Evaluation for Minority Rights Group Europe on a programme funded by the European Union's EIDHR

The South Asia Collective

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[The above graphic shows the Facebook Page of SAC found at https://thesouthasiacollective.org/]

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July 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Headlines:

- The programme achieved its DAC objectives, and was particularly strong on relevance to need
- This was despite a challenging pandemic context
- Quantitative scoring of all stakeholders was consistently high, often surpassing the high results of the baseline research. MRG was very strongly seen as 'expert' (88.8%), a 'positive force' (93.6%) and 'open to criticism' (93.6%)
- SAC is unique in the region and should be supported
- SAC may usefully extend its readership/audience by shorter reports and using new and traditional media
- SAC/MRG subgrants were successful, providing much-needed reach to grassroots
- Partnership and networking are key; in Sri Lanka, a national advocacy campaign might boost this
- Greater cost : benefit multi-stakeholder strategic planning and clearer roles between programme stakeholders would be beneficial for future programmes
- Attention should be given to ensure that researchers' work is used, not just published. Research that is applied and pre-planned in consultation could help project advocacy and networking.
- Capacity work has been highly valued by HRDs. This strengthens their rights' monitoring, ability to provide authoritative research and advocacy and provides knowledge and networks which bolster their ability to protect themselves and FoRB communities in South Asia.
- The EU's EIDHR achieved good value-for-money; future budgets should be increased.

Summary Duration, Cost, Context and Activities: The programme ran from January 2019 to January 2022. It brought together, with full collaboration, an existing regional network – the South Asia Collective (SAC) of researchers, activists and organisations tracking minority rights since 2015 – with three established research and advocacy organisations. It resulted in regional network building, authoritative research, support for partners to engage in targeted advocacy and support for HRDs under threat. The programme was conducted throughout the peak COVID era. Only two physical partners' meetings were possible; in Kathmandu in 2019, and in Colombo in 2020, 'which definitely will have detracted from progress for that objective; virtual meetings are really not as good especially where distrust and vulnerability to state interference are a factor'. As always for Human Rights Defenders, security was an issue, as evidenced by this text box from Nepal, showing dedication and fear at community level. Although some project partners were harassed, none made any request for long-distance security support from MRG, an absence also noted in the latest baseline research; HRDs know their own context and can be relied upon within country teams to navigate it. The scope was smaller than that of the evaluation team's 2021 FoRB Research and the 2020 Global Research, but draws on the results of both studies as baseline. The programme engaged 7 partners, 32 sub-grantees, 9 researchers and had a total budget of 494K euros. Research grants were 5k euro for minority women and 1.5k euro for 'policy briefs'. The first report in 2019 was launched in Colombo on refugees and statelessness. The second for 2020 focused on 'Minorities and Shrinking Civic Space' and particularly noted progress in networking and the publication of authoritative reports. SAC and MRG, launched a sub-grant programme to fund short-term projects that examined and addressed the specific issues that South Asia's minorities have been facing, many adapted to the COVID-19 context from 2020. A total of 30

initiatives were identified to receive assistance from the SAC and MRG, across 6 countries over the three-year project. The third report covered Nov 2020-Oct 2021, and preceded the crowning publication 'South Asia State of Minorities Report 2021: Hate Speech against Minorities' referred to throughout this report. A high-level closure event was held in January 2022 with a high-level moderator Aakar Patel[1], high-level keynote speaker Hina Jilani[2] and limited participants (191 people registered, peak participation of 91, and 69 at the end).

Envisaged Results for the project were to strengthen the capacity of a regional researchers' and activists' network to monitor incidents, trends, and patterns of FoRB violations; produce and publish authoritative reports; and carry out linked advocacy to combat religious discrimination, intolerance and violence, and improve protection of FoRB in South Asia.

The objectives of this final evaluation were: (i) Assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the project towards objectives and outputs, providing MRGE with an opportunity to learn from programme design and implementation processes (ii) Provide recommendations for future and continued MRGE and its partners activities. (iii) To report to the EU and other funders on the use of their resources.

Findings: To the questionnaires, trainees and partners responded very positively; results found fully in Appendix One even exceeded the exceptionally high scores of researchers' previous global stakeholders in two studies. Scores were commonly in the 90% and 80% range. The main preoccupation of researchers was that MRG should: more closely collaborate with government institutions in order to influence policies; conduct more research and study on religious freedom; and facilitate coordination of the CSOs and stakeholders. Partners, Allies and Influencers sought greater support and investment in regional efforts with strong coordination and an information base for advocacy and Investment in young people and social media. Subgrantees were concerned about the sustainability of impact. As in the baseline research, the scale of funding was questioned, both on the overall grant of 494K euro, and the size of small grants of 1-5k euro.

More detailed findings are offered from Sri Lanka, to which a visit was afforded. Rather than unbalance the report, the Team decided to write up Sri Lanka mostly as one block starting here from Background to Recommendations, and then offer edited Sri Lanka recommendations with those for all six countries at the end of the report here.

In the Appendix here statistics and qualitative comments, HRDs have highly valued the programme's capacity inputs which have directly improved their rights; monitoring, ability to contribute to authoritative research and advocacy and support FoRB protection. All participants endorsed MRG as an organization, and described the programme as reliable, professional and useful in helping people who had suffered FoRB discrimination. A call was made for increased networking and coordination. Suggested improvements of KIIs were around boosting readership/impact, building on MRG's recent concentration on 'in-house' social media. This is even more marked in the new SAC structure, where long, important academic reports and highly organised events featuring eminent names do not receive

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[1] Chair, Amnesty International, India, syndicated columnist, author of 'A study of majoritarianism in India & Pakistan (Westland, 2020), 'Price of the Modi Years', a history of India after 2014 (Westland, 2021)

[2] Lawyer, human-rights activist in Pakistan; founder of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Women's Action Forum, ex-UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders; member of the Eminent Jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights

the audiences they deserve. An expected goal of SAC reports is to 'encourage public debate' but this is impossible unless large numbers of people read them, and discussion about them attracts significant audiences. There is a long way to go to consistently achieve better 'reach', beginning with consistently monitoring that reach. Some recommendations are made on the importance of addressing 'hot topics'. Overall, the importance of SAC is emphasized. Not only is it the only cross-border body of its kind in South Asia, SAC has functioned as an independent entity for several years before this intervention, and now remains independent and alive on a voluntary basis afterwards. The challenge has been and remains to allow SAC to broaden its base and to some extent professionalise. This requires sensitive funding. without destroying sustainability (a real risk, successfully avoided to date). The findings call for continued dialogue and support.

Conclusion: Overall, initial results suggest that the programme has been well-received and produced positive results for participants and end-users, suggesting a platform for continuing the development of the SAC as a catalyst for change, with important modifications on boosting readership and influence, and on the management of sub-grants.

Recommendations are [here](#).

ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS

This lists more unfamiliar and key short-cuts; most acronyms are spelled out once in the body of text:

CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
EU:	European Union
EIDHR:	EU financial instrument/budget line/donor to promote democracy and HR worldwide
FoRB:	Freedom of Religion or Belief
HR:	Human Rights
HRD:	Human Rights Defender
KI:	Key Informant
KII:	Key Informant Interview
MRG:	Minority Rights Group (used generically, also adding E for Europe, I for International)
NORAD:	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
SAC:	The South Asia Collective
SSB:	Social Science Baha (Nepal-based partner directly funded by EIDHR)
VDS:	Vidhya Dham Samiti, (India-based partner directly funded by EIDHR since 2021)

EVALUATION CONSULTANCY TEAM

(henceforth 'the Team')

David Hampson (LinkedIn) has intermittently undertaken independent work as a consultant for MRG for over 26 years in 12 roles including work on Global Strategy, Capacity Building, Programme, specific niches such as the Batwa ('Pygmies') and Gender, and on training on participative research. He's served at senior/consultant levels for DFID, UNFAO, IFRC, Oxfam, SAVE, Christian Aid, VSO etc. on the nexus of humanitarian, development and rights' action in 60+ countries.

Ava Batay-an (LinkedIn) is a rights' professional; an Indigenous Person whose early career responded to grassroots disaster and environmental rights concerns. She has since worked with MRG on global strategy and capacity and at senior/consultant levels with CARE, CRS, DFID and VSO. She currently leads WHO's community engagement on COVID-19 Response in the Philippines.

Emma Proux (LinkedIn) is a Master's student in international relations at Sciences Po Bordeaux, France and a researcher on international migration and development with Laval University, Quebec. She has worked on research projects and data reviews for the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) and the YWCA as an intern.

METHODOLOGY

All three members of the evaluation team (henceforth 'the Team') worked on both an MRGI-SIDA Global Organisational Evaluation[3] of February 2020 (henceforth '2020 Global Research') and an MRGE-NORAD Mid-Term Global FoRB evaluation[4] of July 2021 (henceforth '2021 FoRB Research). Those studies were used as a baseline for this '2022 FoRB research' which employed identical questionnaires for both quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis. This approach has its limit and makes no claim to scientific statistical research validity - informants are different people giving opinions on similar but different programmes at different times - but also its strengths of consistency, comparison and simplicity. An identical Timeline exercise to that of the 2020 Global Research was also used in Sri Lanka, again with different participants but critiquing and updating earlier conclusions.

The questionnaire sample, in a smaller programme, was smaller than that of previous baseline research. with a total of 49 email addresses used. The Team provided the questionnaires and MRG sent them out to its participants. Frequent follow-up was required, as initial returns were low with many participants starting but not finishing the 9-minute questionnaire. A reminder email was sent by MRG on 5 April 2022 to 18 subgrantees, 15 partners and 3 researchers. It achieved only two further subgrantee and one partner response. A follow-up was then made from within SAC. A final reminder was sent on 6 May 2022, and resulted in extra responses received as follows: 5 subgrantees; 1 researcher and; 4 partners. The total number of questionnaire respondents was 25 subgrantees; 7 researchers and 8 partners.

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[3] Long-term-evaluation-of-MRG-2012-2018.pdf (minorityrights.org) **MRG-SIDA Capacity Building Programme and MRG's Global Programme 2012-18**

[4] July_Mid_Term_Evaluation_Report_MRG_FoRB_2021_Submitted_Hampson_Proux_Batay-an.pdf (minorityrights.org) 5 MRG Mid-Term Evaluation 2021: "'To learn with the heart and the mind'; Protecting the rights of religious minorities."

The Key Informant Interviews were begun by the Team Leaders' visit to Sri Lanka; over four days between 28 February and 3 March 2021, a total 13 partners were met from 8 CSOs/NGOs/Coalitions, all face-to-face except one person. KIIs were also conducted online with multiple subgrantees, researchers, partners and MRG staff from the other five project countries. Where possible KIIs began with probing into completed questionnaires and then probed hypotheses and potential obstacles to achieving programme goals, on the basis of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, learning and good practice. Further work shaped these into recommendations.

In a highly sensitive context, the Team decided that names and locations of both individuals and organisations would be anonymised unless necessary. Data from questionnaires and interviews is backed up and available on a confidential basis to stakeholders with a legitimate reason to view it, such as the relevant departments of the European Union, SAC and MRG.

BACKGROUND

A: The six countries of South Asia and SAC:

In the programme countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) , hate speech is increasingly used by majority groups against minorities on the basis of religion, ethnicity or linguistic difference. Some of the groups under attack are found, in turn, to be victimising others.

This evaluation does not attempt to provide or reproduce comprehensive background detail on minority rights in the six countries. MRG lists the drivers for hate speech in South Asia here as (i) [misuse of] online platforms (ii) national laws framed as restricting hate speech but used against minorities and (iii) hyper-nationalism by majority groups.

SAC is unique as an independent cross-border collective focusing on minority and FoRB rights. SAC previously functioned as an independent entity before MRG's support, although more than one KI described MRG as the 'mother'. SAC now remains independent and alive on a voluntary basis. Despite the inherent risks of intermittent project-funding with the inevitable consequence of expansion and contraction, SAC has succeeded in surviving and continuing to function, remaining a valid, legitimate player in minority rights, and unique to the South Asia region.

