluation against this baseline. These indicators should relate more to the qualitative changes in policy or capacity which MRG Europe seeks than quantitative assessment of activities which logical frameworks focus on.

Securing sustainable policy change

- provide further support to policy-makers to cement advances in knowledge and understanding of, and support for, the HRBA. To this end, consider the development of outputs which
 - provide examples of the HRBA applied in practice;
 - position the HRBA as a means to achieve gender-differentiated development outcomes;
 - demonstrate the support for the HRBA among other key institutions, especially donors which new member states' Ministries tend to look upon as examples (e.g. SIDA, DfID).
- look to influence the wider political context in which decisions on development policy are taken, including, for example, through strategic mobilisation of Parliamentarians as champions.
- to capitalise on local political intelligence and contacts and to expand the resources applied to pro-HRBA advocacy, use partners to foster a broader base of support for the HRBA in target countries. MRG Europe can play a supportive role, including in the delivery of further capacity-building activities.

Annex: list of interviewees

Name	Position	Organisation	Country
Canan Öztoprak	General manager	Turkish Cypriots Human Rights Foundation	Cyprus
Emmanuela Lambrianides	Head of Secretariat, Secretariat of Cyprus EU Presidency. Formerly Senior Coordination Officer, Planning Bureau, Department of Economics and Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs		Cyprus
Lorraine Marriott	Programme Manager	NGO Support Centre	Cyprus
Nadia Karayianni	President	Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Joint NGO Platform (CYNDEP)	Cyprus
Niovi Georgiades	Officer	Secretariat of Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU	Cyprus
Barbara Erős	Strategic Programme Officer	Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights (DemNet)	Hungary
Beata Szentvári	Policy Officer, CODEV and ACP	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Hungary
Bernadett Marton-John	Deputy Head of Department	Strategic Planning Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Hungary
Ildikó Szilasi		African Hungarian Union	Hungary
Lilla Makkay and Adám Kirchknopf	Head and Deputy Head of Department	Department for International Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Hungary
Péter Morenth	Co-President (until Jan 2012)	Hungarian Africa Platform	Hungary
Zita Gurmai	MEP	Hungarian Socialist Party	Hungary
Neil Clarke	Head of Europe and Central Asia Programmes, Managing Director of MRG Europe	Minority Rights Group Europe	
Zsófia Farkas	Human Rights and Development Officer	Minority Rights Group Europe	
Agata Czapliska	Deputy Director	Department for Implementation of Development Programmes, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Poland
Aneta Kedziora	Head of Department	Department for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Poland
Izabela Wilczynska	Advocate	Polish Humanitarian Action	Poland
Jan Hofmokl	Ministerial advisor on development cooperation	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Poland
Kordian Kochanowicz	Consultant / trainer	Institute for Global Responsibility	Poland
Marta Wytrykowska	Gender and human rights advisor	Department for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Poland
Monika Matus	Policy Officer	Zagranica Group	Poland
Paweł Bigiński	Open Europe Program Director	Stefan Batory Foundation	Poland
Nele Meyer	Policy Officer	Amnesty International EU Office	Belgium

Aurele Destree	Policy Officer	Global Policy Institute	Czech Republic
Esther Somoire	Founder	Centre for Indigenous Women and Children	Kenya
Vaidotas Ilgius	Director	Lithuanian Development NGO Platform	Lithuania
Helena Lagerlof	Policy Specialist Human Rights and Democracy	Department for Policy Support, SIDA	Sweden
Maxi Ussar	Consultant		UK
Levente Nyitrai	Foreign Policy, Justice, Home Affairs and Human Rights Attaché	British Embassy, Budapest	UK