B: A focus on Sri Lanka:

The research afforded a visit by the Team Leader to Sri Lanka to update previous baseline data, maximise previous contacts' willingness to give rich data, and provide in-depth commentary in one country.

1. **Background in Sri Lanka:** is best provided here. Following is a brief summary. Laws meant to protect citizens from violent speech and action in Sri Lanka have long been used to target dissenters, especially from minority communities Under the catch-all slogan 'One Country one law', the extremist Buddhist monk Gnansara have been given State Patronage, involved in

incitement, pardoned and put at the head of a State body. Key issues of 2021 and 2022 have been crackdown on freedom of expression, selective banning of the burqa and forced burials, abuse of regulations on Prevention of Terrorism, 'rehabilitation' of 100s of people, for de-radicalisation.

2. **The SAC report recommendations** are below. These were endorsed by KIs in this Sri Lanka part of the research, and so feed into this report's recommendations; the key questions being 'how?' and 'by whom?'. Some comments are added in square brackets below as possible pointers.

• Lobby national governments to introduce legislation against hate speech in all its forms while playing the role of watchdog against such laws being misused against minorities. [There are seemingly no current plans for effective laws against hate speech in Sri Lanka, only talk of regulating anti-government speech (mis-)using the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). KIIs confirmed that the start of the process for effective laws would seem to be in effective coalition building in civil society]
• Track and analyse the existence and extent of hate speech directed towards minorities and publicise the results through multiple sources. [HashTag Generation currently produces a bi-weekly document, and a Christian partner of the project provides reliable data; again, network creation and strengthening is recommended as a way to replicate, amend and increase the impact of such work]
• Initiate programmes to celebrate diversity working with educational institutions and the media while also targeting the broader society. Further outreach activities could include sustained inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue. [Targeting of broader society will require a simplification of message, and a change of media; video games for Youth provide an example of what can be achieved]
• Pressure media outlets to develop and follow a code of ethics for self-regulation that could contribute to prohibiting hate speech and reporting on speech that could cause harm to one or more groups. [The Verite program provides comments on media ethics, and is putting together a code of ethics. This work should be disseminated throughout civil society, and support enlisted for engagement with media and government and media at all levels]
• Engage in better coordination and collaborative advocacy among civil society actors across borders [The SAC initiative is new, relevant and welcomed. MRG and donors should continue to support the network].

3. **Findings from the Contextual monitoring tool: Sri Lanka Partners' timeline:**

Timeline Methodology: A timeline tool had previously been used in Sri Lanka with MRG's (mostly different) partners in August 2019. before the 16 November 2019 elections which expectedly brought a return to power of the Rajapaksa family. The 2019 tool was used as a baseline, and replicated exactly with twelve staff of six FoRB partners of 2022.
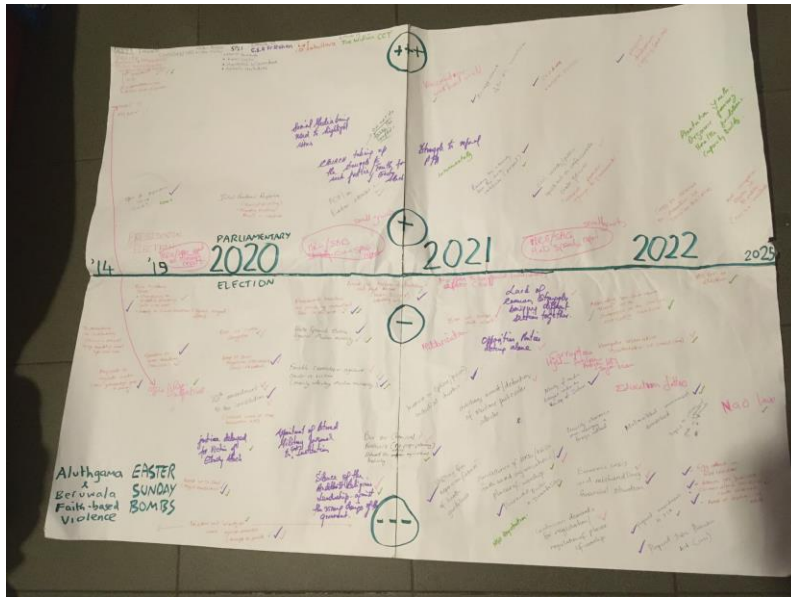
Photo: Timeline tool used in Sri Lanka.

Some of the striking findings in the 'negative section' were: The negative section of 2019 had been strongly characterised by direct negative human rights experiences of people, such as death, widescale abduction disappearance in 'white vans'. rape attacks, land grabs, riots, the Easter Attacks, hate campaigns against Muslims, violence against Evangelical Christians etc, mainly from the previous Rajapaksa regime. In 2022, they are more focused on the ineffectiveness of positive laws or institutions, negative laws such as the 'Prevention of Terrorism' Act or 'NGO laws', general militarization, corruption, education and the current severe economic/financial failures. It was also noted, however, that there had been 'silence of the Buddhist leadership about the wrongdoings of the government', which included several individual human rights cases of detained journalists, a presidential pardon for a politician convicted of murder[5], 'arbitrary arrest/detention of Muslims' accused of the Easter bombings, and surveillance of NGOs. HRDs and demands for registration of places of worship. The most strongly negative comment was about 'inaction and impunity for violence against minorities throughout the period'.

None of the negative 2022 observations were about MRG or the EIDHR-funded FoRB programme.

Timeline Findings: Some of the striking findings in the 'positive section' were: 20 uncontested positive comments[6] were made. 45% of observations in the positive section were of government laws, institutions or actions taken; with two of these from the previous administration (2015-19) and seven from the current administration (namely: initial pandemic response - after which performance was seen as poor with the exception of vaccinations.

A general fear had been expressed by HRDs in 2019 about the predicted Rajapaksas' return to power and an escalation of the 'white van' disappearances. Some HRDs had said that they would disappear from the limelight and back to grassroots community service. Both from the timeline contributions and

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[5] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57608573

[6] Excluding repetitions of vaccine response and campaigns against PTA

KIIs, and notwithstanding both individual human rights abuses of arrest and detention, surveillance, cronyism and impunity for violence against minorities, the worst of these fears have not been fully recognized. There has been no widespread return to the 'white vans'. Reasons given for this varied; that the Rajapaksas (six of whose family members currently hold Cabinet positions) have been overwhelmed by the pandemic and the economy. Youth in particular have been emboldened to mock them in social media taking away the fear factor necessary for concerted repression. A rationale was also given that that the Rajapaksa family wishes to provide evidence for its previous claims that clampdowns on opposition were necessary during a wartime environment which would not be replicated in peacetime. The more blatant violations have reduced, and the crackdowns experienced have been carried out under the label of 'anti-terrorism', whether anti-Muslim using the Easter attacks, or claims of a re-emergence of the 'Tamil Tigers' (LTTE).

Findings of the tool / Neutral: The tool allowed disagreements to rise to the surface. For example, one participant regarded the 2018 establishment of the post-war Office of Reparations as a positive step; another claimed that it had proved 'ineffective'. One participant suggested that the Church had taken up the struggle for justice and truth after the Easter Bombings; whereas another complained that such intervention had been absent during the LTTE-Government conflict, when Tamil rights were curtailed. Some participants called for the repealing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, whereas others qualified this with the adverb 'incrementally'. Overall, however, there was a strong consistency of opinion.

Conclusion from the Timeline exercise:

- The exercise backed up the conclusion found above that the strongest fears of the Rajapaksas' return to power have not been fully realised. Multiple abuses have continued, including individual human rights abuses of arrest and detention, surveillance, cronyism and impunity for violence against minorities,
- Another reason given was a realised common hope from 2019 that civil society would again unify under a new Rajapaksa regime, having become fragmented under the more benign human rights Coalition Government. It appears that this networking has taken place, with room for improvement. Sri Lanka stands out amongst the project countries as not having mounted a coordinated national campaign against hate speech and injustice to minorities. As noted above, there is also much potential for national campaigns on the effect on the vulnerable and minorities of both corruption and the PTA law.
- Discrimination and violence against minorities in Sri Lanka, including hate speech and incitement mostly around elections, are live and grave issues. Although they were not currently seen by KIs as matching the severity suffered in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, there is no complacency. Potential remains for both increased repression and for a more effective counterweight from civil society. However, the 'gulf' between Colombo and the rest of the country is still clear, and civil society's ongoing inability to create the strongest links to the grassroots is still seen as a problem. Little faith was expressed in the ability of opposition political parties to be effective, and the greater responsibility conferred on civil society was repeatedly expressed, with pride taken in those advocacy actions which had been taken.

4. **Findings from Key Informant Interviews in Sri Lanka:**

National campaign: Most target countries of the FoRB program have significant national advocacy campaigns uniting civil society, e.g. #StopHazaraGenocide in Afghanistan, Human Rights Forum

Bangladesh in Bangladesh; Not in My Name, United Against Hate, and Shaheen Bagh Campaigns in India; the Aurat March and Women's Action Forum in Pakistan. There have been smaller advocacy actions by disparate groups in Sri Lanka; for individuals e.g. @Justice4Hejaaz (perhaps a factor for the granting of bail for HRD lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah Hijaz) and '#justice for Easter Sunday'. However, organised civil society has not been the driver or at the centre of these campaigns. Civil society might discuss how to emulate other countries in the program by organizing a national campaign to show strength and unity in the face of closing civil society space; one suggested topic was the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Sri Lanka.

Innovative media and brevity: Talking of the success of a video game on minorities aimed at Youth, one Key Informant from a civil society organization outside the programme had advice for other civil society activists 'Don't be locked into being afraid of different media, newer platforms! Experiment with new forms of social media and engage, fine-tune to a platform. I encourage organisations to try out different platforms, there are newer ways of carrying the message forward; be open to trying out, it opens up [the audience].' Center for Policy Alternatives stated, 'When we do 1-2 pages, people find them more accessible, we get more readers. Also when we work on hot topics such as abortion or women's rights … more than on militarization, which is not seen as an everyday issue... We seek easy access, for example through infographics, and by popularising our message… tagging it onto something that people do find controversial. I was pointed to this article which suggests that 'the swing of public opinion against the constitutional machinations… suggest a degree of resilience of democratic values in Sri Lankan society'.

Traditional grassroots-elite collaboration: SAC in Sri Lanka and elsewhere is mostly a small group of activists with important links to high-level government officials, but weaker links to poorer sections of society. The subgrants and to a lesser extent the research allowed reach and networking to grassroots level, where the harsher consequences of FoRB abuses are enacted. There is much more scope for this, and the Team would encourage SAC (and MRG) to seek funding to this end.

An example of successful significant change:

> 'We said if we {women} are refused access to stand, we ask all voters not to vote. Party political leaders got worried. Finally, 182 women were selected for several parties, and 54 women were selected and are in the Eastern Front, from different parties but in solidarity on women's issues. MRG gave us a first fund from donors we participated.' Source: Logeshwary Ponniah talking of the importance - before and during the programme – of MRG's support to its partner, the Women's Forum

Prioritisation: Sri Lanka played its full part in the Annual Report of SAC, and lead agency Law and Society was instantly recognised by partners as credible and appropriate. However, LST's Dr Sakuntala acknowledged that whilst they had supported Women's Forum and NCEASL, they 'dropped the ball' on some of the small grants, including those of the Ampara Collective, who mentioned that they had not heard from LST or SAC. This also held true for the Center for Society and Religion, who nonetheless achieved impressive results.

An example of the projects successful small grants:

> *Centre for Communication and Training (CCT) witnessed Covid-19 job losses and the frustrated return of youth from Colombo to their origins in the upland Nuwara Eliya tea estate of Hatton. The minimal and short-term (June to August 2020) funding from MRG were constraints. Yet with it, CCT extended its very mandate to provide 129 interactions of technical help in organic gardening (mainly seeds, equipment and liquid fertilizer) and Covid awareness. The project had unexpected positive results in garbage removal, relations with. Estate Management and the Agriculture Department and in social cohesion.   Participant comments included: 'Through this organic farming, plants will grow healthily'; ' 'We can live a healthy life and earn money with satisfaction'; 'This awareness program is very useful for us'; I hope to sell this liquid fertiliser'; 'We will teach others about this liquid fertiliser'.*

SAC-lead agency Law & Society (LST) had also faced budgeting difficulties. Dr Sakuntala explained 'Given the tight deadlines developing the report and the quarterly bulletins for MRG (and all the other projects we had) the expectation to review the small grantees and mentor them was too much. Especially with grantees who are distanced and have more limited research and reporting capacities. I think it is a good idea to support small organisations but in a more meaningful way - give them larger grants, longer timeframes and some structured interventions from us. On programme issues we worked through the SAC [who]... had expansive ideas on what we wanted the programme to look like but the MRG budget was very small. MRG / SAC wanted the report translated into local languages [which] is expensive and [in]sufficiently supported by the budget. We ended up paying for some parts of it…'

As solutions, Dr Sakuntala offered 'MRG should work with SAC to understand what they want to achieve. Transforming attitudes towards religious pluralism does not work simply through such reports. They are useful to document the lived realities but transforming attitudes should reach younger audiences and use other mechanisms of communication… MRG should consider… using social media, audio visual tools and focus on children / youth.

Recommendations for Sri Lanka: NB: The research afforded a visit to Sri Lanka, whose issues could then be covered in more depth. There is no suggestion whatsoever that Sri Lanka is in more need of recommendations than any other country.

The Team concur with all of Dr Sakuntala's views above, and suggest shorter, simpler Reports with less extensive but more targeted research, new marketing through new media and increased prioritisation/organisation of sub-grants and research seen through the lens of cost compared to value-added (henceforth 'cost : benefit')

For Sri Lanka it is recommended that:

- Small grants should continue to be a part of future MRG projects in Sri Lanka. The managing of small grants from SAC did not happen as planned; a review should determine the best way grantees can be supported in future and that partners are better networked.
- Sri Lankan partners, from grassroots to elite might usefully discuss the possibilities of a national pro-minority advocacy campaign in Sri Lanka in the style of other countries (e.g. Support for the

Hazara minority in Afghanistan). Should SAC receive future funding, it may prove to be a useful coordinator of such a campaign, sharing pan-national experiences and lessons.

- Additionally, publications should be shortened and simplified to extend audience and influence
- It is recommended that all Sri Lanka partners reflect on the cost : benefit impact of all aspects of their work. This applies to active engagement with both new and traditional media. Examples (from both within the project actors and beyond) are provided through both innovative methods such as the video games for youth (e.g. of the Centre for Policy Analysis), and more traditional concerted political action linking grassroots and elites (e.g. Women's Forum). Sri Lankan Partners might usefully seek 'hot topics' to connect more influentially with its expanded target audiences and look to increase numbers engaging with the programmes material and meetings.

FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS from the SIX COUNTRIES

Findings and Conclusions from Questionnaires are shown in full in the Appendix, with detailed conclusions after individual results. Summary findings include:

MRG as an organisation: 'a positive force'. On the subject of MRG being regarded as a positive force, subgrantees for this 2022 FoRB Research gave a score of 93.6%, partners from the 2020 Global Research scored MRG at 93.9% and partners from the 2021 FoRB Research scored MRG at 84.4%. Furthermore, researchers from 2022 FoRB Research rated MRG at 93.6%, in comparison to 89.9% rating from trainee respondents from the 2020 Global Research and 79.2% trainee rating from the 2021 FoRB Research. This could be attributed with trainees having less engagement with MRG as opposed to subgrantees and partners who have a longer engagement with MRG. The 2022 results are very positive and show that MRG continues to have a good and sustainable rapport with its subgrantees and partners.

MRG as an organisation: 'open to criticism'. Subgrantees in this FoRB 2022 Research have rated MRG 93.6% on the subject of being 'open to criticism. This shows a similar trend from partners in the 2020 Global Research who rated MRG at 91.25% on this indicator.

MRG as an organisation: 'MRG as an expert'. This FoRB 2022 Research showed a similar rating on MRG being regarded as an expert, where the current report reported a 88.8% rating compared to 87.46% from partners in the 2020 Global Research.

MRG as an organisation: 'able to help its allies to secure funding'. This subject seems to follow a trend of scores showing an average rating of 85.7% from subgrantees in this FoRB 2022 Research. Partners in the 2020 Global Research have shared a similar rating of 81.45%.

Gender participation in the Research. In this FoRB 2022 Research, an explicit request for female participation sent via MRGE improved the gender balance. Out of 40 respondents (partners, researchers and subgrantees), answers were sent by a total of 27 male or 67.5% and 13 female or 32.5%. Respondents from the group of researchers were most evenly balanced by gender, with 57.1% male (4) and 42.9% female (3). Partners had 62.5% male (5) and 37.5% female (3). Subgrantees had the biggest gender imbalance, with 72% male (18) versus 28% female (7).

Completion rate. After great efforts, the survey participation and completion rates were high in comparison to those routinely experienced by NGOs[7], although of course lower than desired by the Team. They were as follows: partners 50%; researchers 63.6% and; subgrantees 54.3%. This result is similar to that of the MRG Mid-term evaluation in 2021 which resulted in 56.27% trainees' completion rate and 44.1% partners' completion rate.

4 of 11 researchers started but did not complete the questionnaire. It is difficult to confidently express a reason for this. It could point to difficulties of technical capacity, to electricity cuts or urgent interruptions, to dissatisfaction with the questionnaire or ties with MRG being strong enough to open, but not strong enough to complete, the questionnaire. This is similar to the findings in the evaluators' 2021 FoRB research in which there were high drop-out rates for both partners and ex-trainees whilst answering the questionnaire.

Evaluators' view on questionnaire results:

The conclusion from the above scores is that all sections of participants from this FoRB programme highly rated MRG and the experience, with very similarly high scores to previously-evaluated programmes.

FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS from KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

- The Covid context was repeatedly brought up in interviews; characteristically, travel restrictions slowed down work. The shift to blended learning created both capacity and connectivity challenges, but brought the ability to connect with mothers who could not have attended face-to-face meetings. MRG internally scaled down its face-to-face meetings to just two in Kathmandu and Colombo which were judged to be richer than online interactions. Networking was believed to be of great importance.

- Alongside MRG, the EIDHR project directly funded two co-applicants – Vidhya Dham Samiti (VDS), in Uttar Pradesh, and Social Science Baha (SSB) (Kathmandu). No issues emerged around the completion of the co-applicants' work. MRGE's connection with VDS[8] and SSB was closer, but a positive working relationship was forged with the remaining members of the SAC.
  It was initially envisaged that Bhutan and the Maldives might be afforded a role in the programme; the FoRB climate dictated otherwise.

- Calls for grants of 1-5,000 euro sub-grants were widely publicised, and allowed acceptable competition. Comments around sub-grants were overwhelmingly positive, except for views about the amounts being lower than optimal. A specific concern was raised on the transparency and communication of subgrants in one country. Extensive research showed a genuine issue, and that MRG had acted swiftly and appropriately on the issue and understood and responded to the complaint. Subgrants were also found in one country to have been inadequately managed by the SAC Lead due to reported over-burdening and prioritisation of the SAC Annual Report and

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[7] The highest comparator the Team has found was 39% for NGO Partners in Keystone Accountability's 2010 research. Keystone were 'delighted about how the survey has worked… . NGOs deserve great credit'
http://cercle.lu/download/partenariats/KEYSTONE1partner1survey12011.pdf
[8] VDS became a direct recipient of EIDHR funding in 2021; in this report, VDS refers to 'VDS and predecessors'

Bulletins. Both of these examples show that there is room for improvement in planning, communication and coordination.

● Researcher grants were appreciated, with a caveat, covered elsewhere, on applicability and use.

Meenraj Panthee, a researcher who received 5,000 euros to conduct work in Nepal on minority Muslim, Christian and Sikh women, experienced both the negative and positive effects of the context: 'We demonstrated dedication. I contracted Covid and had to rest for 9 or 10 days. We had to make a lot of effort, in some areas we had to try many times to arrange meetings. People needed a lot of explanation as to why we were doing it. One Muslim community had been asked to organize a small group. When we arrived, there were 60-70 women with a lot of children with an expectation that we would give money or goods. It was difficult to escape from that community. It felt dangerous. In another district, we discovered that the Muslim people were happy, prosperous and empowered, and were helpful to other communities with business advice and support, helped children, and during festivals supplied oil and wheat for making bread'.

● Comments were received about the need to further boost MRG's and SAC's presence online, despite and also because of the perceived positive outcome of MRG having an In-house editor engaged on social media.

Evaluators' view on KII conclusions:

● The overall programme success was despite Covid difficulties. Sub-grants had been a particularly successful area.
● The call for greater presence and impact is strongly endorsed. Findings from data analysis of two SAC reports showed significant readership increases from a low base. The 2020 SAC report[9] registered 5,035 readers; the only project countries registering views were India (3730 users), Pakistan (207 users) and Nepal (41 users). Users also came from seven other countries, with the USA, UK and Saudi Arabia counting over 100. Almost all users were new to MRG/SAC, and they spent an average of 92 seconds opening two pages of the report. The SAC 2021 report got a greater readership of 7726, of whom nearly 80% were new users; overall they spent an average 145 seconds. It is concluded that SAC has great scope to significantly boost readership by shorter publications and bulletins, better marketed, and using creative and interactive techniques to create greater impact.

Finding from interviews with partners

Some positive findings from partners of MRG's performance were that MRG:

● "brings lots of value to the project", by being a "respected entity with international presence"

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[9] Between 7 Dec 20 to 18 May 2021; all figures reported by MRG using their reporting schedules

- builds partners' capacity through mentoring ("hand-holding"} with experience, insight and reach
- brings important advocacy skills and presence; to bring religious freedom causes to international audiences in Geneva or Brussels was described as an extremely strong advantage of MRG.

Some negative points were:

- a lack of continuity in communications and variable quality of appointed MRG staff. Several interviewees stressed how the link with MRG depended a lot on the individuals that represented the organisation at the time. After the first few years of the project there was a shared sentiment that regional coordination had not been as active, creating a perceived gap between partners and MRG, and a less effective programme.

- Actions should be more targeted at specific countries. as they "need capacity from within ourselves to have more action". Every country has specific context-based needs which need to be stressed during the project. This could translate into more networking events and actions between in-country partners.

Recommendations on how to strengthen the collaboration, especially between MRG and SAC, included:

- Considering incentives to improve the capacity and commitment of SAC members whose efforts are now (in the post-project period) voluntary.
- Capacity and gap-mapping of SAC to optimise strengths (e.g. creating teams able to take advantage of some organisations being grassroots/frontline and others having elite access to policy-makers).
- Stronger joint strategy processes and design, with clearer allocation of responsibilities towards project goals/outputs.
- Conscious designing of capacity transfer (with mentoring and training) to help SAC emerge as a strong and independent entity.

For SAC as a whole, recommendations included:

- More communication, networking and advocacy, with more interventions, outreach and events.
- Greater Government involvement was suggested several times during the interviews. Programme (and SAC) countries vary in hostility to HRDs, but even a partner from India - currently seen as one of the more restricted societies - believed t there could be work on access to justice using the government institution of the Courts

SAC was described as having 3 big goals; 1. documenting, 2.advocacy and 3.capacity-building. The first is viewed as very strong, with a need for that documentation to be increasingly spread and adequately linked to advocacy and capacity-building.

Interviewees from all three groups (researchers, partners, sub-grantees) viewed a partnership with MRG as two-way. They sought "an engagement that looks forward". Specific learnings, lessons, and reach represent value that they can bring to MRG; as above (Positive Findings for MRG). It was recognised that MRG brought access to higher level advocacy and capacity potential. All parties agreed that the goal should always be maximise and use strengths to strengthen religious minorities and rights, and to collaborate to mitigate weaknesses.

Evaluators' view:

Should SAC be able to access funds, the Team would endorse the wisdom of:

- Capacity and gap-mapping
- Continued strong performance in supporting networks to monitor incidents, trends, and patterns of FoRB violations
- Stronger joint strategy processes, design, and responsibility-allocation towards goals/outputs.
- Conscious designing of capacity transfer (i.e. better mentoring, better training building on the work of VDS and its project-predecessors, and MRG to help SAC emerge as a strong and independent entity).
- More communication, networking and advocacy, with more interventions, outreach and events.
- Greater involvement - where possible - of Government

Findings from interviews with researchers

- The process of researcher recruitment was competitive, with extended application times
- Communication went smoothly in the one or two quick interactions with MRG, which sufficed because instructions and guidelines were clear.
- The research project's productivity and efficiency were questioned - 'What do we do with this?" - as it was hard to see how the research projects submitted to SAC could be used by them or other stakeholders or policymakers. To be published on the website wasn't deemed as sufficient, and if that were to be the only impact, it was thought it should be clear in advance. In general, the lack of communication with SAC caused frustration.
- Disappointment was also expressed about a lack of expected follow up when researchers submit their final projects. It was claimed that there was no feedback or questions from SAC country leads on detail, or from a MRG contact to ask how the research went as a whole.

Possible improvements suggested by researchers were to:

- Try to widen stakeholder involvement, including of Government officials. Civil society and researchers expended great efforts, but a required additional outreach task would lead to greater impact.
- Formally introduce another entity, organisation or person which could try and collaborate with officials, working in collaboration with researchers in trying to involve more officials and umbrella organisations.
- Optimisation of roles was raised, with self-knowledge evident in a researcher's request for "Someone next to me to promote the project, it would help the project itself" and the admission that MRG's professional help in marketing and publicizing research would lead to greater efficiency.

- **Evaluators' view on researchers' conclusions:**

The Team has previously supported outreach to Government for sustainability and impact reasons, whilst fully understanding that this is potentially risky anywhere, and would be foolish in certain times and contexts. It has also been previously noted that stakeholders will generally seek support for aspects of their work for which they are unsuited, find difficult, or don't enjoy, but that this is not always practical on limited budgets or within donor guidelines. As above, the Team feels that greater multi-stakeholder (e.g. SAC, MRG, partners, researchers, subgrantees, donors if possible) strategic thinking

could be useful on impact, with less focus on scattergun activities (whilst understanding that those can also sometimes produce exactly the push that a future influential researcher or organisation need).

The issue of how research is to be used appears to be a sub-set on the perceived incompleteness of strategy and planning between MRG, SAC and various stakeholders. As in the Team's previous two studies, It would also appear that is a lack of shared expectation is either caused by incomplete understanding, communication, and awareness of constraints (of MRG as a medium sized niche rights organisation influencing above its weight, and of SAC as a relatively new coalition working in a challenging context, and post-project on a largely-voluntary basis). It seems to us that the most important issue is one of impact. If research (or sub-grants, or events or any other activity) is worth thousands of hours of dedicated time and a significant amount of money, adequate thought needs to be done in advance on the possible impact through realistic audiences. This discussion with researchers (or sub-grantees etc) would likely harmonise expectation and reduce frustration. It might result in smaller numbers of activities in a more strategic framework. MRG has consciously chosen to adopt a bottom-up approach to research, which is to be welcomed. Risks of over-direction can be avoided if this instinct of MRG and its programme managers is maintained. The mid-project suggestion of a COVID-19 theme - which led to successful work in research and sub-grants - is an example of how multi-stakeholder involvement in the process can assist in guiding, rather than hindering or overly-directing, this bottom-up approach. As in all endeavours, project holders should be aiming for 'things which will make a difference' or positive impact on the rights and lives of discriminated FoRB minority peoples.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

NB: This section does not seek to recap material previously mentioned in this report or in the exhaustive MRG reporting to EIDHR on activity to result achievement. It picks out some issues which may, in the view of the evaluators, deserve a second look.

Outcome level

Where completed as planned, did the activities contribute to the planned results? Where this was so, refer to evidence.

The activities (regional network building, support of HRDs etc) and amended (due to Covid) activities all appear to have been completed. These did contribute to the planned results as evidenced in the extensive and detailed reports submitted on-time to EIDHR. The key question - in a larger follow-on programme - would be 'by how much can reports, research, sub-grants and engagement in media transform a negative climate and encourage positive public debate, achieving concrete FoRB minority rights?' What are the strategies to achieve this, and the predicted cost : benefit of each activity?

Where not so, what factors intervened and explain how they impacted. Suggest ways that MRGE tried to overcome any problems and how successful this was (or not). Document any changes in the external environment that may have helped or hindered the project.

As above, a key environmental feature was the Covid pandemic. A model of blended communications management was adopted. Evaluators judged that travel restriction and online modalities caused an understandable lack of effectiveness and contributed to some of the strategic problems referred to in the report. MRG restricted coordination meetings to just two, in Kathmandu and Colombo, which were judged a relative success. Senior MRG managers question whether they may have opted for a third face-

to-face meeting, but this is hypothetical; the decision was taken by the appropriate managers using accurate available evidence at the time.

If there were any unplanned results (positive or negative) explain what these were and how they came about.

Some of the reach to communities by sub-grants was novel and daring in the context of the pandemic. It may be that the novelty contributed to the undoubted success of the small grants programme. A key feature was that organisations (see CCT text box above) without previous links to the grassroots were able to develop them and enrich their core work. Other partners, including SAC coalition members already have established links to grassroots, where individual efforts can be splintered. In this case, the programme provided umbrella research which strengthened, for example, the ability of the Ampara Coalition and Women Solidarity Front, to bring more statistical weight to their advocacy.

In the third year of the project, Covid-19 travel restrictions prevented an SAC annual regional meeting and other in-person activities. The underspent funding was used for policy briefs and research papers, including intersectional issues of minority women in selected countries, the legal environment for minority peoples in India and the relevant constitutional framework in Pakistan.

The evaluation should pay attention to and comment on the mainstreaming of gender and other forms of intersectional discrimination and cross cutting issues in the project.

As in the questionnaire section, participants felt satisfied that MRG was actively attempting to meet the needs of minority women. This was not, however, a focus of the programme. MRG and the Team worked hard to increase the questionnaire returns of women, including minority women, and to access minority women KIs. The issue of class was perhaps of greater importance, as the largely urban elite activists of the SAC and partner organisations strengthened their existing connections to grassroots minority activity through organisations like the Women Solidarity Front and the Ampara Collective. This positive outcome was a key feature of the sub-grant project.

Impact level: assess whether the results achieved are likely, over the longer term to achieve or contribute to the achievement of the specific objective of the project.

The overall objective of the project is '*to promote & protect freedom of religions or belief (FoRB) in South Asia by improved, more collaborative monitoring, reporting, & advocacy on FoRB violations'.* The specific objectives is *'to strengthen the capacity of a regional researchers' and activists' network to monitor incidents, trends, and patterns of FoRB violations; produce and publish authoritative reports; and carry out linked advocacy to combat religious discrimination, intolerance, and violence, & improve protection of FoRB in South Asia.*

Networking took place as possible in the Covid context, and these human connections are likely to be sustainable and called upon where necessary. Researcher networks were strengthened and effective reports written, shared and published. There were questions from some researchers as to whether their work was being fully used to its potential. Regular information was supplied to the appropriate networks.

Emergency assistance to HRDs was provided. The Online Platforms continued in line with project activities. The South Asia collective site https://thesouthasiacollective.org/ was updated with Bulletins, Annual Reports and Sub Grant stories through the project period until January 2022 with due

recognition of the EU assistance. It has not since been updated. Social Science Baha (SSB)'s website is active. Monitoring, reporting and advocacy on FoRB violations appears to have been conducted in line with objectives throughout the project period.

The Annual Reports were professionally researched and published in keeping with specifications and at great time-expense. The Reports are comprehensive and impressive and will provide a historical record of FoRB state-of-play for the six countries during the programme period. As elsewhere, the key question of the evaluators is the extent of positive impact caused for FoRB minorities by such publications. The Bulletins provided a useful collaborative activity between SAC, SSB, MRGE and VDS and were delivered to advocacy targets within Government, Missions, the UN, SAARC and INGOs etc.

The potential of CSOs to engage in effective joined up sustained advocacy was partly realised, although KIs conceded that the pandemic had reduced its effectiveness. As per the project proposal, campaigns were conducted calling for accountability for FoRB violations. Connections were made, as planned to the UN, SAARC and other international bodies. The evaluators conclude that the programme contributed to greater FoRB protection in South Asia, and made genuine significant advances in capacity building of relevant actors. In an extremely valid but ambitious expected sub-result, to create a shift in public opinion, and even to 'encourage public debate' as suggested in the Project Proposal[10] is a herculean task which would require sustained and major resourcing, careful strategic planning involving cost : benefit analysis of different approaches (Government linkage, use of traditional and new media etc) and a conscious setting of acceptable risk levels.

If it is unlikely that all or part of the purpose will be achieved, why is this and is this something that could have been foreseen or overcome?

The challenges and obstacles towards achievement - the pandemic's travel and meeting restrictions and requirements for new technology usage, staff changes and working relationships - could not have been foreseen or overcome. Challenges to public space for CSOs including HRDs is a given, to be anticipated without knowledge of the form it will take. The key issue is not the fact that project purpose was achieved, but is whether in a largely post-pandemic environment, the stakeholders can summon the resources to become very significant players in the challenging environment of FoRB rights in South Asia. The performance of this programme within the additional pandemic constraints suggest that all efforts should be made to expand, engage with traditional and new media, increase the sub-grants and research programmes and support SAC to grow as a significant player.

Evaluation Results Against the Stated Purpose:

A. Assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the project in relation to the objectives and supporting outputs set out in 'Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB across South Asia ' Programme Document and furthermore, provide MRGE with an opportunity for 'structured evaluative learning', with the aim of learning from the programme design and implementation processes.

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[10] Project Proposal's Expected Result 1.2 '… encourage public debate aimed at addressing the root causes of discrimination and violence suffered by minority populations'

A (i) Overall conclusions against the programme's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact:

Relevance: The Team has no doubt whatsoever that the FoRB issues addressed by the programme are serious and relevant. In Sri Lanka, multiple discrimination against the Muslim population in the aftermath of the Easter Bombings and the impunity and governmental posts offered to polarising Buddhist extremists was evidenced, including violence, imprisonment, virtual hate crime, prevention of appropriate burial, and restrictions on clothing. In previous research conducted, Informants in India mentioned state targeting. in Pakistan one informant said, 'Our biggest concern is forced religious conversion of female minors to Islam. All minorities are targeted. There is no accountability… Legislation had been unanimously passed on forced conversion, that any girl under 18 cannot be converted. But… I think there is only a 30% chance of it eventually being passed….'. If anything, the COVID pandemic made the programme more relevant (even as it challenged efficiency and effectiveness), with the surge of online hate throughout the targeted countries, particularly around election times.

Efficiency: The pandemic clearly affected efficiency, with much readjustment, learning, poorer connections within management and networking in situations where people can be disconnected at any time. The programme budget was low for a wide array of research projects, sub-grants, networking and advocacy. The temptation when dealing with small amounts of money is to try and achieve more, by touching more people in scattergun fashion. Some of the small bets will pay out - future leaders, connections, organisations -, but it becomes difficult to measure overall coordinated impact.

Sub-grantees described making an impact with small amounts, but wishing to expand for economies of scale. Researchers put great efforts into work whose target audiences and potential impact was not clear in advance and for which not enough administrative follow-up could be made available. MRG appeared mostly to operate this small budget at low cost[11] in an efficient manner; SAC member organisations made the best of voluntary situations for impressive events with high-level speakers, annual reports, bulletins and networking, but performed less consistently on the management of sub-grants, which were nonetheless a strength of the programme. The overall impression is that even better processes could be developed (and greater impact made) with a larger budget, lengthier multi-stakeholder planning, fewer activities and grants at larger scale.

Effectiveness: The sub-grants were widely regarded as providing significant impact with the small amounts available; examples are found throughout this report. In particular, they allowed organisations to reach outside their comfort zones, such as the CCT grassroots efforts which in-turn brought greater understanding and richness to their core journalistic rights' efforts.

Researchers were clearly encouraged in their role as HRDs and expressed enthusiasm for the programme, with work required on use/impact, expectations and follow-up.

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[11] eg. this research fee was 6,000 euro (plus $800 expenses of the Sri Lanka research). 360 hours of researcher hours gave researchers an average fee of 16.66 euro per hour, compared to 12.74e London Living Wage and 10.85 France minimum wage

It is a tribute to the work of both constituent members and individuals of both the SAC and MRG networks that SAC remains active on a voluntary basis, the only South Asian network of its kind in minority rights. Recommendations are made for SAC to redouble its efforts both to fundraise and to increase impact through deeper, wider audiences and through grants, research and advocacy.

Sustainability: MRG often facilitates and encourages the setting up of networks. It is unusual for the organisation to foster and then support an organisation in the manner of a project, as it did with SAC in this programme. This project approach brings the positives of value-for-money, seriousness, access to government and legitimacy. It also has downsides in power relations, dynamism and focus. The terms of a project must be respected, and were. But when SAC as an idea was formed before MRG's involvement and now outlasts the project, who is overall accountable? For strategic decision-making, it clearly has to be SAC, and MRG appears to have been sensitive to restrict itself to a suggestive role - as does this report - when raising issues of audience, impact, growth, scope etc. In some cases, it appeared that MRG stepped in for SAC when project deliverables were in danger of not being met, such as in sub-granting in Sri Lanka, or when it felt that minority peoples' involvement was lower than optimal (such as in Pakistan, with the cause apparently MRG administrative error on the Terms of Reference). Overall, it reflects impressively on both SAC and MRG that SAC has retained its sustainability and remains a live network on a voluntary basis. The Team would encourage funding bids which allow it to grow incrementally in impact and influence.

Impact: of the project in relation to the objectives and supporting outputs set out in 'Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB across South Asia ' Programme Document

 Strongly positive impact was found in:

- Sub-grant performance, both in terms of direct impact on marginalised minority communities, and also in stretching networks to the grassroots and therefore growing in relevance and impact.
- The solidarity and security provided to individuals and constituent organisations of SAC from its cross-border nature; this is felt particularly strongly in India, but also in Pakistan and elsewhere.
- Media coverage of the Annual Reports was impressive; for example the 2020 Report was mentioned in over 60 media outlets and invited a comment from the Indian Minister for Minority Affairs.
- The growth of SAC's prestige, particularly as measured by its ability to conduct extensive and solid research work, and attract high-level keynote speakers to events.

Weaker impact was found in:

- The growing, but still low-level readership of SAC publications, particularly the Annual Report (notwithstanding positive media coverage), and the growing, but still low, attendance at its closure event (91 participants at the peak, and 69 at the end of the meeting). With the quality of the Annual Report publication and speakers/moderator, the evaluators would have expected,

and the event would have deserved, greater participation. The closure event was lively and informative. It thoroughly covered hate speech on social media, but omitted to discuss engagement with traditional media, whose coverage is much greater. This observation also holds for the relatively low readership of SAC's Facebook page (as at programme closure, 871 followers and 811 Likes[12]). It is fully understood that there is genuine personal security risk to individuals from wider recognition, and yet the programme does not fully meet its expected result of 'encouraging public debate' (whether this is a programme design fault, an under-performance and/or a security limitation) if readership/attendance remain low. A KI commented 'It will need more than just media coverage, rather SAC working closely with specific country teams to sustainably engage key stakeholders, locally/regionally and internationally... A challenge is also the varying interest and commitment of country teams for advocacy work. Sustained, significant funding is recommended to allow the multi-stakeholder strategic planning, training, mentoring and staffing to allow SAC and other partners to make a very significant impact in this expected result.

● Elaine Alam of SAC-lead FACES CSO in Pakistan underlined the need for deeper discussions between SAC, Partners and MRG 'The team must be absolutely transparent and [have] a clear strategy... on the coordination of activities for FoRB... South Asia must have strong coordination and information base within its countries and data has to be at the core for strong advocacy for in-country, regional and global advocacy'.

The headline and broad-brush conclusion and recommendation of SAC member organisation representatives from KIs was positive, that it should be supported to continue, including the Annual Reports, as Key Informants are in agreement as to its usefulness and unique role in South Asia.

A. (ii) Learning from the programme design and implementation processes:

In retrospect, programme design perhaps over-emphasised growth and impact without the in-depth strategic planning which would have uncovered SAC members' motivations and goals. As above, it is a delicate matter for an international NGO to package an existing coalition as a project.

The Team has questioned the huge number of hours and people involved in writing SAC reports with limited readership. It questions the validity of a KI comment of 'the process being more important than the end result'. Whereas the solidarity between SAC members is important for security and motivation, all parties have the right to expect impact on the stated project proposal goal of 'encouraging debate'. This is doubtless a programmatic and security challenge within some of the programme countries. It would be easy to dismiss 'encouraging debate' as an idealistic design flaw. But MRGI's CEO Joshua Castellino commented in the Team's 2020 Global Research 'expert reports for experts is not the way the 21st Century works... [experts] will respond first to the crowds clamouring outside the doors, and we do

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[12] As a comparison, this is exceeded by an FB page hastily created by members of this Team for a much lower involvement in Sudan https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=south%20kordofan%20consortium

not reach those people'. Law-makers in project countries will doubtless receive and thank MRG and some will skim-read well-researched publications. But it is perhaps naive to expect significant positive change for FoRB minorities unless there is a political imperative, or at least a constituency. And that can only be achieved by popularising pro-minority views with new and traditional media (including radio), and links to the grassroots. As mentioned elsewhere, this is the prerogative of partners, not the project, and would require both resources and a shift in the orientation of some partners, bringing grassroot issues to Government and international audiences

The SAC must remain independent and sustainable, and will incorporate strong and divergent opinions. But alongside the continuation of thorough research (which this report suggests be more focused, with shorter and better-marketed, multi-media publications and interfaces), it may usefully consider its historic position as the only body of its kind with potential to create positive impact for FoRB minorities. It is SAC, rather than MRG, which might be seeking funding to fully play this leadership role. In issues of new media, capacity, interest and animation, SAC might be encouraged to invite and mentor a younger influx of talent.

For sustainability, any network is judged by the quality of its outputs, and its impact. Ideally, SAC will be able to access funding to expand from its current voluntary focus on Annual Reports and Bulletins to a more dynamic and varied programme including advocacy. small grants and active networking, performing these functions at a similarly high standard.

B. Based on the findings of the evaluation, develop a set of suggestions and key recommendations for future and continued MRGE and its partners activities (of the project in relation to objectives and supporting outputs set out in 'Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB across S Asia' Programme Document and furthermore, provide MRGE with an opportunity for 'structured evaluative learning', with the aim of learning from the programme design and implementation processes].

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFICALLY for SRI LANKA

For MRG:

- Continue small grants in Sri Lanka where funds allow.
- Determine the best way for future support and networking of grantees/partners

For partners/SAC:

- Consider the possibilities of a national pro-minority advocacy campaign in Sri Lanka. Should SAC receive funding, it may prove to be a useful coordinator of such a campaign

For SAC:

- SAC in Sri Lanka as elsewhere should continue, grow and seek funding.

- SAC-MRG continued collaboration is encouraged, with SAC remaining an independent body, and greater time allotted to strategic decision making with SAC at the centre of this process.
- It is suggested that in the current voluntary situation, publications (notably the Annual Report and Bulletins) continue. However, it is suggested that research might usefully be targeted to areas of particular interest to audiences, and that reports might usefully be shortened and simplified to extend audience and influence.
- Where possible in the time and budget constraints, sub-grants, research and extension of networks, including to grassroots, be considered as essential

For all partners, it is recommended to:

- Reflect on the cost : benefit impact of all work, and consider audience-expansion through innovative methods e.g. video games for youth, 'hot topics' and more traditional media and traditional concerted political action linking grassroots and elites
- Seek common platforms on identified minority and rights issues that can have an impact on national politics and elections.
- Consider a national advocacy campaign on a carefully-selected FoRB topic.

RECOMMENDATIONS for a FUTURE PROGRAMME/CONTINUATION in the SIX PROJECT COUNTRIES

For the EU, other donors and MRG:

- *Sustainability:* MRG and donors should take all opportunities to continue the South Asia Collective which remains the only South Asian cross-border institution on minority issues. This is already partly covered by continued MRG-SAC collaboration under the NORAD project, with partial funding of the next annual report. For greater impact, there is a need for gap-filling.
- *Small grants* should continue to be a part of future MRG projects.
- *Partnerships and collaboration*: MRG should closely collaborate with a bigger range or organisation such as government institutions to influence policies on a national level.
- *Access*: with an imperative to select and support partners able and willing to reach the grassroots through partnership and collaboration, guidance and research on relevant data, and an extension of the small grants.
- *Networking*: MRG might seek funding to take a catalyst role in all countries for sustainable networking between key stakeholders, aim for consistency in coordination worldwide, continuity of research (and training in this and other programmes).
- *Encouraging public debate:* With open consultation regarding genuine personal security risk to individuals and organisations, sustained, significant funding is recommended to allow the multi-stakeholder strategic planning, training, mentoring and staffing which would allow SAC and other partners to make a genuine impact in this expected, imported and extremely ambitious expected result.

For SAC:

- Continue to foster the cross-border solidarity and linking essential for the motivation, performance and security of HRDs

- Fundraise to make feasible the below recommendations and move in a long term and sustainable, incremental, manner from voluntary to professional status to exert greater influence and create greater impact, including in the encouragement of public debate on FoRB.
- Ensure internal strategic dialogue, and where deemed helpful, transparent dialogue with MRG and other donors and partners. This might emphasise the coordination of activities and information for strong advocacy leading directly to concrete, cost : benefit impact for enhanced FoRB and protection of minority community rights. This process should address in-country, regional and global advocacy.
- Reduce the time spent annually researching the general 'state of FoRB' (which in the view of the Team could alternatively be produced less frequently) and concentrate annually on documenting deeper salient and hot rights' topics. Reduce the length of Annual Reports and Bulletins, and reflect on media likely to expand readership.
- Given the relatively low numbers reached by meetings and advocacy campaigns, new and traditional media should be explored for cost : benefit impact.
- Consider whether active participation can be extended to grassroots and to Youth.
- Increased communication with partners
- Increased advocacy, with more interventions, outreach and events.
- Greater Government involvement where this can increase influence, impact and sustainability while keeping security risks within self-defined acceptable limits (which are to be negotiated, person-to-person as they are deeply personal; nonetheless, effective HRD work rarely takes place without some personal risk)

Recommendations for all Partners:

- To seek to increase networking and coordination around a clear, transparent strategy.
- Include relevant departments of Government, where this is practical, for sustainability and impact.
- To closely monitor and seek to boost readership/impact.
- Gain reach through *n*ew technology and smarter messaging

The headline and broad-brush conclusion and recommendation of SAC from KIs was positive, that it should be supported to continue, including the Annual Reports, as all Key Informants seem to be in agreement as to its usefulness and unique role in South Asia.

C. To report to the EU and other funders on the usage of their resources in the project.

The Team found that funds for this low-budget programme had been spent wisely. The major shift suggested for any future programme, which is strongly recommended, is for SAC time resources to be reduced for both the research and publications (particularly the Annual Report, but to a lesser extent the Bulletins), In a larger overall budget, this would free up resources for more innovative marketing, networking to grassroots - including effective sub-grant management - and national advocacy campaigns, all of which should be assessed in advance on a cost : benefit basis.

APPENDIX

Findings from questionnaires

(i) Findings from survey participation

The survey participation and completion rates in general were below 50%. After two requests, after which MRG pushes with a specific focus on women participants and partners, brought return rates of 50% partners, 63.6% researchers and 54.3% subgrantees.

- *Subgrantees*

A high dropout rate was experienced, with 75 views, 46 starts, and only 25 submissions.

Are you:

25 out of 25 answered

Male	18 resp.	72%
Female	7 resp.	28%
Other	0 resp.	0%
Prefer not to say	0 resp.	0%
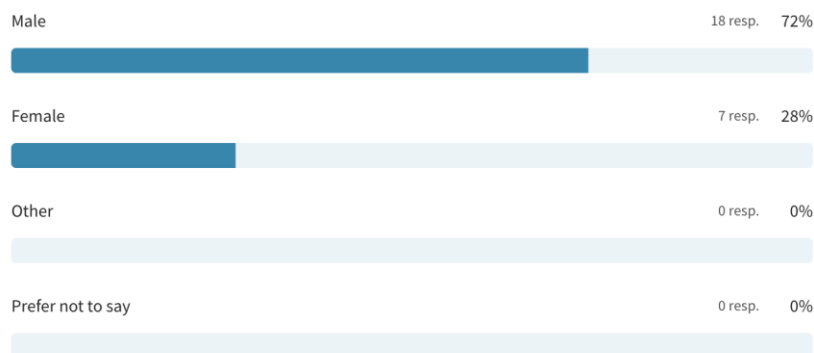
A gender gap is noticeable, with 72% male and 28% female respondents.

- *Researchers*:

14 views, 11 starts and 7 submissions.

Are you:

7 out of 7 answered

Male	4 resp.	57.1%
Female	3 resp.	42.9%
Other	0 resp.	0%
Prefer not to say	0 resp.	0%
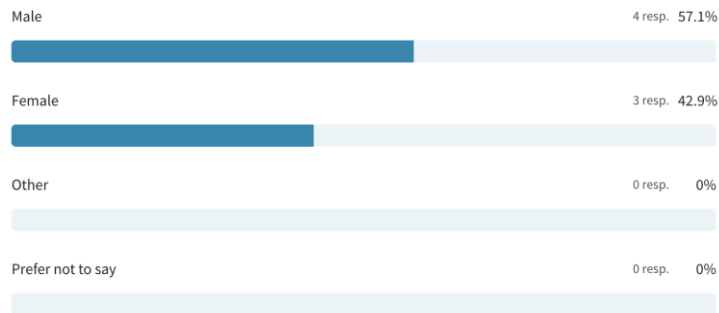
It is good to see an almost equal representation of men and women amongst the respondents from researchers. In a small sample size of 7, there were 4 male respondents and 3 female respondents. Four of 11 researchers did not answer the questionnaire until the end. It is difficult to confidently express a reason for this; it could point to difficulties of technical capacity, to electricity cuts or urgent interruptions, to dissatisfaction with the questionnaire or ties with MRG being strong enough to open, but not strong enough to complete, the questionnaire. This is similar to the findings in the evaluators' 2021 FoRB research in which there were high drop-out rates for both partners and ex-trainees whilst answering the questionnaire. After two prompts for 'activists', for example, 134 people had viewed the questionnaire, 80 started it, 45 completed at an average time of 25 minutes.

- ***Partners, Allies and Influencers***: 8 answers

The drop-out rate here was even higher with 22 views, 16 starts and 8 submissions.

Are you:

8 out of 8 answered

Male	5 resp.	62.5%
Female	3 resp.	37.5%
Other	0 resp.	0%
Prefer not to say	0 resp.	0%
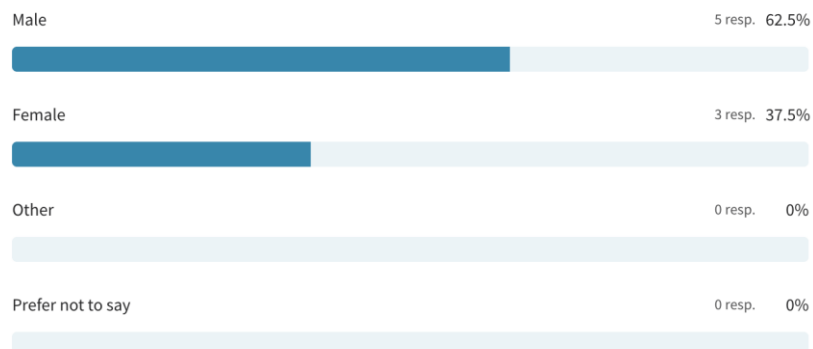
Findings from surveys

- *Researchers*

Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Helped secure the rights of its beneficiaries"

7 out of 7 answered

74.6% average rating

0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14.3%	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	3 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Not helpful   Extremely he...
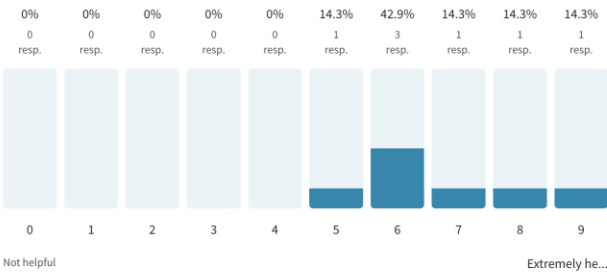
Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Had a direct, positive impact"

7 out of 7 answered

61. 9% average rating

0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14.3%	28.6%	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	2 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Lowest level...   Highest leve...
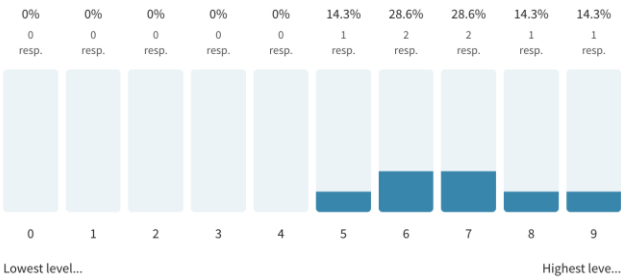
Evaluators regard this as a satisfactory endorsement of the program from researchers.

Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Responded to the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries"

6 out of 7 answered

75.9% average rating

0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	33.3%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Not responsi...   Extremely re...
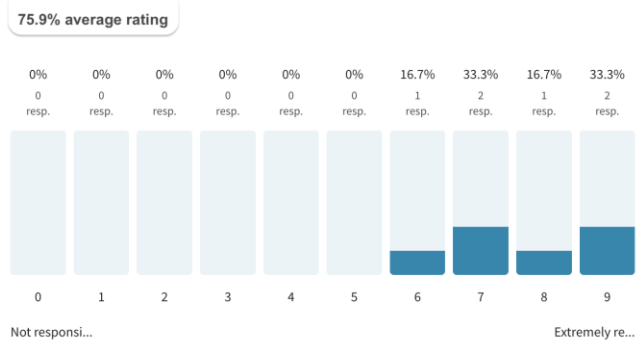
Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Will have sustainable outcomes / benefits"

7 out of 7 answered

76.3% average rating

0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	28.6%	0%	42.9%	28.6%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	2 resp.	0 resp.	3 resp.	2 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Lowest   Highest
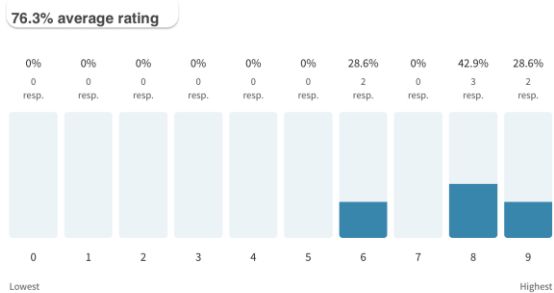
Here, the higher results show that researchers believe the programme will help the beneficiaries in the long-term. This could incorporate satisfaction regarding the *specific* needs of the researchers, on a more micro level.

Questions regarding MRG as an organisation:
- I regard MRG as: "A positive force"
  - 93.6% average rating

- I regard MRG as "Open to feedback and criticism"
  - 93.6% average rating

- I regard MRG as "Expert"
  - 88.8% average rating

- I regard MRG as "Able to help its allies to secure funding"[13]
    - 85.7% average rating

- Did the response make a real difference to the affected people?
    - 57.1% of respondents chose the option "Strongly"
    - 14.3% "Absolutely"
    - 14.3% "Mostly"
    - 14.3% "Average"

The evaluators see those results as a very strong endorsement of MRG as an organisation. Apart from the last question [I regard MRG as "Able to help its allies to secure funding"], the results are very strong in regards to MRG as a driving energy in its field. As previous research showed (overall MRG Global Research of 2012-19 and the FoRB 2021 Research), helping to secure funding is not a straightforward task, and one which requires careful expectation management; it was also not a stated objective - but is a mutual hope - of the programme.
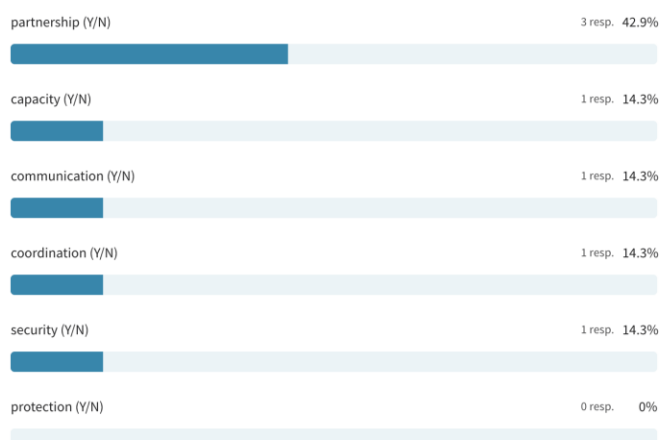
If you answered in 5. anything except "Absolutely", should MRG increase its focus on:

7 out of 7 answered

partnership (Y/N)	3 resp.	42.9%
capacity (Y/N)	1 resp.	14.3%
communication (Y/N)	1 resp.	14.3%
coordination (Y/N)	1 resp.	14.3%
security (Y/N)	1 resp.	14.3%
protection (Y/N)	0 resp.	0%

---

[13] It was never part of this programme to help researchers or academic institutions secure funding, although if could be a relevant part of the relationship with CSOs. The question was included to maintain as close a survey as possible to the baseline data of the 2021 NORAD-funded FoRB Research.

Did the response make a real difference to the affected people?

6 out of 7 answered

Absolutely (97%-100%)	2 resp.	33.3%
Mostly (60-79%)	2 resp.	33.3%
Strongly (80%-96%)	2 resp.	33.3%
Absolutely Not (0-3%)	0 resp.	0%
Average (40-59%)	0 resp.	0%
Partly (20-39%)	0 resp.	0%
Weakly (4%-19%)	0 resp.	0%
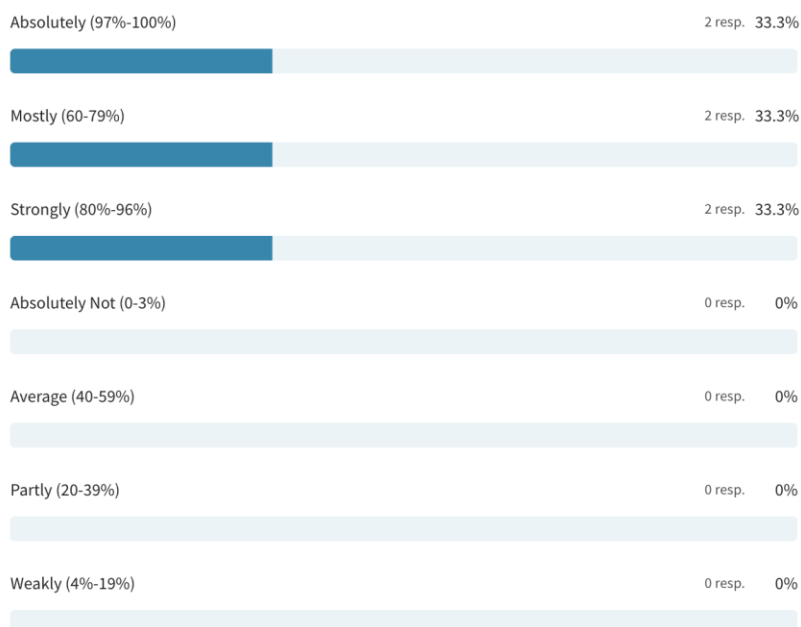
This set of questions highlight a need in **partnership** for MRG in regards to its researchers.

Important insights were gained from the last question, namely "This is the most important question. What message do you have for MRG about the 'Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB Across South Asia' programme?:

- For such projects MRG should closely collaborate with government institutions in order to influence policies by providing recommendations.

- More research and study is needed to produce appropriate data, evidence and policy insights on religious freedom. MRG can also facilitate coordination of the CSOs and stakeholders to this end.

- Persistence; 'Please keep at it'

These last answers underline the need for collaboration stressed at an earlier stage - partnerships with government institutions and CSOs and stakeholders.

- ***Partners, Allies and Influencers:***

Overall, in my opinion, MRG interventions: "Had a direct, positive impact"

8 out of 8 answered

76.6% average rating
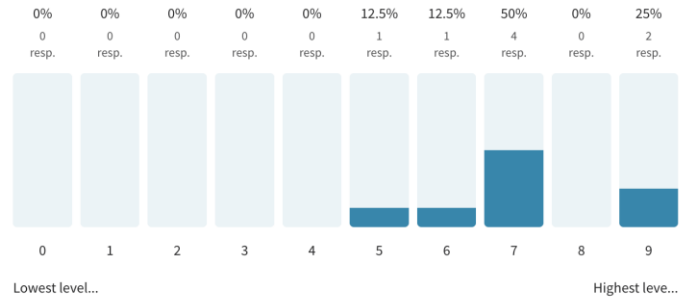
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	50%	0%	25%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	4 resp.	0 resp.	2 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Lowest level...   Highest leve...

Overall, in my opinion, MRG: "Helped secure the rights of its beneficiaries"

8 out of 8 answered

70.3% average rating

0%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	0%	25%	50%	0%	12.5%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	0 resp.	2 resp.	4 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Not helpful   Extremely he...
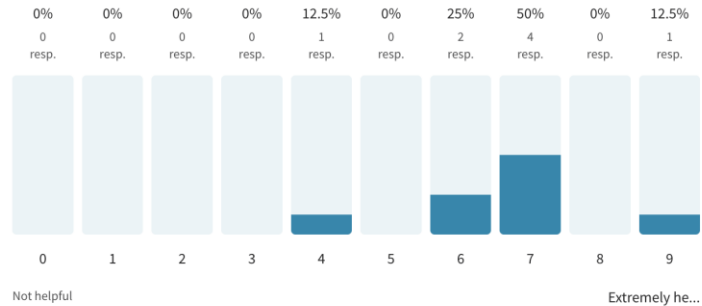
- Findings from interviews

The results here are satisfactory but the lower rating for the second graph [Overall, in my opinion, MRG "Helped secure the rights of its beneficiaries"] shows weaker confidence that the project can help secure beneficiary rights in the long-term.

Overall, in my opinion, MRG: "Will have sustainable outcomes / benefits"

8 out of 8 answered

85.9% average rating									
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	37.5%	37.5%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	2 resp.	0 resp.	3 resp.	3 resp.

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Lowest   Highest
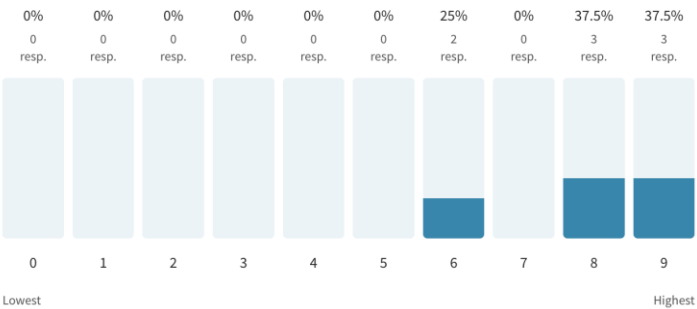
Overall, in my opinion, MRG : "Responded to the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries"

8 out of 8 answered

81.3% average rating									
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	12.5%	37.5%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	1 resp.	3 resp.

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Not responsi...   Extremely re...
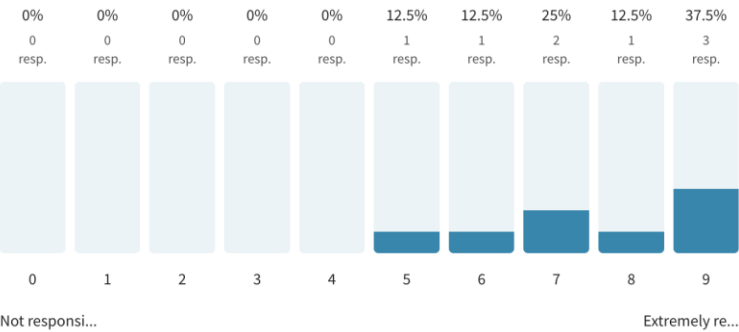
These results show a strong endorsement of MRG as a partner.

Was MRG able to accept when communities, partners, allies and influencers refuse MRG's advice and take a different approach?

7 out of 8 answered

78.6% average rating

0%	0%	0%	0%	14.3%	28.6%	0%	28.6%	28.6%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	0 resp.	2 resp.	2 resp.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

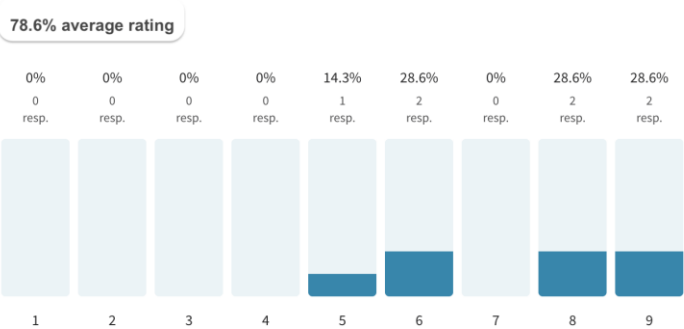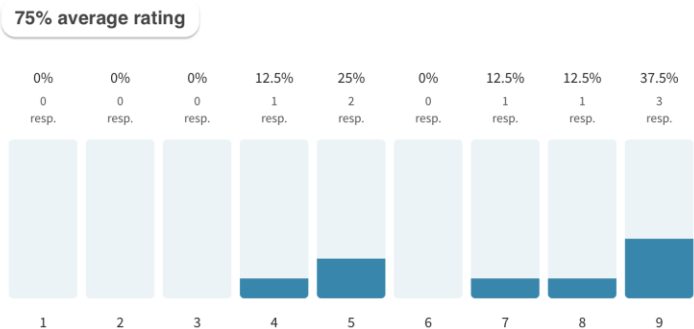Was MRG actively working with partners, allies and influencers to assess gaps in their capacity to influence change?

8 out of 8 answered

75% average rating

0%	0%	0%	12.5%	25%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	3 resp.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

The results of these two questions are overall positive, but weak in comparison to other questions[14]

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[14] Please note that some questions gave scoring options of 0-9, whereas the chosen survey tool allowed only 1-9 for some questions. % scores have been adjusted accordingly.] This may show a lack of understanding between MRG and its partners. One on one interviews are being set up to fully comprehend the lower ratings.

Was MRG actively supporting women within religious communities to develop their skills and abilities to ensure that issues are taken up with their communities and by MRG?
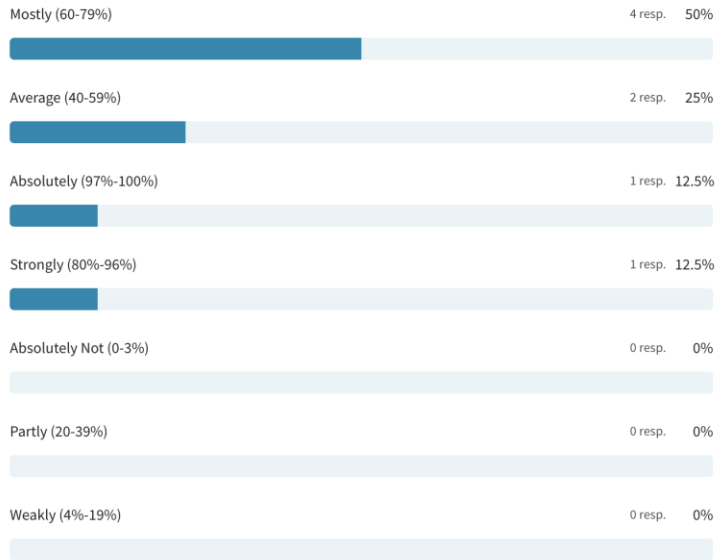
8 out of 8 answered

70.3% average rating

12.5%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	0%	37.5%
1 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	0 resp.	3 resp.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
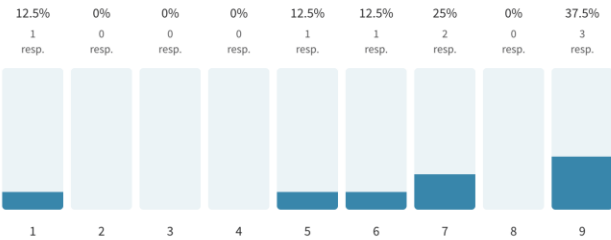
In a small sample of 8 participants, the 70.3% average score of this question is high but brought down by one outlier of 0%. The reason for this can only be speculation. It could show a particular individual's dissatisfaction or indicate that this programme was not particularly focused at women, or suggest an individual view that it SHOULD have been focused at women within religious communities.

Was MRG's support helpful in actively reducing or eliminating participation barries for religious minority communities?

8 out of 8 answered

Mostly (60-79%)	4 resp.	50%
Average (40-59%)	2 resp.	25%
Absolutely (97%-100%)	1 resp.	12.5%
Strongly (80%-96%)	1 resp.	12.5%
Absolutely Not (0-3%)	0 resp.	0%
Partly (20-39%)	0 resp.	0%
Weakly (4%-19%)	0 resp.	0%

Participants felt that MRG mostly succeeded in reducing or eliminating participation barriers for religious minority communities.

Results from the following questions:

- "Have you experienced conflicts between organisations in this programme?"
  - 87.5% No
  - 12.5% Yes
  - 0% Not sure

Only one respondent were no conflicts between organisations in this program.

- "If YES, Are these conflicts mostly because of shrinking civil society space?"
  - 100% Not sure

The evaluation will follow through with key informant interviews to try and seek patterns of conflict and comprehend different reasons for conflict.

- "Is there a problem that organisations operate and communicate without enough openness and/or frequency?"
  - 62.5% No
  - 25% Yes
  - 12.5% Not sure

This question is worded in a way which might encourage problems to be elicited (and followed in KIIs) but the 62.5% of 'no' is a solid endorsement.

- "Is it MRG's role to strengthen coordination and cooperation?"
  - 100% No

Only two out of 8 respondents gave their answer to the above question.

- "Were activities cost-efficient / on time / implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?"
  - 87.5% Yes
  - 12.5% No
  - 0% Not sure

The results show a strong satisfaction towards MRG's cost efficiency, punctuality and effectiveness in the project.

Lastly, for the question:
"This is the most important question. What message do you have for MRG about the 'Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB Across South Asia' programme?

Some answers were:
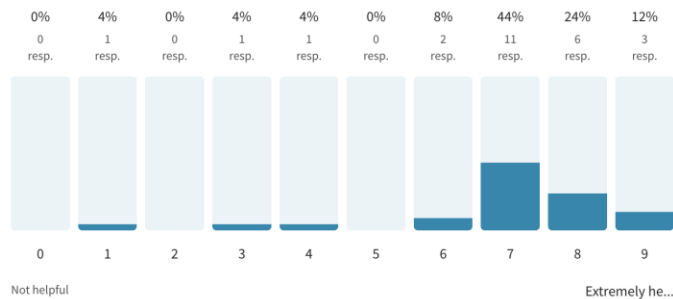
Partners, Allies and Influencers:

- "To support and invest the **regional efforts** further. I think, with the new dynamics our challenges and advances will be very much linked to the whole region."

- "South Asia must have **strong coordination and information base** within its countries and data has to be at the core for strong advocacy for a country, regional and global advocacy."

- "**Invest in young people, use social media more**, alternative messaging and create spaces for shared interactions to bring people together so that religious pluralism and choice is part of peoples' lived reality."

Subgrantees

Overall, in my opinion, MRG interventions: "Helped secure the rights of its beneficiaries"

25 out of 25 answered

0%	4%	0%	4%	4%	0%	8%	44%	24%	12%
0 resp.	1 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	0 resp.	2 resp.	11 resp.	6 resp.	3 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Not helpful — Extremely he...

Overall, in my opinion, MRG interventions: "Had a direct, positive impact"

25 out of 25 answered

0%	0%	0%	4%	4%	8%	8%	32%	24%	20%
0 resp.	0 resp.	0 resp.	1 resp.	1 resp.	2 resp.	2 resp.	8 resp.	6 resp.	5 resp.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Lowest level... — Highest leve...
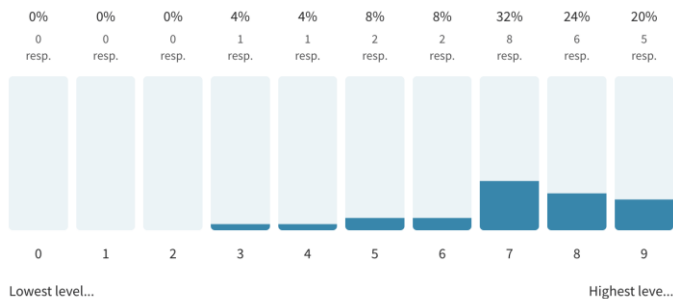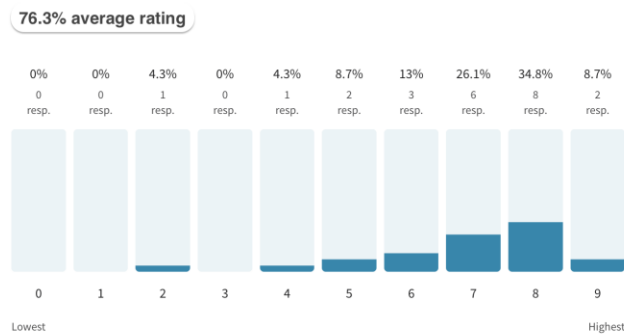
The participants show a high satisfaction towards MRG interventions and its role to secure the rights of its beneficiaries.

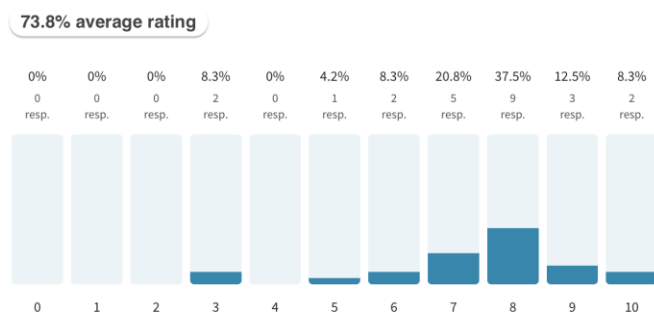Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Will have sustainable outcomes / benefits"

23 out of 25 answered

76.3% average rating

| | 0% | 0% | 4.3% | 0% | 4.3% | 8.7% | 13% | 26.1% | 34.8% | 8.7% |
| | 0 resp. | 0 resp. | 1 resp. | 0 resp. | 1 resp. | 2 resp. | 3 resp. | 6 resp. | 8 resp. | 2 resp. |

Lowest   0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   Highest

Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Responded to the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries"

24 out of 25 answered

73.8% average rating

| | 0% | 0% | 0% | 8.3% | 0% | 4.2% | 8.3% | 20.8% | 37.5% | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| | 0 resp. | 0 resp. | 0 resp. | 2 resp. | 0 resp. | 1 resp. | 2 resp. | 5 resp. | 9 resp. | 3 resp. | 2 resp. |

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

To the questions 'Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Responded to the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries"' and 'Overall, in my opinion, MRG-SA1 interventions: "Will have sustainable outcomes / benefits"', the results are, on average, satisfactory.

However, what is notable is the disparity between the answers. One or two out of 20 answers are noticeably low when the other majority of answers are high. Again, this could point to overall dissatisfaction of one or two individuals.
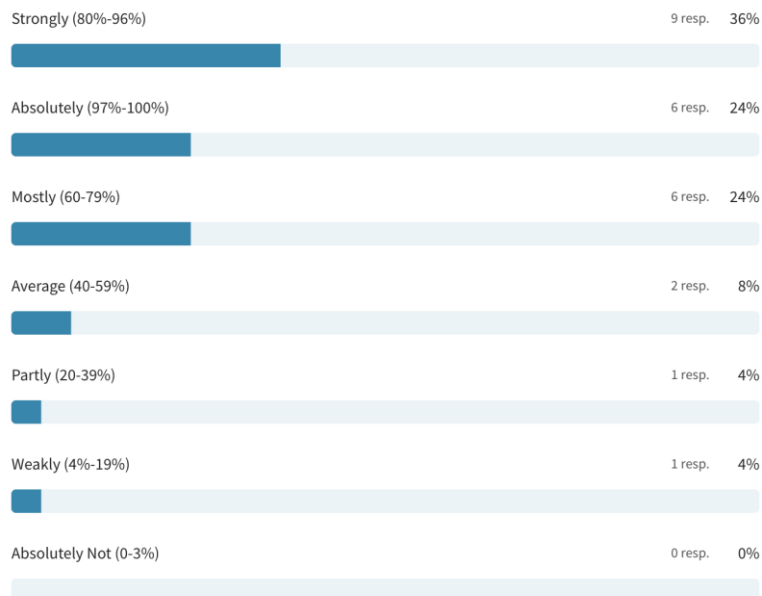
I regard MRG as:

- "A positive force" = 92.4% average rating
- "Open to feedback and criticism" = 87% average rating
- "Expert" = 88.8% average rating
- "Able to help its allies to secure funding" = 85.7% average rating

These results show a solid endorsement from the subgrantees towards MRG.

Did the response make a real difference to the affected people?
25 out of 25 answered

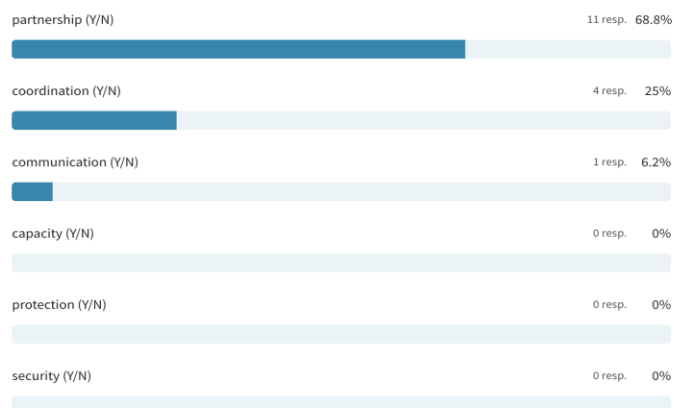|		
Strongly (80%-96%)	9 resp.	36%
Absolutely (97%-100%)	6 resp.	24%
Mostly (60-79%)	6 resp.	24%
Average (40-59%)	2 resp.	8%
Partly (20-39%)	1 resp.	4%
Weakly (4%-19%)	1 resp.	4%
Absolutely Not (0-3%)	0 resp.	0%

The results of the question "Did the response make a real difference to the affected people?" imply a fairly satisfactory opinion.

Again, a disparity in the results (5% "Weakly", 20% "Mostly" and 40% "Strongly") makes it hard to fully grasp significance in a small sample size.

If you answered in 5. anything except "Absolutely", should MRG should increase its focus on:
16 out of 25 answered

partnership (Y/N)	11 resp.	68.8%
coordination (Y/N)	4 resp.	25%
communication (Y/N)	1 resp.	6.2%
capacity (Y/N)	0 resp.	0%
protection (Y/N)	0 resp.	0%
security (Y/N)	0 resp.	0%

As noted with the partners survey, **partnership** is viewed as a distinct focus area for MRG in its project.

The result for **coordination** goes in the same direction of collaboration and partnership which reinforces the point.

Were you able to stay in touch with new contacts through MRG?

25 out of 25 answered

Yes	19 resp.	76%
Not sure	4 resp.	16%
No	2 resp.	8%

The high ratings of this question ("Were you able to stay in touch with new contacts through MRG?") are excellent. This may confirm MRG's consideration of the Team's recommendation in the 2021 FoRB research, in which keeping in touch and creating networks with contacts during the project was a focus of the recommendations.

For the question: "This is the most important question. What message do you have for MRG about the 'Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB Across South Asia' programme?

Some of the answers were:

- I would appreciate the portion of **capacity-building sessions and training courses** as this advances the understanding of HRDs and enables them to access human rights protection mechanisms. Additionally, such workshops and capacity-building sessions further enhanced their capacities for communicating with other like-minded organisations and stakeholders concerned to protect minority rights.

- Supporting Religious Pluralism and Respect for FoRB Across South Asia' programme have a greater impact and a long term strategy. The problems faced by the grantees are from **the government** which has to be addressed through the platform of MRGE.

- Many students are not aware of these benefits. Schools and colleges are not registered under the web portal. There is **a need for collaboratio**n from the part of local district administration as well as **public representatives** to make this scheme and benefit more community based.

- To make the program more effective, we can involve **policy makers, government stakeholders as well as religious leaders.**

(ii) The Team's view:

Some capacity building was conducted within the programme, for example the participatory research (run by Social Science Baha in year one, and approaches to providing mentorship to grassroots NGOs (run by VDS in year two) as well as regional and international advocacy (run by MRGE in Y2). This was not possible within all countries or always face-to-face given the budget and pandemic constraints.

The capacity work undertaken has been highly valued by HRDs. This not only strengthens their monitoring and ability to provide authoritative research and advocacy, it also provides the knowledge and networks which bolster their ability to protect themselves and FoRB communities in South Asia.

Government involvement - including of schools and colleges - and that of selected religious leaders is very much encouraged, and must be done in full consciousness of the sustainability and impact benefits as well as the bureaucratic limitations and potential security risks.

Results on more specific questions have lower ratings. For instance, partnership, collaboration and support for women within religious communities are elements which appear in need of strengthening.

Social media and visibility are focus points that were addressed in answers where participants could write as much as they wished. This echoes a finding from the 2021 FoRB Research, that there is a need from MRG to extend its scope.

Overall, the evaluators see those results as a very strong endorsement of MRG as an organisation. The results are particularly strong in regards to programme relevance and MRG as a driving catalyst in its field.